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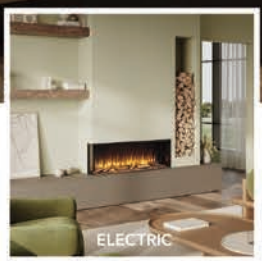

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EDITOR
Roseanne Field

PUBLISHER
Anthony Parker

ACCOUNT DIRECTOR
Midge Myatt

SENIOR ACCOUNT MANAGER
Steve Smith

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
Jamie Weeks

DIGITAL MARKETING & PR ACCOUNT MANAGER
Suzanne Easter

OPERATIONS DIRECTOR
Shelley Collyer

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTORS
Alexandra Pratt
Jayne Dowle

STUDIO MANAGER
Mikey Pooley

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
Georgia Musson

DIGITAL PRODUCTION COORDINATOR
Kimberley Musson

DIGITAL MARKETING & SOCIAL MEDIA ASSISTANT
Nathan Hunt

FEATURE COORDINATOR & PUBLISHER'S ASSISTANT
Kim Neville

EVENTS COORDINATOR
Amy Madigan

FINANCE DIRECTOR
Simon Reed

PUBLISHED BY
netMAG media
An Employee Owned Company
Cointronic House,
Station Road, Heathfield
East Sussex, TN21 8DF

ADVERTISING & ADMINISTRATION
01435 863500
info@netmagmedia.co.uk

PRESS RELEASES
editorial@netmagmedia.co.uk

REGISTRATION & CIRCULATION ENQUIRIES
info@netmagmedia.co.uk

FROM THE EDITOR...

Headlines and stories about building more sustainably are everywhere. The Future Homes Standard comes into force from early 2027 – applicable to all new build homes in the UK – and the Passivhaus Trust is hoping to see Passivhaus projects account for 10% of all new builds in the UK by 2035.

While the Trust's target is certainly admirable, is it realistic? Following our inaugural Selfbuilder Survey in the last issue which explored attitudes towards building sustainably, we've turned our attention this time to the 'gold standard for energy efficiency'. The Passivhaus Trust says 1% of new build housing in the UK is currently built to Passivhaus standard, but how much of that is being delivered by self-builders? Find out what our respondents had to say in the report on page 23.

Passivhaus or not, our case studies in this issue are proof that energy efficiency is often high on the agenda of self-builders. James Sellicks wanted to create a high performing building that would exceed the requirements of Building Regulations – architect Richard Norwood talks to Jayne Dowle on page 58.

For James and Rachel Tilson, making their substantial extension sustainable meant using timber frame to reduce embodied carbon and create a high performing thermal envelope, alongside a planner-imposed green roof. Read the full case study on page 46.

And while these are great examples of sustainability in action in new build structures, improving energy efficiency isn't out of reach for those undertaking a renovation. The latest NSBRC Masterclass on page 18 explores the ways you can improve energy efficiency when renovating or retrofitting.

Whether you're planning a complete new build or a renovation, I hope the issue gives you plenty of inspiration for making your project as sustainable as possible!

ROSEANNE FIELD

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Functionality meets style

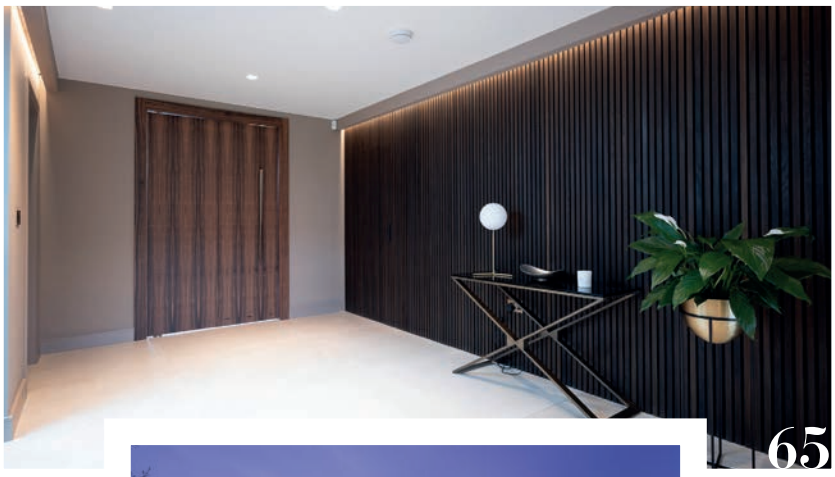
Schmidt's Magali Reisser explores kitchen layout solutions that are both stylish and practical

A seamless transition

The connection between home and garden was a top priority in James Lockwood's redesign and extension

Finishing touch

Jason Nicholson from K Rend discusses why silicone render makes the perfect finishing touch for your project



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SMART, STYLISH KITCHENS

Magali Reisser at Schmidt shares five layout solutions to optimise every square centimetre of your kitchen while elevating the space, proving that clever storage and striking design are never mutually exclusive.

Between the desire for beautiful design and the need for practicality, today's kitchens face a major challenge: providing maximum storage without cluttering the space.

As open-plan living becomes the norm and kitchens increasingly double as living and entertaining spaces, the pressure on storage has never been greater – every appliance, utensil and provision needs a home, yet nothing should compromise the clean lines of the room.

CREATE A DEDICATED BREAKFAST STATION TO FREE UP WORKTOP SPACE

Coffee machines, toasters, kettles, air fryers… these everyday appliances quickly eat up valuable worktop space, cluttering the one surface a kitchen most needs to keep clear.

The trick is to group them together in a dedicated unit featuring a pull-out shelf and the necessary electrical sockets, so every appliance can be plugged in and ready to use without ever sitting out on show. Once the doors are closed, everything disappears from view, leaving the worktop perfectly clear for food preparation.

It's a simple change that makes a real difference to how a kitchen feels day to day, and it can be tailored to the household's routine – from a compact two-appliance set-up for a couple to a full breakfast bar with room for a kettle, toaster and coffee machine side by side.

OPT FOR A HIDDEN PANTRY TO SIGNIFICANTLY BOOST STORAGE CAPACITY

Behind a concealed door finished to match the rest of the kitchen, it's possible to create a genuinely bespoke storage space that stays entirely out of sight until it's needed. Bottle racks, shelving, pull-out units and extendable shelves can accommodate provisions, jars, crockery or small appliances without encroaching on the living area.

Introducing a hidden worktop behind the doors can create not only designated storage for your small appliances but add to your kitchen's worksurface space. It's an ideal solution for making the most of every square metre, even in the most compact layouts, and it means everyday essentials can be kept within easy reach without ever being on display.

A functional pantry can also be built into a corner, seamlessly integrated with the rest of the kitchen; turning what might otherwise be an awkward, underused space into one of the most practical parts of the room.

PERSONALISE DRAWER INTERIORS WITH MODULAR ORGANISERS

Effective storage design is just as much about what happens inside the cabinets as what's visible on the outside. Modular drawer organisers make it possible to structure the space according to the utensils and accessories used every day, so cutlery, knives, spices and gadgets each have their own dedicated compartment rather than being piled together.

Fully adaptable, they offer a bespoke solution to optimise every available centimetre, make storage easier, and help you instantly find exactly what you need, saving valuable time in the daily routine. Because the configuration can be adjusted drawer by drawer, the same unit can evolve alongside a household's changing needs, whether that's making room for a growing collection of kitchenware or reorganising around a new way of cooking.

The soft glow of integrated lighting also brings warmth to the space after dark

EMBRACE GLASS-FRONTED ILLUMINATED CABINETRY TO COMBINE STORAGE WITH DECOR

Far from being reserved for the most spacious kitchens, backlit glazed cabinets allow you to display your finest crockery, glassware or decorative pieces while keeping them protected, while adding levelled lighting options for your space.

They add depth to the room and turn storage into a genuine styling feature, transforming a purely functional cupboard into a focal point in its own right. The soft glow of integrated lighting also brings warmth to the space after dark, making it a favourite feature for kitchens that double as entertaining areas. A bold choice that brings real character to the living space, it works equally well as a statement piece in a large open-plan kitchen or as a single eye-catching detail in a smaller layout.

CREATE A NICHE TO DESIGN A MULTIFUNCTIONAL SPACE

Between two tall units or above the worktop, a lit niche makes it possible to add an extra zone dedicated to meal preparation, everyday storage, or showcasing a few decorative accessories, without requiring any additional floor space.

It's a particularly effective way to break up a long run of cabinetry, introducing a moment of visual interest while still serving a genuinely practical purpose. A clever layout that brings both everyday comfort and personality to the kitchen. This piece of furniture is a perfect blend of beautiful design and practicality.

A well-thought-out kitchen isn't just about adding more storage. The goal is to make intelligent use of every volume so that everything naturally finds its place. Concealed solutions, or alternatively those enhanced with integrated lighting, along with bespoke layouts and modular storage, now make it possible to combine storage capacity, everyday comfort and elegance… whatever the available space or interior style.

Your kitchen should be a direct reflection of the way you live.

Magali Reisser is kitchen category manager at Schmidt

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“Choosing the right heat pump is one thing. Getting the best from it is another.”

A heat pump can be one of the biggest decisions you make for your new home — but choosing one is only the beginning. We asked Energy Donkey co-founder Graham Hendra how the right knowledge and support can make all the difference once it’s installed.

Graham Hendra
Co-founder, Energy Donkey

So what is Energy Donkey?

Energy Donkey is a specialist heat pump AI, trained with decades of real-world industry expertise. Users can ask questions in plain English, understand exactly what their heat pump is doing, diagnose problems and take action. It can control, automate, fault-find and commission systems, reducing complexity for homeowners while providing powerful technical support for the trade.

Why would a self-builder want it?

Whether you’re choosing a heat pump or already living with one, there’s a lot to get right. Energy Donkey gives you expert support round the clock throughout the journey — from understanding your options before you buy to getting the best from your system once it’s installed.

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Even without connecting a heat pump, you can ask Energy Donkey about products, terminology, settings, performance or problems and get answers based on specialist industry knowledge. Connect an Atmo (small gateway device) and those answers become specific to your heat pump, using live data from the system itself.

Does it just answer questions, or can it actually do things?

Once connected to your heat pump, Energy Donkey can do far more than answer questions. It can make changes, run timers and schedules, automate tasks, help find faults and even carry out commissioning. Ask the Donkey to do something, and it will.

Do I need to be a heat pump expert to use it?

Not at all. That’s the point. You tell Energy Donkey what you want in everyday language and it handles the technical side. It can explain what needs doing, and when connected to your heat pump, it can also make the changes for you.

What happens if something goes wrong with my heat pump?

You don’t have to wait for something to go wrong. Energy Donkey can help you make informed decisions before you buy and support you once your heat pump is installed. When connected, it can use live system data to identify faults, investigate problems and help get things working properly.

What does it cost?

You can try Energy Donkey out for free. Paid features include fault finding, timers and scheduling and commissioning with pricing starting from just £7 per month. If your device is online, the Donkey can talk to it.

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Carrots waiting

Render boosts kerb appeal & value

When it comes to updating a tired and dated exterior or completing a new build, first impressions matter. Jason Nicholson at K Rend explains how silicone renders can enhance the visual impact of a home, improve kerb appeal and boost perceived value.

WHY DOES THE EXTERNAL RENDER FINISH HAVE SUCH A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE OVERALL APPEARANCE & PERCEIVED VALUE OF A SELF-BUILD HOME?

High quality render creates a modern, premium looking finish with a wide range of colour options, enhancing the property's visual appeal from the moment it comes into view. Through-coloured renders eliminate the need for painting, providing a fresh and low-maintenance appearance. These renders are engineered for long-term performance and designed to work with a variety of different substrates, enabling the home to retain its appearance for years and supporting the long-term value of the property. Water-based protective treatments are on hand to help maintain a surface free from mould and algae growth.

WHAT MAKES SILICONE RENDER A BETTER CHOICE THAN TRADITIONAL SAND & CEMENT FOR A SELF-BUILDER LOOKING FOR LONG LASTING, LOW MAINTENANCE FINISH?

Incorporation of silicone technology into the render provides a high level of water repellence, causing rainwater to bead and run off the surface, while allowing the substrate to remain fully breathable and managing the moisture movement through the wall.

Modern silicone render comes in a wide range of colours with some manufacturers able to create bespoke shades on request, and is suitable for application across a variety of substrates. This gives self-builders greater design freedom and removes the need for painting, as the colour is already integrated into the product.

While the initial investment may be higher than traditional sand and cement, factory controlled batching, built-in additives that promote weather resistance and bonding to the substrate, and the removal of the need to paint and re-paint, all contribute to stronger long-term performance and lower ownership costs over the life of the building.

HOW SHOULD A SELF-BUILDER APPROACH CHOOSING THE RIGHT COLOUR & TEXTURE FOR THEIR RENDER, & WHAT FACTORS SHOULD INFLUENCE THAT DECISION?

Architectural style should guide the choice first, since render should complement the home's design whether it is contemporary, traditional or rural, with textures ranging from smooth contemporary finishes to more traditional, heavily textured looks.

Location and climate matter too. In coastal or exposed locations, certain textures and render types offer increased resistance to wind driven rain and other environmental conditions. Viewing physical samples or completed projects is essential, as colour can vary considerably between brochures, digital screens and real life.

K Rend offers a free sample service with delivery within five to seven working days. Self-builders should also seek expert advice, such as over-the-phone technical expertise to guide decisions on colour and texture.

CAN RENDER GENUINELY HELP A MODEST PROPERTY ACHIEVE A HIGH-END AESTHETIC?

Through-coloured render creates a

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seamless, consistent, modern appearance often associated with premium residential design, and that fresh exterior enhances kerb appeal by creating a strong first impression.

Render also helps define clean lines, window reveals and other key details, giving a more sophisticated finish and a uniform look that mixed-material facades cannot match. Colour choice plays a major role, and K Rend offers 20 standard colours within its scraped texture and thin coat ranges, with unique colours available on request. Render also works well in combination with brick, timber, stone and cladding, creating the contrast and material layering often seen in high-end homes.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT THAT THE RENDER FINISH RESPONDS TO THE CHARACTER OF THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBOURHOOD, & HOW DO YOU GET THAT BALANCE RIGHT?

Getting this right matters a great deal. Self-builders should understand the character of their surroundings, including neighbouring buildings, the local colour palette and prevailing architecture, before settling on a final render finish. The aim is not to copy a neighbouring home exactly, but to draw inspiration while still finding a unique identity for the build.

Natural tones tend to suit rural and traditional settings, while contemporary developments can support a stronger colour tone. Fine textures create a clean, modern appearance, while more textured finishes bring out character, depth and a traditional feel.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES SELF-BUILDERS MAKE WHEN SPECIFYING RENDER, & HOW CAN THEY BE AVOIDED?

Ignoring long-term maintenance is a frequent error. Cheaper render may cut costs during the build phase but often demands more cleaning and upkeep over the life of the property, and mixing products from different manufacturers can affect system performance and warranties. This is best avoided by weighing the whole-life cost and maintenance required, and by choosing a fully tested system from a single manufacturer.

Choosing on appearance alone is another common mistake. Modern render should look good, but it also needs to deliver long-term protection against the weather and other environmental conditions for lasting performance. K Rend products incorporating silicone technology provide enhanced water repellency in these conditions. Speaking to the right technical experts during the build helps keep performance benefits in view alongside aesthetics. Poor colour selection rounds out the list, and it is vital that self-builders view physical samples before choosing, since colours can look different in brochures or on screens than in real life. Collecting samples from the manufacturer beforehand avoids this.

HOW DO YOU FIND & SELECT A RELIABLE APPLICATOR, & WHAT SHOULD YOU ASK BEFORE APPOINTING ONE?

The fastest and most effective route is to speak with the render manufacturer directly, who can point self-builders towards experienced and recommended applicators. Even the best render system can fall victim to poor preparation, application or detailing, so using an experienced, reliable installer matters.

WHAT LONG TERM MAINTENANCE SHOULD A SELF-BUILDER REALISTICALLY EXPECT FROM A SILICONE RENDER FINISH, & HOW DOES THAT COMPARE TO OTHER EXTERIOR FINISHES?

Modern, high quality render typically requires far less maintenance than other exterior finishes. K Rend's silicone render needs significantly less upkeep than traditional painted finishes, thanks to water repellent properties that limit dirt build up, staining and surface contamination. Periodic cleaning is still recommended and will vary depending on location and exposure, though gentle washing once a year is usually enough to maintain a strong appearance. Where needed, K Rend offers a range of aftercare products, including masonry filler for minor repairs and water-based protective treatments to maximise water resistance and remove moulds, algae and lichens.

Jason Nicholson is renders product manager at K Rend

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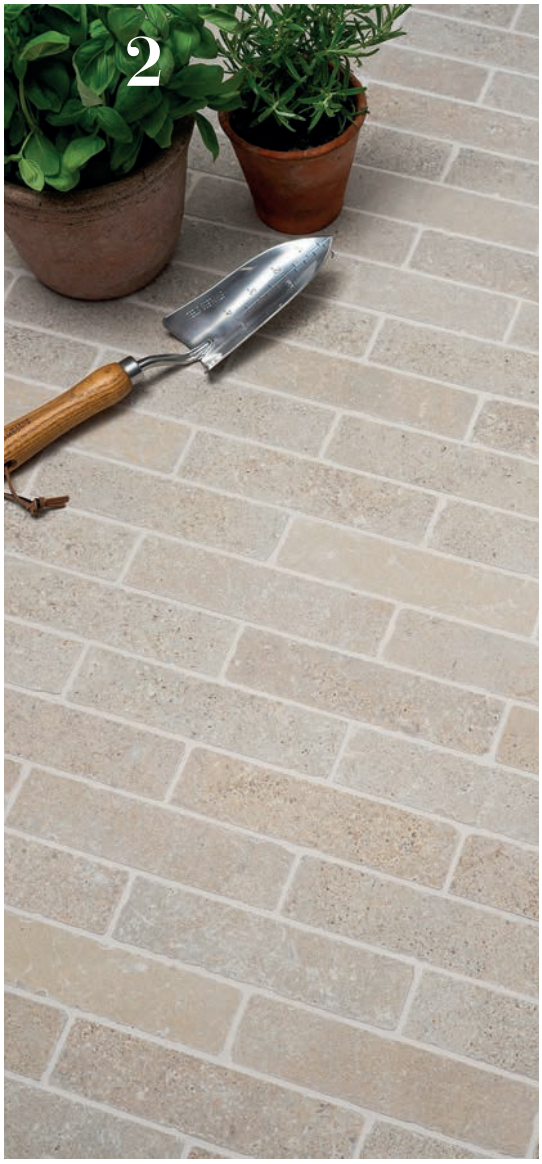

EXTERIOR INSPIRATION: GARDENS & LANDSCAPING

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1. Bring a touch of exotic elegance to your outdoor spaces with the **Alfresco Jannah 20mm Paver** from **Baked Tiles**. Each tile showcases a rich Arabic-inspired motif, blending tones of caramel, blue, and charcoal to create a striking visual tapestry. Perfect for adding warmth and refinement, the intricate design captures the spirit of traditional and Mediterranean-style gardens, making it an ideal choice for patios, courtyards, and walkways.
Price: £64.70/m^2
www.bakedtiles.co.uk

2. The **Montpellier Sable Rustic Edge Porcelain Cobble** from **Quorn Stone** is a characterful stone effect porcelain that combines timeless design with authentic natural charm. Featuring soft tumbled edges, detailed surface texture and intricate fossil-inspired detailing, it replicates the look and character of natural stone. Its warm blend of beige and taupe tones adds subtle warmth and depth, while the herringbone cobble format creates added visual interest and a more traditional, decorative finish suitable for both classic and contemporary spaces. Price: £125/m^2
www.mystonefloor.com

3. Bring warmth and style to your garden with the **Celsian Low Smoke Fire Pit** from **GoodHome**. Its durable stainless steel double-wall construction ensures long-lasting performance, while the innovative double airflow system delivers a low smoke, high-heat fire using firewood, wood pellets or both. The removable ash tray makes cleaning simple, and its modern design adds a sleek touch to any contemporary outdoor space. Price: £100
www.diy.com

4. The stylish **Slatted Corner Pergola** from **Forest** is the perfect addition to an unused corner space and will create an instant feature in your garden. The simple, contemporary structure uses horizontal slatted beams across the top, offering a degree of shade on a sunny day. The pergola has been made from Pressure Treated FSC smooth planed timber giving it a high quality and splinter free finish and a 15 year guarantee against rot and fungal decay. The pergola can be positioned on a hard standing or soft ground, and is recommended to be anchored to the ground. Price: £472.49
www.forestgarden.co.uk

5. Furniturebox's **Lydiard wood 8 seat garden sofa and chairs dining set** with black cushions is that perfect blend of contemporary style and retro Mid Century-Modern inspired flair. Comprising a three seat sofa, three seat garden bench and two garden chairs with arms, plus a rectangular wooden garden dining table, the Lydiard will help you create a cosy, social space where you can eat, chat and unwind in comfort. Constructed from solid acacia wood with a dark walnut colour stain and clear lacquer, finished with black fabric cushions, this set is designed to last.
Price: £1499.99
www.furniturebox.co.uk

6. Give your outdoor space a sophisticated new look with the **Monza Rope-Back Stackable Chair** from **Peppermill Interiors**. Available in three neutral tones – natural, grey, and stone (pictured) – the chair features an aluminium frame with a durable powder-coat finish, with a waterproof rope backrest and armrests. The showerproof textilene cushion seat is removable, and the chairs are lightweight and stackable for easy storage. Price: £99
www.peppermillinteriors.com

NSBRC Masterclass: Improving energy efficiency

For many homeowners, a renovation project begins with a practical need. Perhaps you need more space, a better layout or simply want to modernise an ageing property. Increasingly, however, renovation and retrofit projects are also driven by a desire to reduce energy bills, improve comfort and create homes that are fit for the future.

Improving an existing home can also be one of the most sustainable choices you make. By upgrading and extending – rather than rebuilding – many homeowners can reduce the environmental impact associated with new construction while improving the performance of the property they already have.

Whether you're undertaking a sympathetic renovation of a period property, extending a family home or embarking on a whole-house retrofit, improving energy efficiency presents one of the greatest opportunities to add long-term value. The challenge isn't a lack of technology. From high-performance insulation and modern glazing to heat pumps, solar PV and smart heating controls, homeowners have more options than ever before.

The real challenge lies in understanding which measures are right for your property – and in what order they should be introduced.

WHY EVERY HOME IS DIFFERENT

Unlike new build homes, existing properties come with their own unique characteristics and constraints. The age of the building, its construction, existing insulation levels, ventilation and even its orientation can all influence which improvements will deliver the greatest benefit.

The best energy efficiency upgrade isn't a product – it's a plan.

While many renovation projects focus on improving how a home looks or functions, retrofit goes a step further by improving how it performs. In reality, the two often go hand in hand, presenting the perfect opportunity to create homes that are warmer, healthier and significantly more energy efficient.

There is rarely a one-size-fits-all solution; what works well in one property may be unsuitable for another. So before investing in new technologies, it's worth taking the time to understand how your home currently performs and identifying where improvements will have the greatest impact.

START WITH THE BUILDING – NOT THE TECHNOLOGY

One of the most common mistakes homeowners make is choosing a heating system before addressing how much heat the building actually loses.

The most efficient heating system in the world can't compensate for a home that loses heat through poorly insulated walls, roofs, floors or draughty windows and doors. That's why many renovation professionals advocate a 'fabric first' approach.

Improving insulation, reducing unwanted air leakage and addressing thermal bridging can dramatically reduce a home's energy demand before any new heating technology is considered. Not only can this improve comfort throughout the year, but it can also reduce ongoing energy costs and, in some cases, allow for a smaller, more efficient heating system to be installed.

Technology should follow the building – not the other way around.

If you'd like to see what a fabric-first approach looks like in practice, the NSBRC's Retrofit Zone features lifesize examples of common UK homes,

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showing how insulation, airtightness and other building improvements can work together to improve energy efficiency before considering heating systems.

DON'T FORGET THE VENTILATION

As homes become better insulated and more airtight, ventilation becomes increasingly important.

While reducing uncontrolled draughts helps retain warmth, homes still need fresh air to maintain good indoor air quality and control moisture. Without adequate ventilation, condensation and mould can quickly become problems, particularly during colder months.

The right solution will depend on the property and the scope of the renovation. Some homes may benefit from improved natural or background ventilation, while more comprehensive retrofit projects may be suited to mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR), which provides a continuous supply of fresh air while recovering heat that would otherwise be lost.

The key is ensuring that insulation, airtightness and ventilation are considered together rather than as separate upgrades.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT HEATING SYSTEM

Once heat loss has been reduced, attention can turn to heating the home as efficiently as possible.

Heat pumps have become an increasingly popular choice, particularly where significant fabric improvements have already been made. However, they are not the answer to every project. In some cases, an existing heating system may still be appropriate, while hybrid solutions or phased upgrades may offer a more practical route depending on the property's condition and the homeowner's budget.

Equally important are the systems that help manage energy use. Smart heating controls, zoning and well-designed emitters, such as underfloor heating where appropriate, can all improve efficiency and comfort.

Rather than asking, "What's the best heating system?", homeowners should instead ask, "What's the right heating system for my home?"

GENERATING & MANAGING YOUR OWN ENERGY

Once a home's energy demand has been reduced, generating your own renewable energy becomes an attractive next step.

Solar photovoltaic (PV) panels remain one of the most accessible technologies for homeowners looking to reduce electricity costs, while battery storage

can help maximise the use of energy generated throughout the day.

For those considering an electric vehicle, planning for EV charging infrastructure during a renovation can also prove a worthwhile investment.

These technologies are often most effective when viewed as part of a wider energy strategy, rather than standalone additions. Successful renovation isn't about adding more products; it's about making every part of the home work together.

WHOLE HOUSE APPROACH DELIVERS BETTER RESULTS

Perhaps the most important lesson for anyone planning a renovation or retrofit is that a home should be viewed as a system, not a collection of individual upgrades.

Improving one element without considering the others can sometimes create unintended consequences. Better insulation without appropriate ventilation, for example, may lead to condensation issues. Installing a heat pump before reducing heat loss may limit its effectiveness. Even seemingly straightforward improvements can affect how the rest of the building performs.

Taking a whole-house approach allows homeowners to prioritise improvements, phase work sensibly where budgets require and avoid costly mistakes. Often, the biggest energy savings don't come from the most expensive technology – they come from making informed decisions in the right order.

The best energy efficiency upgrade isn't a product – it's a plan.

LEARNING BEFORE YOU BUILD

Every renovation project is different, but one thing remains consistent: informed homeowners make better decisions.

Investing time in understanding your property, the available technologies and how they work together can save significant time, money and stress later in the project. Independent advice is invaluable in helping homeowners cut through conflicting information and choose solutions that genuinely suit their home, lifestyle and budget.

Successful renovation and retrofit projects aren't defined by how many technologies they include, but by how well those technologies work together. By taking a whole-house approach and sequencing improvements carefully, homeowners can create properties that are warmer, healthier, more comfortable and cheaper to run for years to come.

If you're looking to build your knowledge before work begins, the National Self Build & Renovation Centre's Renovation Workshop is the ideal place to start. Designed for anyone planning a renovation, extension or whole-house retrofit, the workshop offers practical, impartial guidance covering everything from planning and budgeting through to building performance and energy efficiency. You'll also have the opportunity to explore the Centre's life-sized Renovation House and Retrofit Zone, helping you visualise the stages of a successful project and understand how different measures work together in practice.

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Autumn 2026

DELIVERING HIGH PERFORMANCE HOMES

Introduction

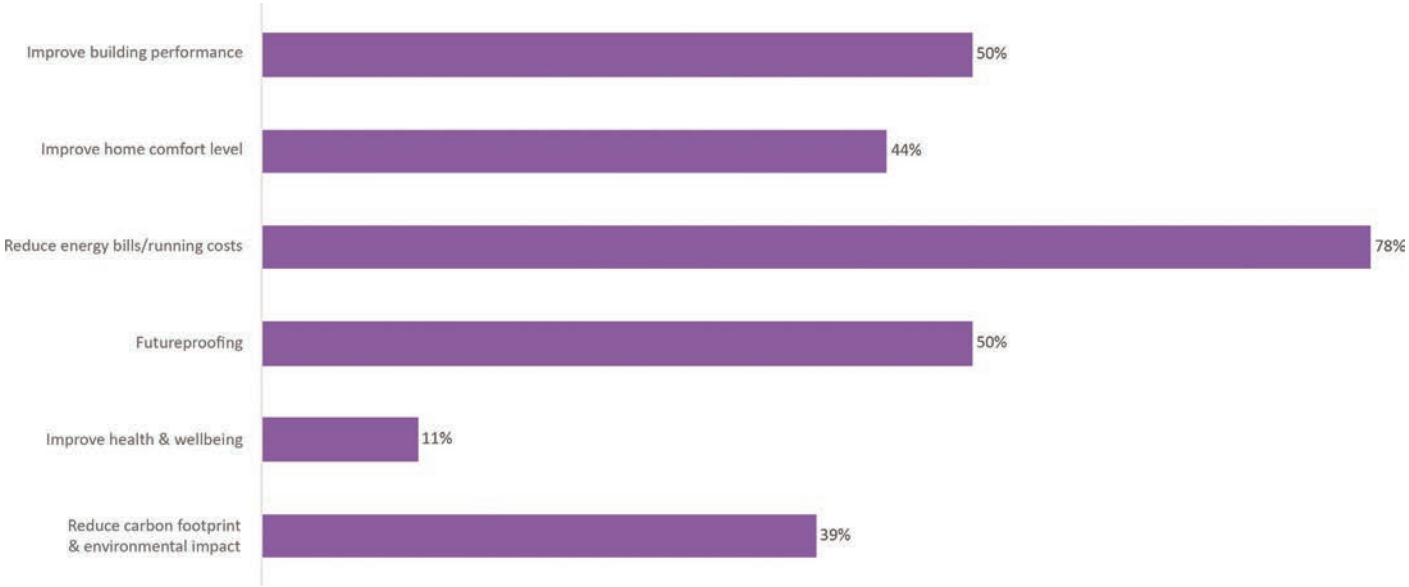
The construction industry in the UK is striving to evolve in terms of environmental impact and energy efficiency. In 2027 the Future Homes Standard comes into force for all new builds in the UK, meaning much tighter requirements regarding the way homes are insulated, glazed and heated and how airtight and well-ventilated they are, mandating the use of renewable technologies.

It's a cause that self-builders are arguably ahead on, with many already opting for sustainable features and products such as heat pumps, triple glazing and solar PV. But with expectations and regulations ever-increasing and tightening, and this summer's record-breaking high temperatures making it more evident than ever that we need to rethink the way we build our homes, is it time to take things even further?

Widely regarded as the 'gold standard in energy efficiency', Passivhaus encompasses a range of principles and methods to achieve incredibly high building performance standards. According to the Passivhaus Trust, buildings account for 35% of total global energy consumption. It's for this reason that it's aiming for 10% of all new housing projects in the UK to be Passivhaus standard by 2035 – an arguably ambitious target given that figure currently sits at only 1%.

To meet the requirements for certification houses must be extremely well-insulated and airtight, use triple glazing, and avoid thermal bridges – spots where heat can leak through such as a beam passing through insulation. Strict airtightness requirements mean mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) is necessary to ensure adequate ventilation and fresh air is achieved, and homes must also strike the tricky balance between using solar gain for heating, while simultaneously avoiding overheating.

To achieve certification designs must undergo energy modelling using the Passivhaus Planning Package (PHPP), and



What are your reasons for deciding to pursue Passivhaus?

What are you reasons for choosing to achieve Passivhaus certification?

a Passivhaus certifier will then assess whether the completed building meets the set targets. While the individual elements can be somewhat straightforward, getting everything to work in harmony to meet the various targets can be more complex. It's for this reason many aspiring Passivhaus self-builders use either a Passivhaus designer or consultant to help with the process.

To avoid the involved certification process, or in cases where the site or project may not be suitable for full certification, some self-builders opt to simply apply Passivhaus principles to their build. This allows them to handpick the elements that work for their project, without being tied to a myriad of components.

With a complex process to navigate and the associated increased cost, is it a genuinely attainable standard for the majority of self-builds? And are self-builders even aware of what it is, and more importantly what it entails?

To answer these questions, The Selfbuilder conducted a survey (hosted by Find Out Now) to determine just where Passivhaus sits in the minds of UK self-builders. We sought to learn how many are actively pursuing Passivhaus – whether that be full certification or applying certain principles – and what their motivations are. Equally, we wanted to find out from those who aren't pursuing it at all what's put them off – is it a lack of understanding, reservations around the complexities or a lack of suitable experts and products?

Unsurprisingly, given the stats published by the Passivhaus Trust, only 2% of respondents said they are pursuing Passivhaus including full certification.

The reasons for pursuing it are plentiful – aside from the obvious environmental benefits, it can improve the health and wellbeing of occupants, result in much lower energy bills, and make homes more valuable.

However, are the challenges outweighing the positives? Going through a more complex design process, the cost of additional professionals and products, a lack of suitable experts and products, and the rigorous standards that must be met can all hold self-builders back. Some consider it but ultimately choose against it for those reasons, while others aren't considering it at all.

In order for sustainable building to go a step further, it's important to understand the motivations and barriers self-builders are facing. How much interest is there in Passivhaus and, perhaps more crucially, how much understanding is there? In order to hit the Passivhaus Trust's bold target, would the self-build industry benefit from more support, better education or a wider pool of professionals to guide them through the process?

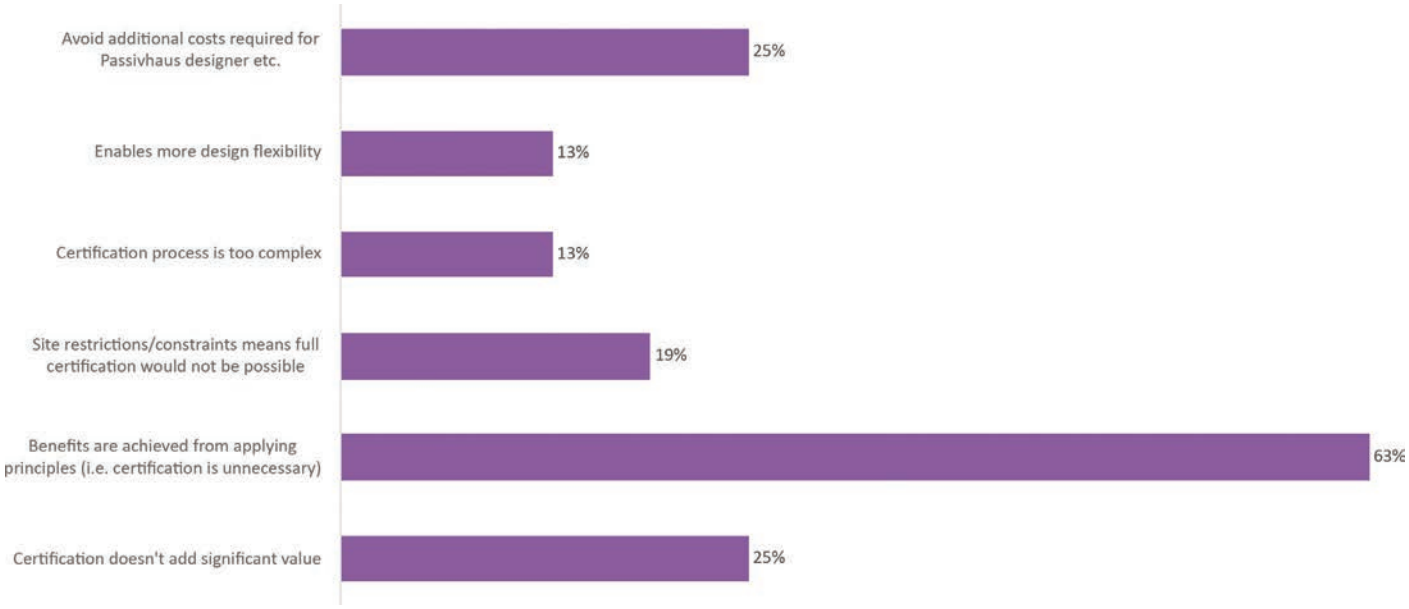
The Findings

With the Passivhaus Trust admirably hoping to see 10% of new housing built to Passivhaus standards by 2035, how far away is that target at the moment? There are varying ways of using Passivhaus within a build – while some self-builders will be seeking full certification, others may simply choose to apply the principles without certification.

We asked survey participants whether they have considered Passivhaus for their project, with the majority (75%) sadly but perhaps not all that surprisingly saying they did not consider it at all. The reasons for this were explored later in the survey – whether it's something specific such as finding it too complex, or simply that they aren't even aware of what it is.

It does encouragingly mean the remaining 25% of respondents are not only aware of Passivhaus, but have actively thought about it when planning their build. We asked them specifically whether they were either aiming for full certification (2%), applying Passivhaus principles but not seeking full certification (15%) or had considered it but ultimately decided against it (8%).

While it's maybe slightly disheartening that only 2% are aiming for full certification, the fact 15% are applying the principles is hugely encouraging and proves there is not only an awareness of the need for high performance buildings, but an actual effort to build them. While certification is the only way to guarantee a building built using Passivhaus principles is performing as intended, applying the principles will still ultimately result in a much better performing building than one built to simply meet the requirements of Building Regulations.



What are your reasons for applying Passivhaus principles without seeking certification?

THE POSITIVES OF PASSIVHAUS

Of the combined 17% who are aiming for full certification or applying Passivhaus principles but not seeking certification, we asked what their motivations are, with responses wide-ranging. We gave respondents a list of motivations, asking them to choose as many as are relevant.

The most popular choice was 'reduce energy bills/running costs', which 78% of respondents selected. Given the recent and ongoing increase in energy costs this is fairly unsurprising, with much of the UK aspiring to reduce energy bills. While the other positive impacts of building a better performing home are undeniably more altruistic, it would perhaps be beneficial for the industry to make self-builders more aware of the direct implications they themselves will benefit from, rather than solely focusing on the wider mission.

The next two most popular choices were 'improve building performance' and 'futureproofing', both of which were selected by 50% of respondents. These are both factors that can bring benefits to the self-builders, while also extending further – improving building performance means fewer carbon emissions, and futureproofing carries benefits for not only the self-builders but future homeowners.

Only just behind was 'improve home comfort level' which 44% of respondents selected – another motivation that benefits the homeowner more than having any wider environmental benefits. However, not far behind was 'reduce carbon footprint & environmental impact' which 39% of participants selected, revealing an awareness and sense of responsibility to build in an environmentally friendly way.

The final option, which only 11% of respondents selected, was 'improve health & wellbeing'. The low number could be down to a lack of awareness of how a high performing home can positively impact health and wellbeing, through factors such as improved air quality.

PROS & CONS OF CERTIFICATION

For self-builders, there can be both positive and negative reasons to pursue – or not – full Passivhaus certification. While it provides a guarantee that the home performs as intended and designed, it can make the build more complicated from the start and make the process more rigorous. Self-builders will need to engage Passivhaus-certified designers or consultants from the beginning, and the certification process itself has a cost attached.

However, it does provide the assurance many self-builders desire, and enhances the overall credibility – and value – of the project. Of those seeking certification, we asked what their reasons for doing so are. 50% of respondents said it's to 'enhance project credibility', and the remaining 50% said it's to 'increase property value'. Interestingly, they didn't select the other options provided – 'quality assurance/reduce the risk of performance gaps', 'independent verification of performance', and 'gain access to Passivhaus experts'.

Evidently what matters to the self-builders themselves is the arguably more surface level advantages, rather than being concerned with whether the home actually performs as intended, though of course they will get that verification anyway. It's also somewhat surprising that some were enticed by the potential increase in property value – with most self-builders building a home to live in, it's not often something they concern themselves with as they have no intention of selling.

We then asked a similar question to those applying Passivhaus principles but not seeking certification. Responses were more varied, though the most popular choice by far was that the 'benefits are achieved by applying principles (i.e. certification is unnecessary)', which 63% of relevant respondents selected. This is fairly unsurprising – the certification process can be complicated and expensive which is naturally off-putting to self-builders, particularly with many working to a tight budget. It also requires self-builders to engage more professionals in the project, in the form of a Passivhaus designer or consultant and a building certifier.

Reinforcing this view point, 25% said they want to 'avoid the additional costs required for a Passivhaus designer etc.', proving that budget and costs are indeed a relevant factor. Also selected by 25% of respondents was 'certification doesn't add significant value' – contradicting the respondents who said their reason for seeking certification was the added value. Perhaps

more clarification is needed for self-builders as to whether or not achieving certification can increase their home's value, as it's evidently a factor that's important to them.

Just behind this, 19% said their reason for not seeking certification was that 'site restrictions/constraints mean full certification would not be possible'. There are various factors that can play into this – if the building has to be oriented a certain way the necessary passive solar gain may not be possible, or heavy overshadowing from nearby trees or buildings can block sunlight. Certain ground conditions – such as steep sites or high water tables – can mean elements such as airtight foundations or the necessary continuous insulation levels can be risky or even impossible. It seems a legitimate frustration, therefore, that some self-builders are simply dictated by their site and cannot meet all the necessary, rigorous requirements.

The final two options, both chosen by 13% of respondents, were that not pursuing certification 'enables more design flexibility' and that the 'certification process is too complex'. It's arguably reassuring that so few self-builders view the process as too complicated, however also not surprising that some are put off by the potential design constraints. Self-builders will often have strong ideas on what they want their house to look like, and will be unwilling to compromise on that. However, while Passivhaus means strict performance requirements, the overall look and feel of a home is less impacted by this, suggesting this is perhaps a misguided belief that needs dispelling.

IMPEDING PASSIVHAUS PROGRESSION

Having delved into the reasons self-builders were opting to apply Passivhaus principles (and whether or not they were seeking full certification) we then sought to attain the same from those choosing not to, whether they had initially considered it or not.

Site restraints are seemingly a bigger issue than they perhaps seemed from our previous question – of those who considered Passivhaus but decided against it, 88% of them said it was because it's 'not suitable for their project/site'. This could of course be accurate, or could potentially be down to a lack of understanding from self-builders on what they can or can't do. However, with a highly convoluted planning process and notoriously difficult local authorities enforcing often unnecessary restrictions, it's also highly plausible that many are left with no real option.

Unsurprisingly cost and budget restraints have also put self-builders off, with 50% of respondents reporting that this has contributed to them deciding against Passivhaus. 25% said they are 'making other sustainable choices (e.g. heat pump, high insulation levels etc.), indicating that while they may have dismissed the idea of aiming for the 'gold standard in energy efficiency', that's not to say they're not making sustainable choices in their project. Perhaps the idea of aiming for a full Passivhaus is simply too daunting for some self-builders.

Our final question was to those who said they had not considered Passivhaus at all. As might be expected, the most popular answer was that they're 'not familiar with it enough to consider it', selected by just over half of respondents. This can be a common problem among self-builders not just when it comes to Passivhaus but all aspects of a build, with many complete novices and not privy to the knowledge, education and experience that those who work in the industry have.

The next two most popular reasons were once again 'not suitable for my project/site' (31%) and 'cost/budget restraints' (20%). These are evidently proving to be two of the biggest obstacles overall, having come up consistently in responses throughout our survey.

The construction industry has an opportunity – and perhaps a responsibility – to make Passivhaus less daunting

Other options seemingly prove less of a hindrance which is encouraging. This includes 'too complicated' (3%), 'standards are too rigorous' (3%), 'lack of suitable designers, experts & installers' (4%), and 'lack of suitable products/materials' (3%). In particular, it's reassuring that the latter two aren't holding a high number of self-builders back, indicating that the necessary support from the industry – be that products or professionals – is there.

In a similar vein to the previous question, 10% said they are making other sustainable choices, such as heat pumps or high levels of insulation, and presumably therefore didn't feel the need to push their project as far as a Passivhaus.

Conclusion

Passivhaus may be the 'gold standard' for energy efficient homes, but for most self-builders in the UK, it evidently remains some way from becoming the norm. While our survey encouragingly indicates self-builders are increasingly interested in building better, it also shows they're not necessarily ready to commit to the demands of full Passivhaus certification.

For those who are embracing it – whether that be full certification or more simply applying some of the principles – the attraction isn't simply doing the right thing for the planet. Lower energy bills, better building performance and futureproofing all rank highly, alongside improved comfort levels and an overall reduced environmental impact. For self-builders the appeal of a high performing home is not just environmental but personal – arguably more so.

Those who aren't pursuing it – having considered it initially or not – have varied reasons for ultimately rejecting it, but perhaps the biggest obstacle is knowledge. More than half of those who had never considered Passivhaus said they simply weren't familiar enough with it. For those who had considered it but decided against it, site restraints and/or a lack of project suitability were overwhelmingly cited as the reasons.

This suggests the construction industry has an opportunity – and perhaps a responsibility – to make Passivhaus less daunting. Better education and a greater awareness of what is achievable could help self-builders distinguish between genuine limitations and perceived ones.

Of course not every project will be able to achieve full certification, and not every self-builder will want to. But that doesn't mean the principles have to be abandoned too. As energy efficiency inevitably becomes more prevalent, applying Passivhaus standards – whether certified or not – could provide self-builders a home that is cheaper to run, more comfortable to live in and better prepared for the future. The challenge for the industry is to make Passivhaus feel achievable rather than aspirational.

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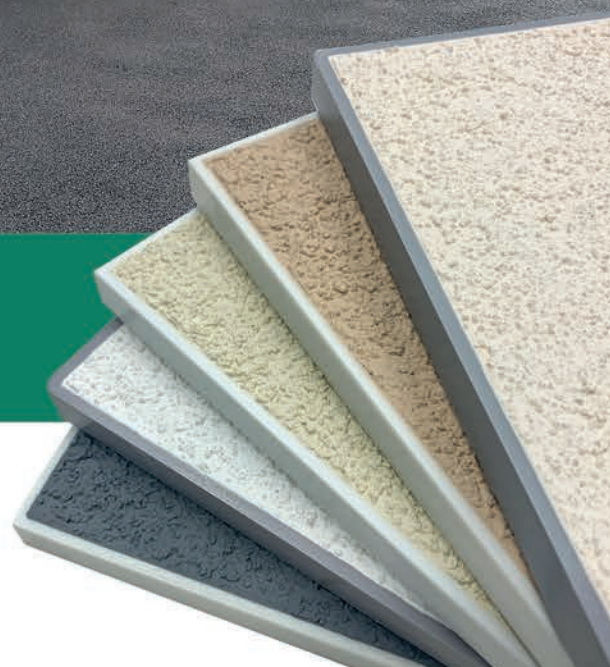

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Clad in Success

How Cedral fibre cement cladding helped to transform a tired bungalow into a stunning family home.

Skilled carpenter and Cedral Select Professional Installer Ryan Gooch has completed a domestic housing project that demonstrates how the creative use of cladding can completely change the character and aesthetic of a house.

This remarkable development in Colchester saw the budding entrepreneur buy a derelict bungalow out of probate, turning what was an unloved, three bedroomed shell into a stunning five bedroomed family house.

Ryan explains: "Having been left for a few years to deteriorate, there was a lot of internal damage and degradation, especially on the inside of the property. Hence, I decided to keep the basic, solid structure of the property and simply build upwards, reusing as much of the original materials (such as roof tiles) as possible."

ADVANTAGES OF CEDRAL FOR THE FACADE

When it came to the external envelope of the new building, Ryan was adamant about the use of Cedral fibre cement cladding - in this case their Lap system which offers a traditional shiplap aesthetic with a woodgrain finish. Ryan chose to use the colour Tea Green."I really liked this fresh, optimistic colour," said Ryan, "which worked really well next to the sand-coloured rendering we used on some external sections of the house.

"As this was my first development, under the RG Carpentry name, I wanted to achieve the highest quality finish in every area – including the facade. There are other fibre cement brands on the market, but for me this is simply the best product around. I like the colour finish, the thickness and rigidity of the boards and also the denser quality of the planks compared to some other brands. This higher quality means fewer spoilt cuts on site, as well as a better end result."

As a Cedral Select Professional Installer, Ryan also appreciates the access to technical experts about the product as well as the sale and installation support provided. "I was delighted to receive a set of Gecko clamps earlier this year from Cedral, which were wider than others I've got – which makes solo installation that little bit easier!"

In all, Ryan installed two and a half pallets (over 150 sq m) of Cedral cladding to complete the six-month build.

INSTALLATION ADVICE FOR SUCCESS

Without doubt, the most important aspect of any facade installation is the preparation, advice that Ryan is keen to support. He said: "Getting the battening right from the very start is absolutely critical. If things are just a couple of millimetres out at the beginning, then this error will simply exacerbate when you start installing the boards. For this reason, I always use a laser and set out the battens perfectly. I've seen people not using lasers, which puts things marginally out. And while it's not obvious to the eye, it's not level. Everything needs to be exact or you'll pay for it in the end."

Getting the right breather membranes fitted and batten widths are other vital aspects that can often be overlooked, according to Ryan, who has attended several technical workshops provided by Cedral. He continued: "In my opinion, too many jobbing contractors treat every cladding product the same, without paying due respect to the manufacturer's specification with regards to installation and airflow. For Cedral, 38 mm vertical battens are recommended to achieve optimum airflow behind the cladding."

The transformation to the old bungalow is remarkable – and Ryan is delighted with the finished project. This was Ryan's first foray into development and the house is testament to the focus placed on quality fittings and finishings throughout and his hard work. Within just weeks of completion, a family buyer acquired the house for well above the average property price in the area.

Ryan says, "I've really enjoyed working on this project, the success of which is also down to the various other contractors I've worked with on this job. It goes without saying that the use of a top quality cladding brand such as Cedral has also given the house huge 'kerb appeal' which has helped to market the property so effectively."

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Registrations open for Screwfix Live 2026

Screwfix Live, an unmissable event for trade professionals and serious DIYers, returns to Farnborough International Exhibition Centre from Friday 25 to Sunday 27 September.

Now in its 13th year, Screwfix Live brings together more than 200 leading trade brands, offering visitors the chance to get hands-on with the latest tools, products and innovations, all under one roof. Attendees can also shop exclusive event-only offers and enjoy giveaways, live product demonstrations, hands-on experiences, expert Q&A sessions, and much more.

Free to attend, visitors can now register to secure their place and receive a free goodie bag worth over £40 on arrival.

Screwfix Live will also host the final of Screwfix Top Tradesperson 2026, where ten finalists will face a panel of industry experts. One worthy winner will take home the ultimate £20,000 trade bundle of tools, tech and training.

Max Britten, Screwfix managing director said: "Screwfix Live is an absolute highlight of the year, where we the trade community come together under one roof with hundreds of suppliers showcasing their fantastic products. Last year we welcomed a record-breaking 30,000 visitors, and we're delighted to open registrations for what promises to be another incredible event. Whether you're an experienced professional or serious DIYer, there's something for everyone at Screwfix Live and we look forward to welcoming visitors this September."

To register your free place, please scan the QR code.

Article supplied by Screwfix

Rise of timber frame & closed panel solutions

As timber frame and closed panel systems gain popularity, Demi Kinghorn of Fleming Homes explores how offsite manufacture can give self-builders greater control over costs, timescales and the construction process.

For anyone embarking on a self-build journey, the dream is always the same: the perfect home shaped around them. But the dream can easily tip into a feeling of being overwhelmed, juggling trades, coordinating deliveries and managing a hundred moving parts onsite. That's why a growing number of self-builders are turning away from the traditional masonry build and towards timber frame and closed panel systems, which promise to hand back some of the time, budget certainty and peace of mind that self-building can so easily consume.

Timber frame has become one of the most popular building methods thanks to its efficiency, flexibility and sustainability credentials. Closed panel systems take this a step further. With an open frame, the first layer of insulation can be pre-fitted in the factory, while further layers are added and finished on site. Closed panels, by contrast, are manufactured entirely offsite in a factory, arriving complete with insulation and membranes already fitted.

For self-builders this higher level of offsite manufacture can reduce onsite labour, cut the number of trades required and shorten build timelines. Where materials are supplied as part of a qualifying supply and install package for a new home, greater offsite manufacture can reduce upfront VAT outlay, supporting cashflow and affordability at a stage of the project when every saving counts.

THE BENEFITS

It's fast. A timber frame home can be wind and watertight in two to three weeks, compared with two to three months with a masonry build. Getting to this important milestone quicker helps create build schedule certainty.

It's low risk. One of the biggest hurdles faced by self-builders is project

Timber frame has become one of the most popular building methods thanks to its efficiency

management. Sourcing, scheduling and coordinating the different trades, often around each other's availability and the weather. Because timber frame homes are precision engineered offsite and quick to assemble, they allow you to work to a reliable build programme, so trades can be booked with confidence rather than juggled reactively. That certainty also matters for anyone relying on a stage mortgage or other finance options, where hitting build milestones on schedule can be just as important as hitting them on budget.

It's sustainable. Timber frame construction is recognised worldwide as one of the most sustainable and environmentally responsible building methods available. It offers low U-values, high thermal performance, low waste and high acoustic performance, making it easier to meet energy efficiency targets without compromising. For self-builders investing in their own long-term home, that translates directly into lower running costs down the line.

It's flexible. Timber frame is packageable, allowing you to ensure what you buy suits your project requirements exactly, from an uninsulated frame through to a fully closed panel system. That flexibility means you're not locked into a one-size-fits-all approach. Crucially, this flexibility comes without sacrificing a high-quality product.

WHY IT MATTERS

For self-builders, the appeal of timber frame and closed panel solutions comes down to something quite simple: it hands back some of the control. Control over budget, over programme, over the number of unknowns between breaking ground and moving in. Rather than being at the mercy of weather delays, trade availability and the general unpredictability of a traditional build, self-builders working with timber frame can plan with far greater confidence. This is one of the main reasons timber frame homes are increasingly the starting point for self-build projects rather than the alternative.

GETTING STARTED

If you're at the early design stage of a self-build project, it's worth speaking to a timber frame supplier before finalising your plans. The earlier they're involved, the more of these benefits you'll be able to capture from optimising the design for offsite manufacture, to advising on foundations and site access requirements, and helping you choose the right level of package for your budget and timescale. Leaving that conversation too late can mean missing out on some of the design efficiencies and cost savings that make timber frame and closed panel solutions such a compelling choice for self-builders in the first place.

Demi Kinghorn is marketing coordinator at Fleming Homes

CASE STUDY

THE GARDEN CONNECTION

A small extension and clever redesign transformed the connection between James Lockwood's Edwardian home and his exquisite garden.

TEXT ALEXANDRA PRATT **IMAGES** ANDY HASLAM

Architect James Lockwood wanted more living space and was considering self-building when he noticed an elegant villa for sale. This Edwardian home overlooked a Grade II listed park in Grimsby and James realised it could be a better option. The house needed some TLC, but "it ticked every box," says James. "You can see trees from every window, and I fell in love with it."

As is often the case, the period charms of the home's formal rooms, including high ceilings and cornicing, were absent at the back of the house. Here, a warren of small rooms clustered around a 1970s north-facing kitchen. Together, they made the home feel disconnected from its exquisite two/three-acre garden.

James, who owns Studio Lockwood, immediately saw the villa's potential. His plan to knock those rooms into one open-plan area and add a small extension has created a spacious new kitchen, dining and living area, which transforms the home's connection to the outside. Although the extension is relatively small, James also gave the rest of the house a "facelift" to tie it all together.

James considered timber frame construction for the extension. However, due to the amount of steel needed for the large sliding windows, he considered it more economical to use blockwork, which is also load-bearing.

The extension is faced in timber, and this became a significant detail in the project. James used the same black timber cladding to cover the existing pebble dash render on the first floor above the sliding doors. The cladding pattern on the extension complements the home's original decorative brick pattern.

"I'm a big fan of modernism, but I wanted it to feel warm and homely."

The pebble dash across the original building was cement-based and had started to peel off where water had been trapped behind over the years. So, "at the first-floor gable end, I hacked off the pebble dash and rendered fully in a through-colour silicone render, to create a crisp white finish. This allows the black timber-clad box below to then really 'pop'," says James.

The large sliding windows bring direct access to the garden and an ever-changing picture of nature.

"All windows and doors I eventually replaced in black aluminium double glazing except the front bay windows and front door, where the existing lead work and curved glazing were so characterful, they deserved retention," says James.

Inside, "due to the interior coving, skirtings etc. I opted not to dry line to improve the insulation value as the loss of character was too great. I didn't want to externally insulate, either, as this would have resulted in loss of the

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

DESIGN
Studio Lockwood
www.studiolockwood.co.uk

PAINT
Valspar
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CABINETRY
Samuel Neal Kitchens
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FLOORING
Porcelanosa
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SANITARYWARE
Victoria Plumbing
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brickwork facade at ground level. Instead, I went for the practical approach of thick-lined curtains, thick underlay, larger column radiators etc.," says James.

The garden and the house are defined by a long pergola, underscored by a colourful border, planted with perennials. This offers sun-dappled shade in high summer and interest year-round. "Before the house sat on a sea of lawn; now the pergola connects the house to the whole length of the garden," says James. "The garden is the biggest room; treat it with lots of love; add garden lights and furniture. It makes your house feel bigger and it really does lift your spirits."

Painted in black, the pergola echoes the Tudor-influenced parts of the house and is part of a strict palette of colours and materials that seamlessly bring old and new together. "It's all about how you tie it in", says James. "And the cladding pattern is beautiful when the sun hits it."

This same idea is used inside, where the same wood-effect porcelain tiles flow from the new sitting room onto the terrace. "I'm a big fan of modernism, but I wanted it to feel warm and homely. That is why there are no grey floor tiles; I wanted a warm colour."

An open-plan space like this is inevitably where life happens. The sleek kitchen was designed by James so that, whether cooking or washing up, there's always a view of the garden. There's also a long dining table for entertaining friends and family. This leads into the sitting room, where a new brick fireplace provides a focus. Green decor brings the outside in, creating a warm and calm feel.

"The garden is the biggest room; treat it with lots of love"

"My style is contemporary, but with a sympathetic nod to the property's heritage, through colours and features," says James. "This pulls you through, and using the same tones and palettes on both old and new means there's no jarring."

Upstairs, the bedrooms have a more contemporary feel. Layout changes reduced five bedrooms to four and relocated a new master suite to the rear, with a glorious garden view. James also built a new wall so he could add a walk-in wardrobe and recess the ensuite.

Yet the homely feel remains. James is particularly pleased with his new window seat. "It provides extra storage, and I can see a beautiful tree that turns yellow in the autumn, so I chose yellow cushions."

In the end, this was a home project that became all about the garden and the relationship between the two. "Opening the house up to the garden was my best decision," says James. "I wasn't a keen gardener before, but I am now… I can even sit inside and watch a family of foxes play." ■

LOW POINT

"While I knew decorating could follow, I just wanted a functional kitchen, and I had this installed while still waiting for the glass to arrive, on 20 December. The stress of having a brand-new kitchen, etc., all installed, protected only by plastic sheets covering the bare window frames while I waited for the glass, was not pleasant. But as with all things, that issue simply became a funny memory, and the stress was all worthwhile."

HIGH POINT

"Coming home and walking up the new Victorian-tiled path, past the alliums, to the front door. I just love opening the door and walking through the house to that amazing view of the garden."

BEWI supports cutting-edge ICF project

BEWI Thermomur® Insulating Concrete Formwork (ICF) Building System and BEWI Jackodur® Atlas Foundation System have made possible the construction of a new cutting-edge energy-efficient home in Berkshire. The project, which was in the past shortlisted for the BuildIt Awards, comprised the stunning transformation of a 1960s bungalow into a superb and unique family home of 418sq m internal area. BEWI Thermomur® 350 Super ensures an outstanding thermal performance (with a U-value of 0.15W/m²K) and also enables a fast and efficient build. It was used on this project in conjunction with the BEWI Jackodur® Atlas Foundation System, which features an innovative interlocking design to eliminate thermal bridging and ensure superior insulation, combined with stability for the foundation slab. Both the contractor and the homeowner, Charles Vickery, particularly liked the strength of the block, both in terms of the ease of construction and also the minimal bracing of the blocks required prior to each concrete pour. The BEWI high density cavity closure product was also used on all four sides of every external door or window opening. The result is a building with a total construction cost of just under £1m, which has an outstanding thermal and acoustic performance and highly insulated structural walls and floors. The building has an SAP rating of 93A – where 100 represents zero energy usage.

01204 221089 **www.bewi-icf.co.uk**

Build smart, glaze first

Paul Higgins at TuffX explains why glazing should be considered early in a whole-house strategy.

For self-builders, glazing is one of the most exciting elements to specify in a new home. It helps define the architecture, draws daylight deep into the plan and can transform everyday rooms into spaces that feel more considered and connected. But glazing also plays a much bigger role than many people realise. As part of the building envelope, it affects heat loss, solar gain, comfort, compliance and long-term running costs.

THINK FABRIC FIRST

The best self-build homes are designed as complete systems, with the walls, roof, floor, airtightness, ventilation and glazing all working together. It can be tempting to choose glazing mainly for its appearance, but performance matters as much. Poorly specified glazing can undermine an otherwise well-insulated home, while the right products can help create a comfortable, efficient building fabric.

That point is becoming even more important as standards continue to evolve. The Future Homes Standard is expected to come into force for most new homes in England from March 2027, with an ongoing emphasis on improved fabric performance. At the same time, Approved Document O has made overheating a key consideration in the design of new residential buildings. For self-builders, making early glazing decisions is more valuable than ever, rather than leaving them until the end of the project. The earlier glazing is considered, the easier it becomes to balance daylight, heat retention and solar control as part of the wider design.

Early specification can also help keep the build programme moving. Standard sizes can simplify ordering and make costs easier to predict, while bespoke glazing can unlock the design freedom many self-builders are looking for. Making those decisions at planning or detailed design stage gives architects, contractors and suppliers time to

Heated bi-fold doors and glass infill for roof glazing are opening up even more options.

coordinate openings, structural support, drainage, upstands and access.

BALANCING DAYLIGHT & OVERHEATING

Large areas of glass can make a self-build feel bright, open and closely connected to the garden, but they need to be handled carefully. South- and west-facing elevations, roof glazing and open-plan spaces can all be vulnerable to excessive solar gain if the specification is not considered alongside the rest of the fabric.

Solar control glass can help by reflecting some of the sun's energy before it enters the home. That can reduce the risk of rooms overheating in summer while still allowing homeowners to enjoy generous daylight and views. When rooflights are part of the plan, that balance can be the difference between a space that works comfortably year-round and one that only feels right for part of the year.

It's also worth looking beyond the glass itself. Frame quality and installation both make a real difference to the final performance of an opening. A highly insulated wall will only perform as intended if the openings within it are specified and installed with the same level of care. For self-builders aiming for a low-energy home, that means discussing U-values and solar control performance as part of the wider project conversation.

ROOFLIGHTS & THE FIFTH ELEVATION

The roof is often described as the fifth elevation, and for good reason. It has a major impact on both the look and the performance of a home. Rooflights can bring daylight into the centre of the plan where vertical windows can't reach, making them especially useful in deep layouts, single-storey extensions and open-plan kitchen-diners.

For self-builders balancing budgets and schedules, ease of installation is more than a convenience. A rooflight that arrives as a complete, well-engineered solution can reduce complexity, minimise coordination issues and help a home become weathertight more quickly and confidently.

HEATED GLASS OPENS UP NEW POSSIBILITIES

Heated bi-fold doors and glass infill for roof glazing are opening up even more options. In addition to bringing in natural light, these systems can provide radiant heat during the colder months, improving thermal comfort and daylight levels.

Paul Higgins is commercial director at TuffX

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CASE STUDY

FOUR STOREYS OF LIGHT

James and Rachel Tilson saw an opportunity to create a 21st century home in this Victorian terrace with subsidence.

TEXT ALEXANDRA PRATT **IMAGES** DAN GLASSER

Any major build project or renovation is an act of creation that demands faith in the process and sometimes just sheer will. Yet Rachel and James Tilson not only completed this jaw-dropping remodel, but they did so with creativity and enthusiasm.

This couple are busy professionals with a young family, and they needed a new home in north London. They found a mid-terrace, four-storey Victorian property that needed more than a little TLC. Where other buyers played safe, James and Rachel saw an opportunity to redesign the building to their own needs and tastes; a home for the 21st century.

The house was in a generally poor condition. Dank and badly insulated, it suffered from a series of ill-conceived extensions that compromised the 'flow' and severed connection to the garden. Worse still, "it had some subsidence issues," recalls James. "This scared off a lot of people, so it was cheaper, although we had to pay cash. We knew we were going to be doing a basement and would therefore need to completely redo the foundations. So actually, the subsidence made zero difference to us. We got a great price, so it was uniquely good."

The couple worked with Andrew Mulroy of Mulroy Architects, a practice that excels at solving architectural puzzles. James came across them while searching for planning applications in the area. The couple's brief to Andrew was a home filled with light, which is energy efficient and sustainable. They also wanted a flexible home for the family to grow and evolve. "The design was an organic process, and we were pretty involved. We weren't scared," says James. "We loved getting involved, and we had lots of enthusiasm."

The design that emerged is fairly radical. Although in the original parts of the house, James and Rachel have chosen to respect the Victorian heritage, in the newly enlarged basement level and the rear extension on the ground floor, the style is far more contemporary. The house still has five bedrooms, but there are now additions, including a cinema and gym in the basement. While there are other changes to the layout, the most striking change is a russet-coloured steel staircase in a double-height atrium. This is a sculptural focal point at the heart of the home.

"We were thinking about a discreet staircase to maximise floorspace," says James. "But that wouldn't have been great to use, and we already had plenty of living space. We were working out how we wanted the building to look: utilitarian or stand out. We chose to stand out."

Powder-coated in orange paint to appear like Corten steel (budgetary constraints ruled out using Corten itself), the staircase connects the ground floor to the basement. The couple sacrificed the former dining room to create the void, but this was no real loss, as it had been a dark, internal room which added little usable space.

"By removing the floor, we created a bright and airy double-height space in the heart of the house," says Tom Harris of Mulroy Architects. "The atrium helps the home feel more open and connected, celebrating the relationship between the old and new and forming a grand entrance to the basement, filled with natural light."

LOW POINT

"Moving in day. Our children were aged two and four. We moved in over the weekend, and we had no hot water, so we had to shower at the gym. The grill over the lightwell had not been installed, and a fox fell in and was injured. We had to call the fire brigade!"

HIGH POINT

"Living in it! Everything worked out well, to Andrew Mulroy's credit. It's a very liveable space, and we use every room in the house."

From a design point of view, the creation of this new basement led to the idea of the atrium. It can be difficult to add a basement that isn't dark and uninviting, and even harder to make the space feel like an integral part of the home. This double-height atrium solves those problems. The question of light is addressed by the clever alignment of an internal window between the atrium and the kitchen (the neighbouring room on the ground floor), with large rooflights in the rear extension.

"The alignment of the internal window with the rooflights means that natural light can filter down into the basement and, amazingly, you can stand in the basement and have a view of the sky," says Tom.

To improve the light and 'flow', James and Rachel removed previous ill-thought-out extensions, which contained a poky kitchen and garden room. They replaced these rooms with a single, open-plan extension that is a kitchen, dining room and living room for the family. South-facing skylights flood the space with light, and glazed doors connect the living space to the garden.

Mulroy Architects specified a mixture of construction methods across the new levels. Where the extension sits over the basement, there is precast concrete beam and block. The remainder of the ground floor extension is a reinforced concrete slab, which offers good strength, stability and an even surface. Above this, the new walls and roof include a few steel beams to create the open spans. However, the rest of the extension is built using a

"We were working out how we wanted the building to look: utilitarian or stand out. We chose to stand out"

200mm deep softwood timber frame with Rockwool insulation.

"The timber frame offers more design flexibility… a high-performing thermal envelope, reduced embodied carbon and embeds our studio ethos of creating socially sustainable architecture into the very fabric of the building," says Tom Harris.

There are other sustainable design features in the building, including a wildflower green roof on the extension, which provides lovely views from the upper floors, as well as fantastic insulation. "It was a planner-imposed condition," recalls James. "But we thought it was a great idea."

Elsewhere, James and Rachel chose to insulate (internally) the outside walls of this original Victorian building. They also upgraded the roof, and installed underfloor heating. The couple also opted for an MVHR (mechanical ventilation and heat recovery) system in the basement, which ensures fresh, filtered air without heat

loss. Together, these measures have significantly improved the home's energy efficiency, raising its SAP rating from a band 'F' to a band 'C'.

There is also the infrastructure for an air source heat pump, but the family has yet to move away from gas heating as, "there are restrictions on the location of the units, especially in conservation areas," says James. "We plumbed it in in anticipation, but even with the house being well insulated, the air source heat pump may struggle."

The basement also adds that all important flexibility. Although part of the main house, access via the new atrium creates the feeling of a separate zone that may be transformed in the future into a self-contained apartment for older children, or ageing parents. This level of forward-thinking ensures the home will remain functional as the family and their needs evolve.

In the basement, the couple embraced their passion for contemporary styling. Rather than echo the skirting boards and architraves of the Victorian house above, there are shadow gaps. In place of cornicing, there are clean lines.

Yet the house is not clinical. Materials are important and create an inviting, warm feel. The russet-coloured staircase sets the tone for both colour and texture elsewhere. Working with interior designer ALL&NTHXNG, James and Rachel embraced original, raw materials, such as the rough, exposed bricks of the fireplace. These share the same earthy tones as the staircase. Raw plaster adds texture and pinky colours, set against the cool grey minimalism in the rear extension. In the original parts of the house, the parquet flooring is golden in colour and "great from a design perspective," says James.

In the kitchen and bathrooms, the floors are microcement, a fantastic, cost-effective option to a poured concrete floor. Microcement has a seamless finish that is water-resistant and easy to clean. It also works over underfloor heating and creates the stylish, high-end look James and Rachel wanted.

The kitchen itself was designed by ALL&NTHXNG and built by Sola Kitchens. The clean lines of the contemporary styling suit the Tilsons' desire to have a practical and modern workspace. This open-plan space, designed by Mulroy Architects also has a modern oriel window, projecting into the garden. Sliding doors from the same company, Eurowindows (UK), connect the inside and outside, making the terrace an integral part of the living area for much of the year.

"The garden is a great, south-facing space," says James. "Our old house had a north-facing garden, which was unusable. This one fits family life very well."

The garden by Emily Allen connects cleverly

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECT, PROJECT MANAGER, COST CONSULTANT
Mulroy Architects
mulroyarchitects.com

INTERIOR DESIGNER
ALL&NTHXNG
allandnthxng.com

GARDEN DESIGNER
Emily Allen

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER
Halstead Associates
halsteadassociates.co.uk

MICROCEMENT (KITCHEN & BATHROOMS)
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STEEL STAIR
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"The house and garden create a natural flow from inside to outside"

to the architecture and interiors through the construction of a garden pergola. This – and the exterior wall of the extension – is finished in Corten-effect powder coating in 'Sahara' by Powdertech, echoing the finish on the staircase.

"The house and garden create a natural flow from inside to outside in a way that makes them feel inseparable," says Tom Harris. "I'm most proud of the harmony in this home. Throughout, the original charm and character of the Victorian house is complemented by the clean, contemporary additions."

There were a few challenges for the Tilsons, who enjoyed both the process and the results of the build. They were renting a property nearby during the project, so they were able to stay engaged, but the project did run over the expected time due to unforeseen problems with the existing foundations and party wall brickwork, which was frustrating and incurred additional rent payments.

"The last few months we were pretty anxious to get in there," says James.

Now the family are enjoying their new life in the home, has it lived up to their expectations? The answer is a resounding 'yes'.

"It's great from a utility perspective," says James. "It's also provided great health benefits, both for the kids and us. Even the cinema and having the guest bedroom suite for the grandparents to help with the kids."

Andrew Mulroy has relished the challenges presented by remodelling this derelict property. "At its core, this home meets the needs of the present, while planning for the future. Our design ensures it remains adaptable, comfortable and sustainable for years to come. By solving the puzzle of this Victorian home's limitations, we've delivered a bespoke space that is not only functional but inspiring."

The Tilson family's home is a testament to how intelligent design can breathe new life into period properties, and this one is as dynamic and forward-thinking as the family that owns it.

"What was once a damp, cold and disjointed house is now a warm and highly functional home," says James. "The basement, once an underused space, now benefits from plenty of light, making it an integral part of our daily lives." ■

More room in the roof

Matthew Evans at Kingspan Insulation GB explains why getting the insulation right is crucial for loft conversions.

Loft conversions are a great way to unlock extra living space, potentially raising the value of your home by over 20%. When planning a conversion, one of the key early conversations to have with your contractor or architect is around insulation. Factors such as the performance and thickness of the insulation, where it is installed, and the quality of the workmanship can all impact how spacious and comfortable the finished room is and on your long-term energy bills.

WHY INSULATION MATTERS FOR LOFT CONVERSION

The insulation in your home serves a fundamental purpose: slowing the speed at which heat can travel through the floors, walls or roof. In cooler months this helps to keep warm air inside your home more effectively, while in summer it can keep your rooms cooler than the outdoor air for longer (in combination with good practices like shutting windows and closing curtains and blinds during the daytime).

The impact of insulation is particularly noticeable for loft conversions as your entire roof is exposed to the outside, providing a large surface area for heat to either escape or enter your home. Your roof will also typically receive direct sunlight throughout the day, meaning that without good insulation it can quickly heat up.

Insulation can obviously also impact your energy bills, reducing the amount of heating or cooling that is needed to maintain comfortable internal temperatures. This is increasingly important as we switch to low carbon heating systems (such as heat pumps) which perform most efficiently at lower flow temperatures than gas boilers. If heat is allowed to escape, it can mean these systems have to work much harder and could significantly raise bills.

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

When insulating lofts, the insulation will need to be fitted either between and above rafters (only possible if your tiles are being removed or replaced) or between and below them. This is to ensure there is a continuous layer of insulation which is vital as any gaps in the insulation layer can allow heat to bypass it (known as a thermal bridge). This not only reduces its effectiveness but can also allow cold spots to form which can lead to condensation and damp issues.

When it comes to insulating performance, the key metric is the U-value. This measures how easily heat can travel through a full construction. The lower the U-value, the better the roof/

When it comes to insulating performance, the key metric is the U-value

wall is at slowing heat transfer. Building Regulations in England, Scotland and Wales set improved/maximum U-values which your builder should typically either meet or improve on for your loft conversion. These values may vary depending on whether you are retaining the existing tiles (renovating) or replacing them. In some cases, it may be possible to relax these values where meeting them is technically impractical.

The thickness of insulation needed to meet these values will depend on the thermal conductivity of the material being installed. Again, the lower this value is, the more effective the insulation is at stopping heat from passing through. This can allow a thinner layer of insulation to be installed than would be possible with a worse performing product. This could help unlock extra headroom if your insulation is being fitted between and below rafters.

Phenolic boards are some of the thinnest commonly used insulation solutions for pitched roofs with a thermal conductivity as low as 0.019 W/mK. Phenolic insulated plasterboard products are also available which combine insulation, drylining and vapour control in a single layer for below rafter applications. It is important to check the thermal conductivity of the product being installed matches the designs for your home as there are a number of insulation products which look similar but can have very different thermal conductivities.

Your contractor should also consider how the construction will handle condensation risk. In homes, warm moist air will rise into the loft. If this is not effectively released it can condense on cool surfaces such as sarking boards and timbers in your roof, leading to potential damp problems.

In a ventilated construction, this moist air is removed by maintaining a 50mm clear cavity between the insulation and the sarking/tiles. This cavity should be fitted to allow air to flow through the eaves and out through the ridge, carrying moist air away. It is important to check that this 50mm cavity is included in your contractor's plans, where relevant.

Alternatively, contractors can use a breathable sarking material which allows water vapour to pass through and out of your roof. This avoids the need for an air gap meaning a greater thickness of insulation can be fitted between your rafters, allowing the target U-value to be achieved with a thinner thickness of below rafter insulation – maximising headroom.

Whatever approach is taken, your contractor should take care to eliminate any gaps in the insulation layer during installation. For phenolic boards, this should include carefully measuring and cutting the boards to fit the exact space between rafters, filling any small gaps with expanding foam and using flexible insulation to fill any unwanted gaps at the eaves. Careful installation can prevent potential issues in the future and some manufacturers can provide specific best practice guidance to support this.

BETTER RESULTS

Getting the insulation right in your loft conversion needs to be a key consideration and not an afterthought. With good planning, the right insulation solutions and careful installation, it should be possible to create a loft which can be kept comfortable at an affordable cost across the year and has plenty of headroom.

Matthew Evans is director of technical & regulatory affairs at Kingspan Insulation GB

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Radiating the right style

Richard Lister at The Radiator Company explores how the choice of designer radiators can help to establish a successful interior design scheme and create a truly personal aesthetic.

It is important to consider radiators at an early stage in the planning process. This allows the size, shape and colour to be selected and the location of pipework agreed in advance, allowing plenty of time should you need to order a bespoke product. This is important because depending on size, colour and stock availability, delivery times could range from two days up to eight weeks.

The correct sizing of the radiators is also crucial to ensure they perform as intended. This should be calculated/measured in BTUs (British Thermal Units). If the BTU is too low, the heating won't reach the temperature you need. Too high and the energy usage will be increased unnecessarily. While online calculators are useful tools, it is advisable to seek help from a professional installer or a manufacturer at an early stage. They can check the calculations and ensure they are based on an appropriate and independently tested Delta T figure, as well as gain an understanding of what you are trying to achieve from a design perspective.

Consideration should also be given to where the radiator is going to be positioned and a suitable format and shape. Where there is limited space – or you simply want to maximise for other things – then vertical radiators are a practical choice. This orientation can create a feeling of spaciousness and column radiators are ideal as vertical lines instinctively draw the eye upwards.

Furthermore, the choice between a floor-mounted or wall-mounted radiator can help create a traditional or contemporary feel, depending on the overall aesthetic you want to achieve. Floor-mounted radiators are often associated with classic designs, similar to the early cast iron Victorian radiators. Wall-mounted products have a more modern look, which can complement the aesthetic of a minimalist interior.

While radiators have traditionally been viewed as purely functional, they are now recognised as an important design feature. This shift also reflects the evolution of the designer radiator market.

Available in a wide range of styles, sizes, colours and finishes, today's radiators offer far greater design flexibility than ever before. Whether you want a statement piece that becomes a focal point or a subtle option that blends seamlessly into the background, the right radiator can play a significant role in

bringing your interior vision and aesthetic to life.

Colour plays a fundamental role here, as the days when radiators were only available in white are long gone. Today they can be manufactured in soft neutral colours for a cohesive, subtle design scheme or for those who want to make a strong design statement, maximalist interiors offer the perfect opportunity to inject vibrant colour choices such as Ruby Red or Zinc Yellow.

In fact, colour-drenched walls in rich, dramatic shades are a key design trend on the rise. Radiators are a particularly important feature in this type of scheme, as by colour-matching to the walls, you can create that seamless aesthetic that another colour would simply disrupt. If you are colour matching, then it's important not to paint the radiator yourself as this could invalidate the warranty from the radiator manufacturer. Instead, check your chosen manufacturer can offer a wide range of RAL colours as well as special finishes. At The Radiator Company, we offer a useful colour co-ordination service for those who want to achieve a big impact.

This year has also seen the rise of warm minimalism, which is all about clean lines softened with texture that use earthy tones and organic materials to create a feeling of warmth and comfort. Slim profile radiators in matt finishes can really help to complement this look.

There has also been a shift to more sculptural statements in living spaces. Contemporary and expressive, this type of interior scheme will tend to feature modern furniture, curved lines and a modern art-inspired decor. Curved radiators and those that have tubular designs will help to achieve this.

For bedrooms and bathrooms, the quiet luxury trend means that metallics remain popular. High end design is all about attention to detail and as such, when it comes to the radiator, finishes in brass and copper add a premium touch, while colours like Blue Black can enhance the feeling of luxury and richness.

Radiators have traditionally been viewed as purely functional; they are now recognised as an important design feature

The designer radiator market has grown exponentially in recent years, so there is a diverse choice of product options available and of course manufacturers. However, as with any purchase, it is always advisable to research and make an informed decision. There is real value in speaking directly to a manufacturer to gain advice about sizing, as well as guidance on how best to achieve the aesthetic you want.

Richard Lister is national sales manager at The Radiator Company

GRAF UK's range maximises the use of free water

A range of award-winning rainwater harvesting systems that maximise the use of free rainwater rather than rely on mains water top-ups has been launched by **GRAF UK**.

The specialist water management company's AA rainwater harvesting range differs from most systems by feeding mains water directly into the plumbing rather than topping up the underground tank. This preserves full tank capacity for rainwater and ensures compliance with the AA part of the Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999, which require an air gap to prevent water contamination.

The range includes two systems – the AA Eco-Plus and the AA Silentio – with tanks made from 100% recycled plastic and capacities from 1,500 to 7,500 litres.

Designed for non-potable uses including toilet flushing, washing machines, garden irrigation and outdoor cleaning, the systems automatically switch to mains water via an integrated cistern when rainwater levels are low, while keeping the main tank reserved for rainwater.

Rainwater is collected from roofs, filtered to remove leaves and debris, and stored in shallow-profile underground tanks that reduce excavation depth and installation time.

The AA Silentio system also features a reversible flow filter and digital display showing the remaining rainwater level. Free UK mainland delivery is included as standard.

01608 661500 aasystems.grafuk.com

Elevate comfort with the new poll towel rail

The Radiator Company has recently introduced the new Poll towel rail to its designer heating collection. Clean, contemporary and highly practical, the towel rail is crafted to combine high performance with striking visual appeal by offering reliable heat output, whilst bringing understated elegance to modern bathroom designs.

The Poll is offered in White RAL 9016 as standard, with an additional 23 RAL colours, 31 special finishes and six feature finishes available, providing greater flexibility to interior designers who are looking for an option to suit a range of different bathroom schemes.

01342 302250 www.theradiatorcompany.co.uk/poll-stock.html

New look column radiators from Stelrad

Leading radiator manufacturer, **Stelrad Radiators** has introduced an Italian-designed new look, improved range of its popular Column radiators – in both its vertical and horizontal column radiator ranges. The most obvious changes are to the design of the radiators that will now feature a new rounded column design. They will feature an increased warranty – significantly extended from the current five years to fifteen years. To find out more about Stelrad's new Column radiator offering go to the website. For more information please send an email. Alternatively, you can also see regular updates from Stelrad on X @Stelrad and Facebook @StelradRadiators.

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CASE STUDY

AN INDUSTRIAL EDGE

Architect Richard Norwood has transformed James Sellicks' former builders' yard in Uppingham into a characterful new home, where industrial inspiration, local materials and clever planning unlock a remarkably generous modern family home.

TEXT JAYNE DOWLE **IMAGES** DOM JONES PHOTOGRAPHY

In the picturesque East Midlands market town of Uppingham, architect Richard Norwood was presented with a small but mighty challenge.

Delighted to be asked to design a new home for a local long-standing client, James Sellicks, founder and owner of a chain of estate agents, Richard approached the tight, town centre site his client had found with some trepidation.

"It was a former builders' yard, nestled down a tight traditional side street in the centre of Uppingham," Richard explains. "The first thing we had to bear in mind was the limited access. This was not a lovely, green vacant site. There were lots of surrounding buildings, adjoining landowners, neighbouring structures, and it was on the edge of the town centre conservation area with several listed buildings in the vicinity."

Part of the yard had once been used as an undertaker's, and there was even an empty coffin standing up in the corner of a brick-built garage, joining a whole collection of dilapidated buildings with timber additions and steel corrugated roofs. "There were some stone walls, but there was no ecology, nothing green; this was certainly a challenge to turn into a dwelling, but we also wanted to respect the history of the yard," says Richard.

The new home is named Dorman's Yard; the Dorman family had been well-known builders and part of the non-conformist religious movement in Uppingham during the 19th century.

As the site had a number of structures on it, it appeared smaller than it turned out to be, Richard recalls: "My first thought was, 'how are we going to get a building on this?'" As an architect, it's only when you get the measured survey and work of the footprints of buildings that are going to be demolished that you start to see things, and what is possible. But the buildings, and the mixture of materials they showed, did give me the initial inspiration for the industrial barn style I felt suited the situation."

The materials palette took inspiration from the local vernacular

The site had a frontage width of 22 metres and tapered to a depth of 26 metres. "It would always be a challenging design in terms of highways, privacy and light, so we quickly arrived at an L-shaped building form which maximised a reasonable courtyard garden," Richard says. "It was a jigsaw puzzle."

The garden, designed by Second Nature Gardens, based in Kibworth, Leicestershire, has become both a focal point of the house and an oasis in this elegant urban setting. It's easily accessible from the house via full-height Crittall-style glazed doors in the kitchen and living room.

As founder and owner of Leaf Architecture & Design in Market Harborough, Leicestershire, Richard had known his client for two decades. He had worked with him on his former property at Billesdon Manor in a village near Uppingham, and a smaller canalside property nearby. "We have a good understanding of each other," he says. "And Leaf Architecture's speciality is that we try to strive for bespoke one-off houses, and we work a lot with listed buildings. This project was absolutely our specialism; a bespoke house for an individual private client on a challenging site."

Another recent Leaf Architecture project, Grade II-listed Smeeton House, at Smeeton Westerby in Leicestershire, completed in November 2025, also showcases the practice's approach.

Acquired by Richard's clients in "an incredibly poor state of condition", the property, dating

HIGH POINT

"Learning that my client had appointed a great builder in Adam Weafer to build this long-awaited project – after securing planning permission the second time – and finally seeing the building start on site."

LOW POINT

"The painful and slow process of finalising all the requirements for building control sign off, it's much more involved than people ever think."

to the mid-18th century with late 19th century alterations and a detached coach house, was built as a private home and adapted into a school. "The challenge here was to undertake a full renovation of the property, matching existing traditional materials and craftsmanship but also linking the detached coach house to the main house," Richard explains. "We did this with a contrasting contemporary extension which provided an opportunity to maximise a glazed connection to the south-facing gardens."

Back in Uppingham, the next challenge was the planning process – twice. Leaf Architecture first got on board in late 2020. The initial planning application was submitted to Rutland District Council in mid-2021, and approval granted.

However when the project went out to tender, "exacerbating construction and materials costs after Covid" meant that the potential outlay would have made the project unviable financially. So the initial iteration was adapted; a second courtyard was removed, the structure was simplified and window sizes became more standard. The new plans went back to the council as a revised scheme in mid-2023.

Planning consent was granted again later that year, with the adapted plans meaning the project could proceed much closer to the client's desired build budget. Richard estimates that at today's prices, the build budget for a similar project would be in the region of £2,500-£2,750 per sq m.

All of the existing buildings on the site, most of them industrial storage buildings, were

Although Covid prolonged the process by a few years, Richard regards this element as crucial to the success of the finished home

taken down – a lot of them were fairly rickety, Richard says.

However, most of the stone walls to the west and east of the plot were conserved, repaired, rebuilt and repointed as needed, which helps to bring rich character to the outside space. Bat boxes were installed, but no evidence of roosting bats was found and the last bat survey was completed in July 2023.

The build process began in late 2024, with completion onsite in October 2025. Leicester-based Sandhurst Construction were appointed as main contractors, with the company's director, Adam Weafer, running the site as project manager.

"There was nothing wrong with the actual planning itself, other than it taking longer than it should have done," Richard says. "Rutland

District Council is a very small council and has limited staff. The planning process was drawn-out."

The client didn't want "a traditional Uppingham stone house, and in any case it wouldn't have fitted, the DNA of the site was industrial." Richard grasped this immediately, proposing that the new building had to evoke "that sort of industrial barn style, but not a traditional barn conversion. It needed that industrial edge, dark stain cladding, corrugated, sheet metal materials, slate, and the lovely clay tiles that are also evident in the area."

However, this original vision faced compromise when it came to achieving planning permission. "The councillors understood the modern design direction – rather more than the comments (on the planning application) from the public, some of whom didn't get it," Richard explains. "However, the local authority did challenge some aspects. I wanted to use a dark stained timber with the stone for the industrial edge, but they didn't get that, they needed something more mellow. They demanded the timber cladding was a more natural oak colour. Everything else is a regular L-shaped two-storey building. It was never going to be a contemporary glass box."

Although Covid prolonged the process by a few years, especially when the original tenders came in higher than expected, Richard now regards this element of the project as crucial to the success of the finished home. "It helped us reflect on the design a little bit further, and in a way that was a good thing. It meant we could test the design and the detailing and it became a truly viable project that was finished to everyone's satisfaction. All of that painful process, all that transpired, was a positive thing in the end."

Cleverly, Richard has managed to design a generously proportioned two-storey 300 sq m home with four double bedrooms, an open-plan living space with a vaulted ceiling for daytime activities and relaxation, plus a separate TV snug. There is also an ample utility area and boot room – a must-have request from the owners – plus an internal garage.

With a mixture of slate and clay tiles, air-dried oak and ironstone and brick dental detailing, the materials palette took inspiration from the local vernacular. Black Crittall-style windows and doors add to the subtle yet characterful variety of warm textures and materials.

The house is of traditional masonry cavity construction, using salvaged brick and local stone, but the unusual element perhaps is a block and beam concrete first floor to provide a robust and sound-proofed floor construction.

"Clients fall into two categories: they have a strong idea, or a loose idea", Richard says. "The latter is better because it allows me to use my skill set to the fullest. James had some basic ideas of the accommodation he needed. He wanted a family day space, a nice kitchen, four bedrooms and lots of support provision – so the utility, boot room and garage – and genuine high-quality detailing. This was a tight, snug site, so he knew he wasn't going to get a large garden." Internally, James, who is in his early sixties and married with two children, also wanted a contemporary look. This was achieved through neutral/soft white colour schemes which help to reflect all the available natural light, smart Crittall-style internal doors to complement other glazing and natural hardwood floors.

However, James did have strong external design detail ideas, which he inputted to his architect, including the distinctive projecting first-floor dormer windows: "The windows to the bedrooms were always going to need detail, but these are actually a detail quite specific to

CONTACTS/ SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECT
Leaf Architecture
leaf-architecture.co.uk

BUILDING MATERIALS
MKM Building Supplies
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CRITTALL-STYLE DOORS
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www.isteel.co.uk

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Second Nature Gardens
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HARDWOOD AND CLADDING
Sunningdale Timber
www.sunningdaletimber.co.uk

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Sandhurst Construction Leicester
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Barkby Timber & Steel
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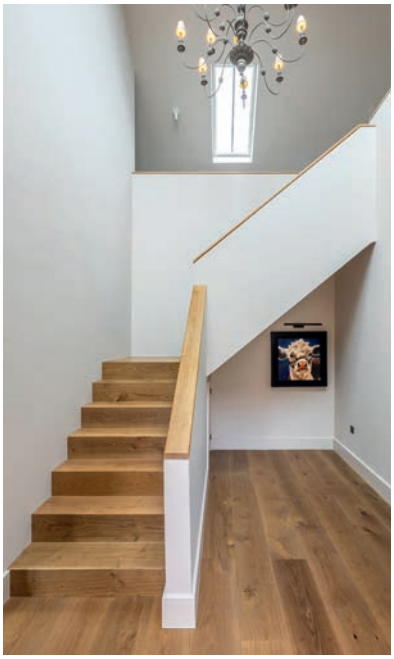


Richard proposed that the new building had to evoke "that sort of industrial barn style, but not a traditional barn conversion."

James. He'd seen a number of local buildings with similar traditional windows. For his own home, he wanted to use this idea to create some finesse and enrich the detail on the building."

James sent Richard images of vernacular design he'd spotted on his travels in the local area. "That richness of detail and individuality that James wanted was definitely something that the client brought to this project. And the builder and his team had some fantastic artisan skills that brought out these details brilliantly."

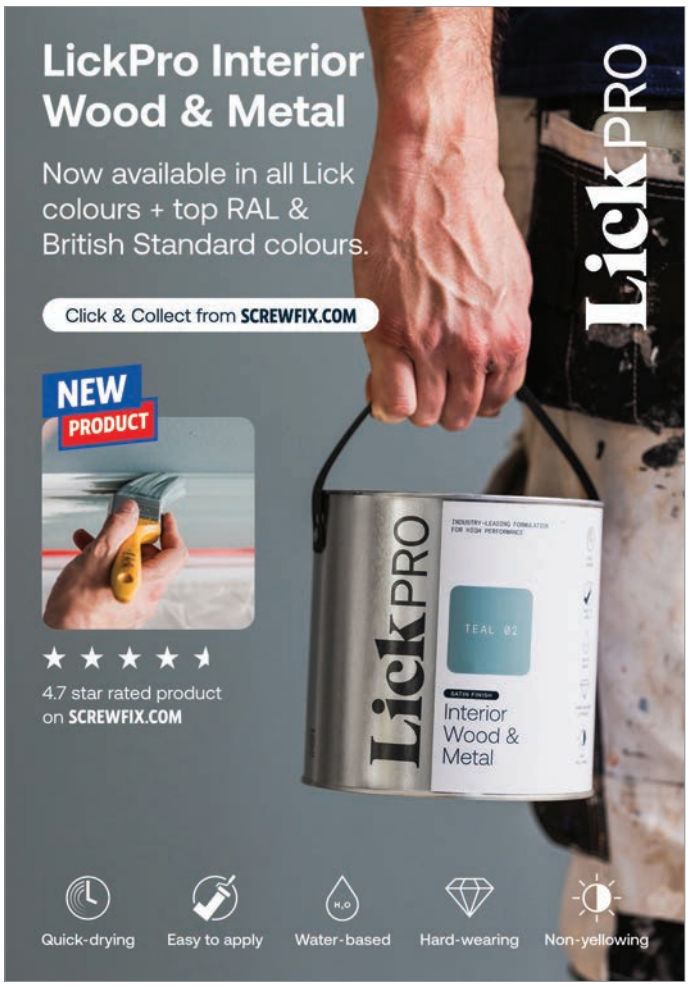
Other traditional elements featured on the exterior of the house include the distinctive louvred oak vertical cladding, the limestone architrave surround for the front door, the exposed truss and exposed rafter feet under the roof, plus the Crittall-style heritage windows, salvaged clay tiles and slate all bring together genuine quality materials, Richard says.

When it came to energy efficiency, the aim was to create a high-performing building that would exceed Building Regulations requirements. After considering various heating and hot water options, including an air source heat pump, James decided to proceed with a high-efficiency gas boiler. He has also installed a PV array on the south-facing roof.

Achieving building control sign-off also proved a long drawn-out process. "It's not just a question of building control doing a final inspection and supplying the certificate the following day," Richards says. "There are many people involved in supplying the EPC following air pressure tests, various certifications from suppliers on windows for fire escape compliance, testing certificates on all plant and equipment. This can take weeks, if not months, to finalise, so can be stressful when you simply want to sign off the project."

The only access road to the site, Audley Street, was barely a car width wide, and shared access with a neighbouring property, so this meant careful planning for the builders and deliveries. "There wasn't another immediate location where highway access could be relocated," Richard explains. "There were a number of other factors to juggle too. We were very mindful of adjacent neighbours; we wanted to screen the northern boundary for privacy, we needed to be respectful of the properties to the east and we needed to create a courtyard that would have opportunity to optimise southern and western light."

What is Richard's advice for would-be self-builders considering the potential of similar challenging urban sites in their own towns, villages and cities? "Embrace the initial stage with all that excitement, but be aware that the process can grind it down," he says. "It's important to find ways to maintain that excitement and energy and find an architect who is passionate about design opportunities and a good team, good quality builders with good reputations. And be prepared for a long process; planning can be awkward, but it's definitely worth the long haul." ■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Close suppliers make for a better finish

Door provenance is about accountability, not patriotism. Deuren's Ian Chubb explores how a door designed, built, and fitted by one team can become a defining feature of the entire space.

A self-build project draws on dozens of suppliers, and many often sit at the end of a long chain – a product designed in one country, made in another, imported by a distributor, sold on by a retailer and, finally, fitted by yet another trade. For most of the build, this chain stays invisible, but issues begin to arise when something arrives late, turns up in the wrong finish, or fails after a year, at which point the finger pointing between each link begins. For the self-builder – usually the person holding the whole project together – it's where both stress and unplanned costs accumulate.

Doors are an overlooked exception. Plenty of features in a home can be made and fitted by a single, local team – a kitchen or a staircase, for example – yet doors rarely are. Often they'll be picked from a catalogue or shipped in when, in fact, they're one of the features that could benefit most from being made and installed by one entity.

VALUE OF LOCAL SUPPLIERS

When a door is engineered and finished in a British workshop by the people who will also install it, the supply chain shrinks to a single point of contact. Now, there's only one party to the creative brief, and one to hold to a delivery date. Lead times become a carefully considered conversation rather than a shipping forecast, and questions are answered by someone who knows the product – and understands your vision – inside and out. Provenance, in this sense, has nothing to do with flag-waving and is instead more about who owns the outcome, and whether they're a drive away, or if they're in an entirely different timezone.

There's a design dividend involved also. When external doors, garage doors, and internal sets are sourced separately, matching them becomes an act of optimism involving cross-referencing finishes and hoping the samples hold-up in daylight. Alternatively, when they're made by the same hands and from the same materials, they match seamlessly simply because they were designed to. Coherence across every threshold stops being a gamble and is a given instead.

WHAT PROVENANCE REALLY CHANGES

A short local supply chain matters because of what it makes practical. A door made to order entirely to the vision can be designed, sized and finished to a specific space, rather than picked from a fixed catalogue and trimmed to fit onsite. The way it's built is also important – internal doors made from engineered timber rather than solid wood stay more stable and are less likely to warp, which suits a home with underfloor heating or one that experiences seasonal humidity, for example. And a door supplied as a complete, pre-hung set – leaf, frame, and architrave together – arrives already aligned, sparing the onsite adjustment that often shows up in the final finish.

Plenty of imported doors are excellent, and 'made in Britain' is not a guarantee in itself, but a local label holds weight because it makes the entire process fundamentally easier to manage. It's clear who's accountable, how the door is built, and whether it can be made to suit the openings in the design – questions that need to be put to any

supplier, wherever they're based.

THE 'SEEING IT MADE' TEST

One of the main advantages of sourcing features close to home is that the self-builder can go and see it in person. Visiting the workshop where a door is made – watching a leaf being finished, feeling its weight, hearing the particular sound as it closes – turns an abstract specification into a feature a person can judge with their own hands. It's also a quiet test of a supplier, as those confident in their work will be happy to demonstrate how it's done.

In opposition to this, the apparent economy of buying off the shelf or from overseas can prove to be a false one. A door that arrives a fortnight late can stall plastering and decorating, and upset the entire project timeline. A door that doesn't quite match is a compromise that will be seen every day. Choosing a door supplier that's relatively local can be an insurance against both.

HOW IT WORKS IN THE REAL WORLD

The difference is clear in a finished home. In one contemporary West Yorkshire project, the brief was for a single oversized door to distinguish the entrance from the open-plan space beyond it, finished to sit in balance

A door that doesn't quite match is a compromise that will be seen every day

with the panelling around it. The owner described the bespoke 'pivot' door as being the best match possible, a statement feature that serves to pull together and make coherent the entire downstairs – as well as commenting on how straightforward the design, manufacture and installation process was.

A refurbishment in Essex made the same case by its absence. Partway through the project, a homeowner who'd already bought a front door from one company found that no standard range could supply internal doors to match it – a long supply chain saw them out of options. After they'd begun to think it wasn't possible to find exactly what they wanted, they turned to a specialist British maker and had a consistent set produced to sit with the entrance they'd already chosen and were delighted with the results.

On a build with countless moving parts and most of them with long supply chains, the few a self-builder can keep within easy reach – made to measure, matched by design and accountable to a single point of contact – tend to cause the least trouble down the line. Doors are seen and touched every day and are a part of every room – it's worth keeping the designer, maker and fitter as close to home as possible.

Ian Chubb is managing director at Deuren

Chartwell Green – the garden colour trend to watch in 2026

HMG Paints has identified Chartwell Green as one of the defining exterior paint colour trends shaping garden renovation projects in 2026. HMG have seen a noticeable increase in demand for the colour Chartwell Green, with homeowners increasingly embracing heritage colours that offer a timeless alternative to darker, trend-led exterior finishes. Originally associated with the historic home of Winston Churchill at Chartwell House, Chartwell Green has evolved into one of the UK's most recognisable heritage paint colours. Today, it is widely specified across both traditional and contemporary properties, offering a timeless alternative to darker, trend-led exterior finishes. The muted green shade complements a wide range of materials including timber, brick, sandstone, composite cladding and exterior metalwork, allowing it to work across a variety of property styles without overwhelming surrounding outdoor spaces. The growing popularity of Chartwell Green reflects a wider shift in exterior design preferences, with homeowners increasingly moving away from darker grey finishes in favour of softer, more natural colour palettes inspired by traditional British architecture and garden design. HMG Paints has seen particularly strong demand for Chartwell Green across its decorative coatings portfolio, most notably within the HydroPro Garden Paint range. Chartwell Green sits alongside a carefully curated selection of timeless and versatile shades.

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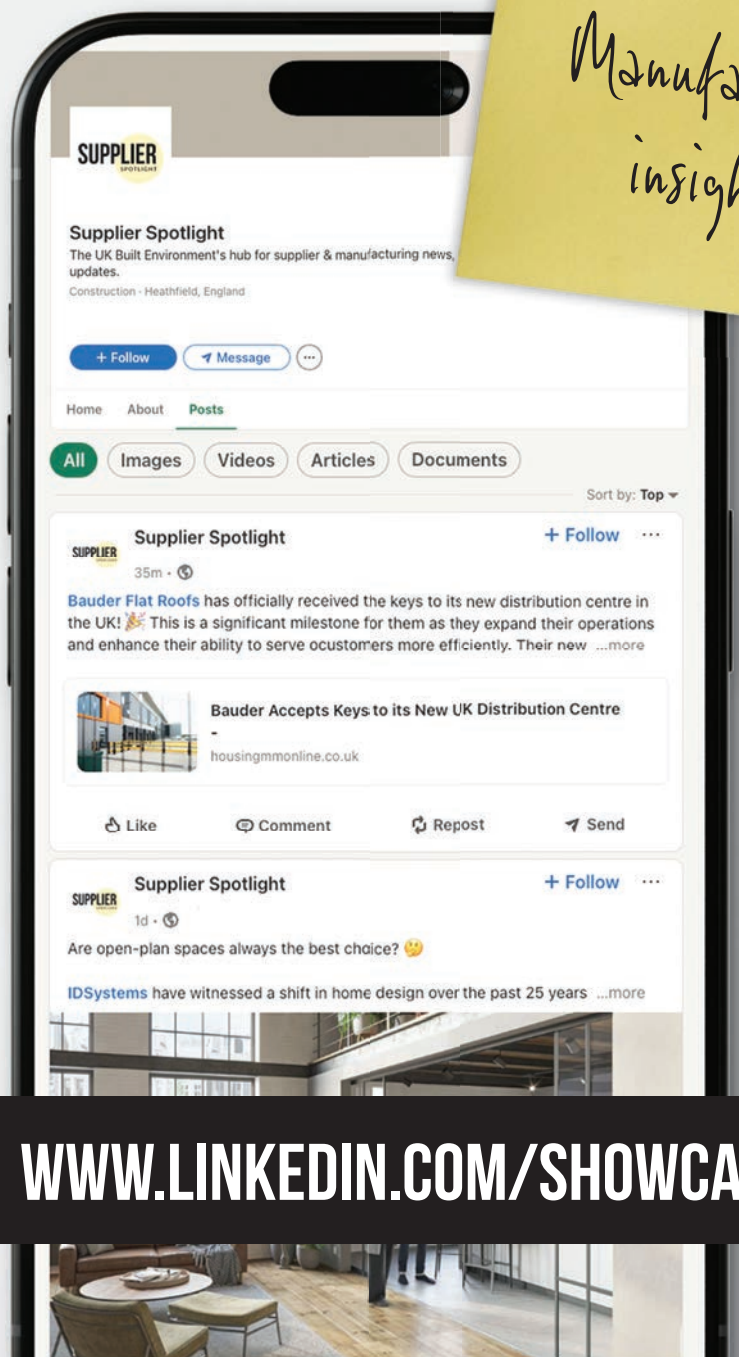

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