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you need to know before work begins

20

ways to cut
the cost of
your project

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BUDGET-SAVING
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“We built our dream home for retirement”

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Each spring we launch our annual awards scheme: The Daily Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards. Our Awards scheme has been running almost as long as the magazine (*Homebuilding & Renovating* turns 30 next year!) and was first introduced to celebrate the achievements of self-builders and renovators across the UK... and continues to do so over two decades on.

There are nine categories to enter, ranging from best eco home and best conversion, to best extension, plus if your project is chosen as our Home of the Year, you will win £1,000 of John Lewis vouchers. So, if you've recently completed a building project, we'd love to see your entry. (Find out how to enter on page 37.)

Also this month, we sent Mark Brinkley, author of the *Housebuilder's Bible*, to Graven Hill, Bicester, to investigate just what's on offer at the UK's largest self-build site, and to speak to those who've already taken the plunge. Graven Hill is



CLAIRE LLOYD has been a member of the *Homebuilding & Renovating* team for over a decade. She's just completed her latest renovation

somewhat of a landmark in our world — it puts self-build (quite literally, and importantly, politically) on the map, and that can only be a good thing for those of us with an ambition to build an individual home. Turn to page 46 to read Mark's excellent reportage.

Finally, experienced renovator Natasha Brinsmead provides her tips for designing a kitchen on a budget (page 58); planning consultant Ken Dijkman reveals his secrets to planning permission success (page 124); and self-build expert Mark Stevenson explains what you need to know and do before you start on site in the latest instalment of his new series (page 135).

The Homebuilding team and I hope you enjoy another packed issue. **H**



Graven Hill is a landmark in our world... it puts self-build on the map



Extend

Improve

Renovate

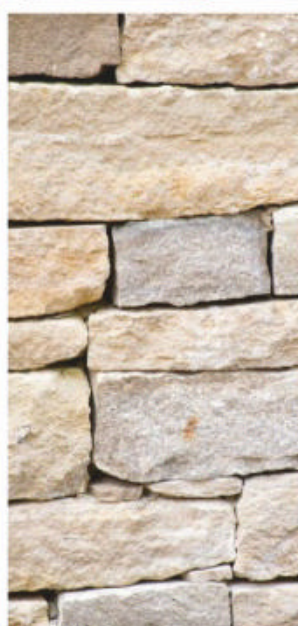
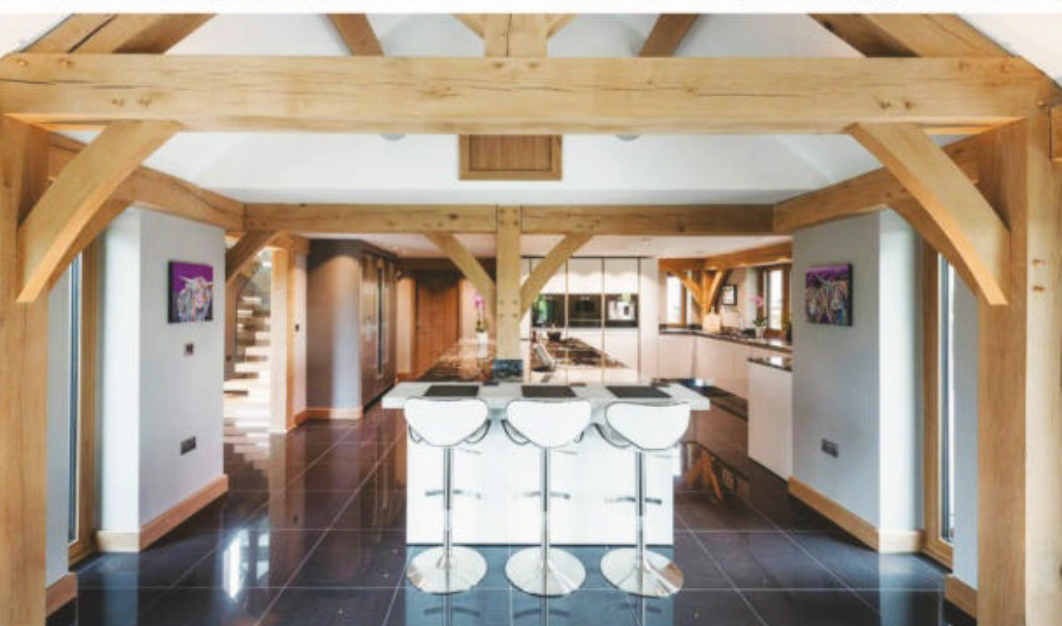
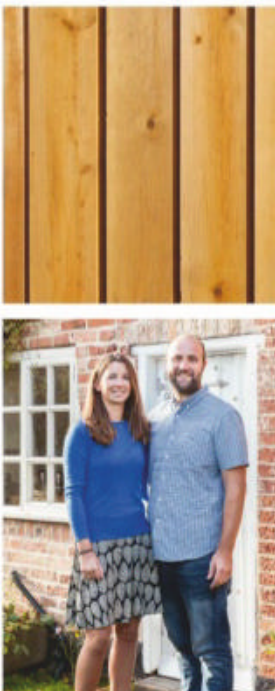
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On the hunt for your next project? Plotfinder is a great way to discover plots and conversion and renovation projects up for sale.

Oak-framed self-build

WORDS Debbie Jeffery PHOTOGRAPHY Jeremy Phillips

A single story

Sheila and Geoff McGaughey have built a stunning single-storey oak-framed home fit for their retirement



NATURAL AESTHETIC
The single-storey oak framed house stands on a level landscaped plot which was previously part of a neighbour's garden. Painted softwood weatherboarding

clads the exterior, with natural slates chosen for the roof and a feature oak entrance porch. The house won Best New Self Build in the South East Local Authority Building Excellence awards.







PROJECT NOTES

HOMEOWNER Sheila and Geoff McGaughey
PROFESSIONS Retired
LOCATION Surrey
PROJECT Oak-framed self-build
BUILD ROUTE Builder and subcontractors
SIZE 149m²
BUILD TIME Nine months
PLOT COST £500,000
BUILD COST £491,000
CURRENT VALUE £1.2million+

When Sheila and Geoff McGaughey planned to build a new house in the pretty Surrey village where they had lived for many years, a bungalow was definitely not part of their wishlist. “We wanted a two-storey home in the style of a barn, but our plot stands in a conservation area and we were restricted to building a single storey,” explains Sheila. “At first we hated the idea of a bungalow, with its implications of disability and old age, but now we wouldn’t change a thing.”

The couple moved to the village of Windlesham 53 years ago, raised a family and lived in three different properties. Then, when their three children had all left home, Sheila and Geoff purchased a plot in the same road with the idea of building a new house for the next stage in their lives. A tumbledown cottage stood on the garden plot, overlooking open fields, which made gaining planning permission for a replacement dwelling easier to secure.

Designing a single-storey home

“We thought it would be exciting to design something from scratch, and although we’d never previously organised a building project we had some experience after buying a property off-plan in Spain,” explains Sheila. “We came into contact with Border Oak at an exhibition and loved the style of oak-framed houses they design and build, so that was our starting point.”

MODERN RUSTIC
Left: The kitchen, supplied by Thomas Ford and Sons, features beautiful double-height glazing and a larder cupboard. Hand-painted cabinets and an island are teamed with leather-finish granite worktops. The spacious, vaulted kitchen/diner showcases the exposed green oak frame, which has been left natural and untreated.

The couple, who are both retired, visited the oak framing company in Herefordshire to discuss their ideas for a traditional home with a contemporary edge, based on the footprint of the old cottage, which stood on their plot.

“Herefordshire has many traditional oak houses, which are beautiful, but we knew we’d have to build something slightly different for our corner of Surrey, and Border Oak came up with a perfect plan,” says Sheila. “The hard part was knowing that once the frame had been built we couldn’t change our minds, so we needed to think hard about exactly where everything would go from the start.”

Restricted to building just one storey, a layout was devised where a central living room serves to connect the distinct living and bedroom wings, with vaulted ceilings making the space seem far larger than 150m². “Two of our children live in America so we are often away travelling and also need space for guests,” says Sheila. “The house had to work for us as a couple as well as for larger family gatherings, and we wanted a home that would be low maintenance and economical to run.”

The H-shaped cottage is clad externally in painted weatherboarding, with some feature oak framing and a traditional entrance porch — a design which was met with the approval of the planners and conservation officer. Border Oak worked with both hand-drawn concept sketches and CAD technology,

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producing a comprehensive array of planning, construction and Building Regulations' drawings for the new property. "We absolutely loved working with Border Oak — it was like being part of a family," says Sheila.

The build

"Living just a couple of houses away from the plot meant that we could keep a close eye on things, and we chose our own builder who's a family friend," continues Sheila.

The frame was built from FSC and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) certified green oak and was delivered and erected by Border Oak. The company also installed the SIPs (structural insulated panels) which encase the frame, and offer excellent thermal and airtightness performance. Once the house was weathertight the oak frame was cleaned using oxalic acid and has been left untreated.

"I must admit that while the foundations and frame were being built I worried the house wouldn't be large enough, but as it took shape I could see that it would work," says Sheila.

Natural slate was chosen for the roof covering and softwood windows have been painted grey, as has the external timber weatherboarding. "We worked with Border Oak to choose all colours at the

ORGANIC MATERIALS
The lime-washed oak floor from Higherground creates a uniform backdrop throughout the house, an ideal base for Sheila's interior design ideas.

“

We absolutely loved working with Border Oak, it was like being part of a family

design stage, so that materials would complement each other," says Sheila. "I can honestly say that there were no real issues during the build at all and everything went to plan."

The finishing touches

Underfloor heating has been laid beneath a limewashed oak floor and is connected to an air source heat pump, with a woodburning stove installed in the vaulted sitting room.

"I'm a bit of a shopper really, and after owning my own gift and lifestyle shop I already had a number of contacts and knew more or less what I wanted," says Sheila. "I love interiors, so it was great to have a free hand to create the look."

The couple have also lavished a great deal of attention on the garden, which was designed and landscaped to include an oak-framed garage and a gazebo. "For us, the setting was all part of building a new house, as this is our outlook. Having all the rooms on the ground floor means we feel far more connected to the outdoors, which was another benefit of the design. Now that we've experienced life on one level we've completely changed our minds about bungalows, and feel it would be great if another word with more positive, modern connotations could be adopted, generally, to describe single-storey homes!"





CONNECTED LIVING
The vaulted sitting room connects to the kitchen/diner through a wide opening and serves as a central link between the two wings of the house, with roof glazing bringing additional light into the space.



MASTER BEDROOM
Solid oak timbers frame the bed in the master bedroom (opposite), which benefits from a dressing area and a spacious en suite.



THE BATHROOM
An oval bath and a walk-in shower were chosen for the master bathroom, which has a tiled floor (Ceramic Tile Warehouse) laid over underfloor heating.

BUILDING FOR LATER IN LIFE

It perhaps goes without saying, but bungalows and dormer bungalows are popular house types for lifetime homes. Alternatively, incorporating a ground floor bedroom and bathroom in a two-storey house would allow for single-storey living in the future.

‘Part M – access to and use of dwellings’ of the Building Regulations requires all new homes to consider the needs of disabled occupants to ensure available and usable access for disabled people to the entrance storey, all habitable rooms in that storey and the WC. Simple considerations, such as installing lever taps and door handles, specifying non-slip flooring and ensuring staircases are well lit, work well for all ages — particularly if young grandchildren will be visiting.

Sheila and Geoff knew when they designed their new home that, despite being extremely active, they should consider the future. Geoff had his own engineering business and retired 10 years ago, while Sheila sold her gift and lifestyle shop seven years later, so they had time to oversee a building project, which they were able to fund privately.

Designed on a single level, with no steps, the property is extremely accessible. Built on a relatively flat plot, the design incorporates wide doorways and an open-plan layout that would be ideal for wheelchair use if required. A separate study beside the dining room doubles as a third bedroom, and both bathrooms have walk-in showers.

“You don’t always want to think about the future, but it’s important to plan ahead, and there’s no point living in a big house if you can’t get upstairs,” says Sheila. “It’s enjoyable when you’re older to start again and we haven’t discounted building again, either, as we enjoyed this project so much.

“At first, we didn’t want a bungalow, but now we love the layout and to us it feels more like a cottage. The only drawback we’ve found to living on a single storey is that sometimes in the summer you don’t feel comfortable leaving bedroom windows open at night, but really we wouldn’t change a thing,” Sheila concludes. **H**

THE FLOORPLAN

The single-storey house has been designed with two distinct wings connected by a central vaulted living room to form an H-shape. The kitchen/breakfast room, utility and study/third bedroom are contained in one wing, with two bedrooms, a bathroom and a shower room in the other.

- 1 Study
- 2 Dining room
- 3 Utility
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Living room
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Bathroom
- 8 Shower room
- 9 Bedroom



BUILD COSTS

FOUNDATIONS	£35,000
OAK FRAME, ROOF AND WINDOWS	£24,000
FLOORING	£7,000
KITCHEN	£35,000
BATHROOMS	£22,000
OAK FRAMED GARAGE	£12,000
FITTING OUT	£140,000
ADDITIONAL BUILDING WORK	
AND MATERIALS	£216,000
TOTAL	£491,000

THE SUPPLIERS

DESIGN, OAK FRAME, SIPs AND WINDOWS
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THE BUILD

The oak frame was crafted off site by Border Oak. It was brought to site to be erected and wrapped in SIPs (structural insulated panels). A membrane was then applied (below) before the cladding was installed. The roof has been finished in slate.





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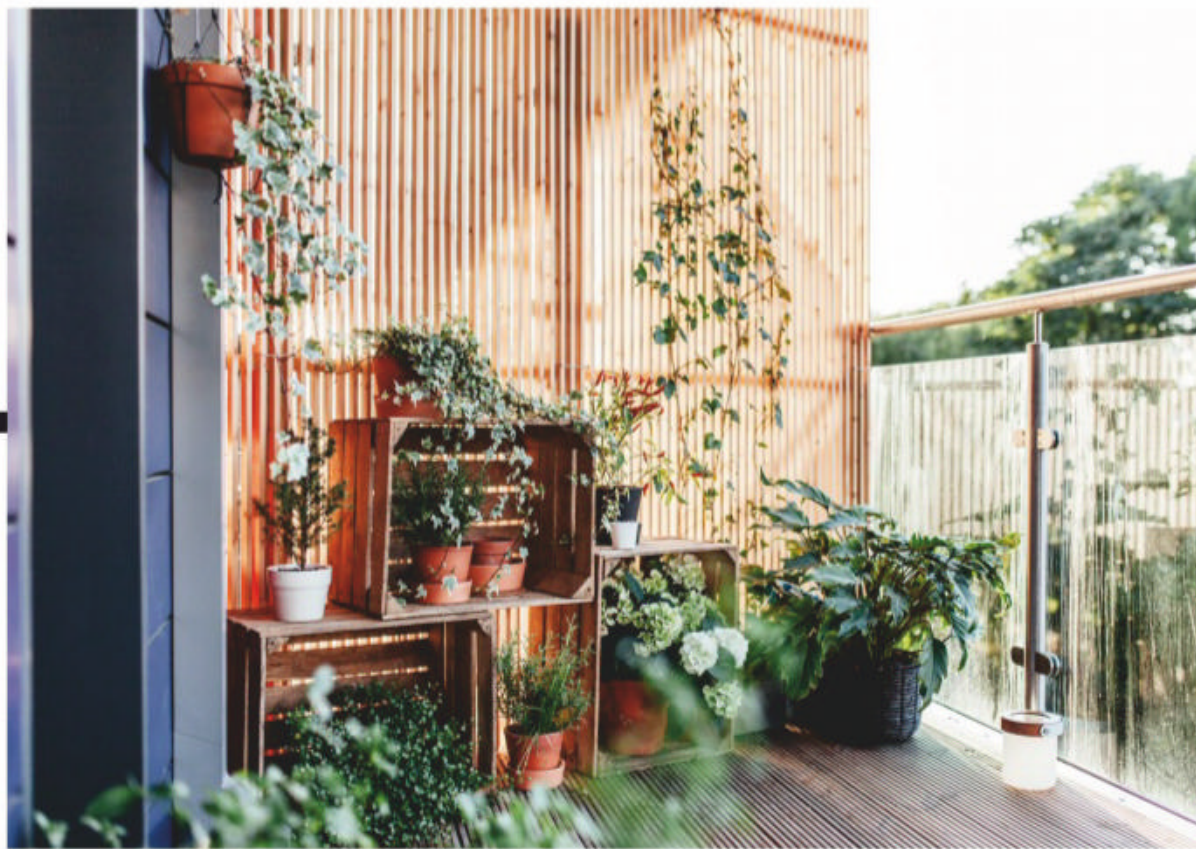
DON'T MOVE, IMPROVE...

The 'don't move, improve' trend has never been more popular, with a fivefold increase in the number of homeowners choosing to invest in their existing property instead of finding a new house, according to insurance expert Hiscox.

The same report has also found that among 18-34 year-olds who were able to climb onto the property ladder, more

than one in four were choosing to invest in a property in need of renovation, rather than invest in a new home.

The contemporary kitchen shown was supplied by Husk, a company who provide beautiful door fronts for off-the-shelf Ikea units — an ideal solution for homeowners looking for a unique kitchen while renovating on a budget. (www.madebyhusk.com)



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A HEALTHIER HOME

Test for indoor air pollution launches

Ventilation manufacturer EnviroVent and indoor air quality screening company Airtopia have teamed up to provide UK homeowners peace of mind regarding indoor air pollution. They're offering air quality testing resulting in recommendations as to how homeowners can improve factors such as the humidity and mould levels in their home.

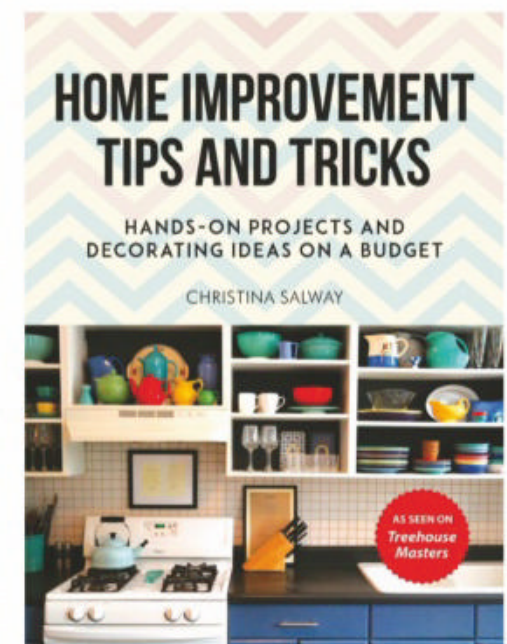
The British Lung Foundation links indoor air pollution to increased risks of pneumonia, COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) and lung cancer, not to mention heart disease and strokes.

The detailed report and laboratory test costs £299 and more information can be found at www.envirovent.com/healthcheck.

BOOK OF THE MONTH

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

For homeowners who are looking to renovate their homes on a DIY basis, *Home Improvement Tips and Tricks* offers know-how on what to tackle, including renovating a kitchen on a budget, changing light fixtures safely, and replacing bathroom hardware. The book costs £11.99 and is available from www.amazon.co.uk.



Brits spend nearly £30billion a year
on home improvements according to the Office for National Statistics

BUILD EVENTS IN JUNE & JULY

1 - 2 JUNE

HOMEBUILDING & RENOVATING SHOW, Scottish Event Campus, Glasgow

The Homebuilding & Renovating Show is the go-to exhibition for self-builders and renovators. No matter what stage your project is at, there will be sessions, experts and exhibitors at the show to help you bring your project to life.

29 JUNE HEATH HOUSE MILL OPEN DAY, Bolster Moor, Huddersfield

Learn more about Passivhaus construction and retrofit with this series

of talks and product demonstrations of windows, doors and MVHR units.

29 - 30 JUNE

HOMEBUILDING & RENOVATING SHOW, Sandown Park, Surrey

All of our shows up and down the country offer a wide range of free seminars and 15-minute consultations with experts.

12 JULY INTRODUCTION TO SELF-BUILD, Potton Self Build Show Centre, Cambridgeshire

A great event for those considering a

self-build, the seminar will outline what to expect, how to find land, design a home, achieve planning permission and build a timber frame home.

26 - 29 JULY A WAY OF BUILDING:

USING LOCALLY SOURCED MATERIALS, Centre for Alternative Technology, Powys

Keep your home low impact by working with natural materials for your project. This four-day course aimed at self-builders is highly practical as attendees work on a real-life structure, learning how to use straw, timber, stone and earth in construction.



Get alerts about useful advice, articles and build ideas on Twitter: @MyHomebuilding

NEW POLICY ON NEW BUILD HOUSES ...IN THE GOVERNMENT'S SPRING STATEMENT

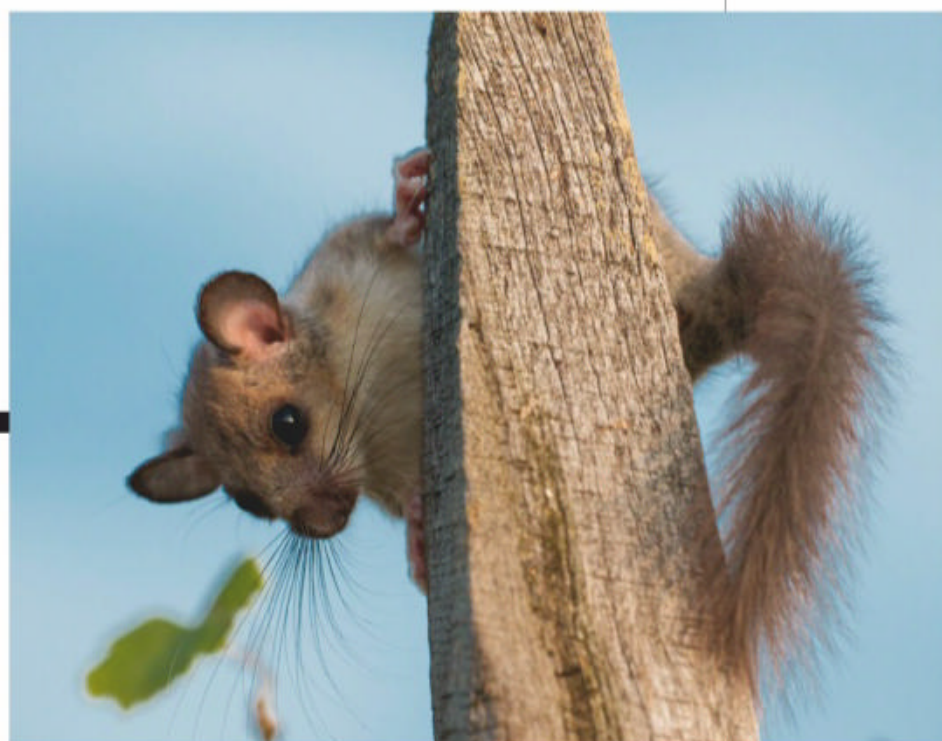
The government will introduce a new Future Homes Standard which will require all new build homes to be future-proofed with low carbon heating and high standards of energy efficiency. Although the exact nature of the policy is yet to be defined, the spring statement set the deadline of 2025 as a start date (see page 29 for more).

This news came in conjunction with the announcement of a £3billion scheme to build 300,000 affordable houses across the UK.

WATTS IN STORE

A homebuilder's guide to energy storage

A new, free-to-download guide from the NHBC Foundation aims to ensure homeowners are selecting the right battery systems for their homes. With advances in technology and rise in electric cars, household-scale battery systems are becoming more commonplace. The guide, *Watts in store? Introduction to energy storage batteries for homes NF83* examines the key aspects of battery selection and is available from www.nhbcfoundation.org.



WORKING WITH WILDLIFE

A new app, Working with Wildlife, has been released by CIRIA and The Ecology Consultancy to advise those taking on a building project on how to practically deal with situations where wildlife is involved and how to recognise protected species commonly found on construction sites (badgers, bats, dormice, birds etc). The app includes signs of what to look for on site, so decisions can be made quickly on whether further advice needs to be sought while work is paused, or if certain build works can continue. The app is free to download from the App store and Google Play store.

BOILER GEOLOCATION

Ideal Boilers has introduced a geolocation functionality to its Touch Connect thermostat. The smart boiler can be controlled via an app and now recognises when a user's phone is inside or outside the 'home boundary' so the system can automatically turn itself on or off accordingly, meaning no heat is produced unnecessarily. For more information see www.idealboilers.com.



MODERN MATERIAL TRENDS

SIPs (structural insulated panels) homes are on the whole more contemporary than their masonry counterparts with 65% of self-builders who utilised this construction system identifying their home as more modern in style*. This SIPs home, designed by

Allan Corfield Architects and supplied by SIPs Scotland, has an airtight exterior barrier to improve the already impressive thermal qualities of the SIPs construction system. The Wraptite material by the A. Proctor Group provides high vapour permeability in a continuously sealed, self-adhered, airtight membrane. (www.proctorgroup.com)

ecoHaus

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Revolutionary new minimal window
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WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

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providing you various content:
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fresh magazines, hot games,
recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price

Cheap constant access to piping hot media

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All languages

Brand new content

One site



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WILL GAS BOILERS BE BANNED?

They still have a role to play, says energy expert David Hilton



David Hilton is an expert in sustainable building and energy efficiency, and is a director of Heat and Energy Ltd

In February, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) – who are creating a pathway for the UK to meet its targets to reduce greenhouse gases by 80% of 1990 levels by 2050 – advised the government that all new homes should be banned from connecting to the gas grid by 2025 in order to tackle climate change. This is set out in their report *UK housing: Fit for the future?*. What's more, they suggested that new homes in rural areas should be heated by heat pumps and cooking done on induction hobs, while city-based homes should be heated by networks of hot water that will be heated from industry waste.

The CCC attribute most of the housing emissions to heating boilers and claim that installing low carbon heating in new homes only costs around £4,800 compared to £26,000 in existing homes, as the latter requires high levels of additional insulation to be installed, which is disruptive and not always feasible.

CCC spokesperson Prof. Julia King states that many new homes are poorly constructed and will therefore need to be re-insulated in 10 to 15 years' time. The CCC also recommends that provision for shading and ventilation as well as measures to reduce indoor moisture, improve air

quality, water efficiency and flood protection, should be designed into new homes.

GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT

There has been an industry reaction to the CCC report that highlights the difficulties with adopting the measures suggested, as well as stressing that best practice measures have not always been adopted in the construction of new homes and the installation of heating technologies.

The report doesn't take into account the development of low emission fuels and boilers, either. Dutch boiler manufacturer Intergas, for instance, have developed what they say are the lowest NOx boilers in the world, with some also having built-in passive flue gas heat recovery units. With NOx emissions as low as 17.06mg/kWh they are well below the current mandatory maximum of 56mg/kWh and the proposed ultra-low emissions maximum of 30mg/kWh.

Greening up the mains gas network is another solution, with a move from natural gas to hydrogen which will still require boilers, but with different technology.

However, behind all this, industry has called for a need to address the basics. Heating technology manufacturer Viessmann commented on the report and stated that mass deployment of heat pumps or hydrogen could be an overstep if we cannot get the basics right.

Good installation standards are also vital in preparation for the widespread roll out of low-carbon heating technologies that operate

at low temperatures. The Boiler Plus policy, introduced in 2018, was a big step towards making advanced controls and energy-efficient measures mandatory with boiler installations, but fell short in preparing the market for further change.

Many efficiency measures are not mandatory under this policy except on combi boilers, meaning that there are 350,000+ system boilers replaced each year with no regulated improvements, while new homes, which are also not covered by the policy, could be responsible for over 200,000 more boilers being fitted each year that may be less efficient than retrofitted ones.

Boiler Plus also does not address installation best practice properly. Measures such as hydraulic balancing – where all radiators are adjusted to have equal flow – are only noted as 'expected practice' and are not enforced.

THE WAY FORWARD

If homes are better designed and better constructed, policies such as Boiler Plus are extended beyond defined products such as combi boilers, better product efficiency standards are enforced and better installation standards are brought into the industry as a whole, then we can expect great savings on gas consumption and a much easier transition to energy-efficient heating systems.

If the industry cannot get the basics right in a mature market, then what chance is there if we simply make knee-jerk reactions to ban products and switch to different or emerging technologies?

INTO THE WOODS

Wood is the favourite material for flooring, furniture and wall cladding across Europe and, according to new research by Swedish Wood, Linköping University and Luleå University of Technology, regardless of overall interior styles, products that have a light colour finish, a modern style and visible knots are the most desirable.

Homeowners also feel more positive in interiors that incorporate more natural materials, according to the results of the questionnaire, drawn from 7,000 respondents over seven European countries (Sweden, Norway, UK, Poland, Germany, France and Spain).

Right: The Sherwood collection embraces the organic aesthetic of natural wood in a cool palette of five core colours. The tiles can create a seamless modern rustic look as they are suitable for both walls and floors. From £32.94m². (www.solusceraics.com)

Below: Howdens' Allendale kitchen features an oak block worktop finished with white Osmo oil and paired with farmhouse white-washed wood panelling around the room. Dove grey painted units complete the Scandinavian feel. (www.howdens.com)



DREAM HOME

This month: London Orangery

With a brief to create a place for the homeowners to relax, dine and entertain in the heart of the home, Westbury Garden Rooms have completely refurbished and renovated a tired home in London, building a stunning orangery space for use all year round that caters for a modern lifestyle.

Accoya, a high-performance modified timber which resists rot, was a core material for all windows, doors and the orangery itself, while raw brick and rough-hewn stone flooring flags add texture. The use of glazing in traditional styles – including weighted box sash windows and a four-lead folding door – means the new space is sympathetic to the original building, while the contemporary roof lantern allows natural light to flood the space.





INTERIOR DETAILS

This Hörmann timber composite interior door is available in its highly durable 'Linen' finish; a tactile addition to any room. The DesignLine Concepto range offers stylish and contemporary internal doors available in a variety of modern finishes from £515. (www.hormann.co.uk)



LONDON FESTIVAL OF ARCHITECTURE, 1-30 JUNE

Celebrate the diversity of the capital's architecture by attending one of the 500 unique public events throughout June — the majority of which are free of charge.

The theme for 2019 is 'boundaries', exploring how and why we surround ourselves with fences and walls both in public and residential spheres. The events will unpick the impact of Brexit on design and the comfort physical and metaphorical lines bring to us, from party walls to city limits. Find more information about the various events at www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org.



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FOUR PLOTS IN THE MIDLANDS FROM WWW.PLOTFINDER.NET



Chesterfield, Derbyshire
£75,000

This 5.57 acre plot has scope to build a stunning paragraph 79 house subject to planning. Part of a former quarry in the Ashover area, the landscape is naturally dramatic and has maturing vegetation, trees and standing water.



Swannington, Leicestershire
£450,000

This farm outbuilding has planning permission for a four bedroom barn conversion. Sitting on 2.5 acres of land, access is via a private driveway and plans include an integral garage.



Shrewsbury, Shropshire
£415,000

This detached bungalow on a quiet residential street is available for renovation. The house includes two large double bedrooms, a spacious living room with vast glazing out to the generous gardens as well as a detached double garage.



Hellidon, Northamptonshire
£675,000

This plot has attached consent for a single-storey dwelling within the walled garden of Hellidon Grange. The plan includes designs for a kitchen/dining room, day room, study, four en suite bedrooms and a sunken garden with feature pond and more.

MODULAR MIDLANDS HOMES

According to www.building.co.uk, Gareth Bradford, the head of the West Midlands Combined Authority, says he wants to make sure 50% of homes built in the next decade in the region are prefabricated off-site.

PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT REFORMS

Can the high street aid the crisis?

James Brokenshire, the Housing Secretary, indicated that he intends to review current Permitted Development rights for the conversion of buildings to residential use in light of the government's approach to supporting the high street and aiding the housing crisis. Expanding on Phillip Hammond's spring statement regarding new 'additional' flexibilities being allowed for businesses to adapt their shops (namely hot food takeaways) to change to residential use, he stated: "We will continue to consider the design of a Permitted Development right to allow commercial buildings to be demolished and replaced with homes."



RURAL COUNTY EXPENSE

Analysis by the County Councils Network revealed that house prices in rural counties are 10 times higher than annual earnings, based on the UK Housing Prices Index December 2018. The national average is 8.2 times the average earnings, but in some shires it can reach up to 14.5.

See vistaline at

- ▶ The Building Centre in Central London
- ▶ Our Comprehensive Showroom in Norwich
- ▶ Exhibitions across the country

vistaline

innovative Swiss designed
slide & turn doors



Capable of creating a complete opening like bifold doors yet with slimmer frames like sliding doors, vistaline is a contemporary glazing solution that consists of non-connected panels that stack to one end. The doors provide an industry leading combination of precision Swiss engineering, outstanding thermal performance and ultra-slim 45mm sightlines.

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SING ALONG IN THE SHOWER WITH BATHROOM SPEAKERS

Now suitable for bathrooms, Lithe Audio's all-in-one WiFi-enabled ceiling speakers are the only AirPlace-certified speakers available on the market, and are easy to install in existing homes. At £429.99 for a pair, they come with a dedicated app enabled to connect to Spotify, Deezer Tidal and vTurner radio, meaning you can create a sanctuary of tranquillity while in the tub, or boost your mood when getting ready in the morning. (www.litheaudio.com)

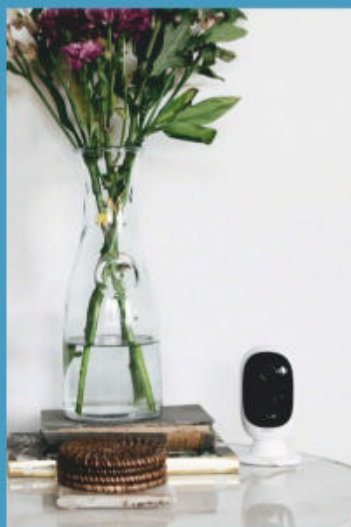
SHOWER SPACE SAVER

Grohe's Rapido SmartBox offers homeowners a flexibility in both design and space in their shower enclosure or wetroom — the small flush-mounted shower mixer, £89.95, can be installed with one of 170 different trim designs, which can be purchased separately. (www.victorianplumbing.co.uk)



SUBTLE SECURITY

Reolink, a wire-free solar-powered, rechargeable security camera, is a great idea for keeping your home safe, and can be used inside and out. It costs £103.99. (www.reolink.com)



FINISHING TOUCH: Built-in extractors



Hidden by a glass and cast iron ring, Elica's Nikola Tesla Switch is sleek and stylish. The system is completely automatic, powerful and near silent. Available for £2,760. (www.elica.com)



In the Siemens inductionAir hob, the extractor unit is fully integrated and monitors steam and odours and adjusts the power level automatically. (£3,239, www.siemens-home.bsh-group.com)



The rectangular format of Bora's CKASE features five power levels controlled using intelligent touch operation that is only visible when turned on, suiting a minimalist scheme. (from £6,000, www.bora.com)



The beauty of a Schueco sliding door is what you don't see

For instance, you won't have your view interrupted by intrusive framing because the frames are so slim you hardly notice them. And then there's the unbeatable insulation (up to Passive House standard) – you won't see that either, but you'll feel it. Likewise the excellent soundproofing and the superb watertightness (even with the flush threshold option) and the reassuring rigidity of the doors as they glide effortlessly into place.

For German engineering made in Britain, there's only one name.

For more information and your nearest Schueco Partner installers, visit www.schueco.co.uk/slidingdoors

SCHÜCO

The Daily Telegraph
Homebuilding
& Renovating
AWARDS
2019



IS YOUR PROJECT 2019'S HOME OF THE YEAR?

We want to see your finished project as we launch The Daily Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards 2019

Enter the Daily Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards 2019 for your chance to win 'Home of the Year' — and £1,000 of John Lewis vouchers.

Our Awards scheme has been showcasing Britain's most amazing projects for well over two decades and is the perfect opportunity to celebrate your new home, too. This year we are not just commending incredible architecture and build quality, but celebrating you, the homeowner, and the wonderful people that make building a dream home possible. From beautiful barn conversions, eco homes and radical extensions to stunning self-builds, our Awards celebrate projects, small and large, delivered within a range of budgets.

There are nine categories, highlighting not only the best domestic architecture, but also the spirit and ambition it takes to complete such a project. Plus, the overall winner will be named 'Home of the Year'.

Our Awards are free to enter and it takes just 10 minutes to enter. We can wait to see your finished projects.

HOW TO ENTER ENTER ONLINE

Go to www.homebuilding.co.uk/awards, complete the online entry form and attach your floorplans and at least one image of the exterior, along with a handful of photos of the main interior spaces.

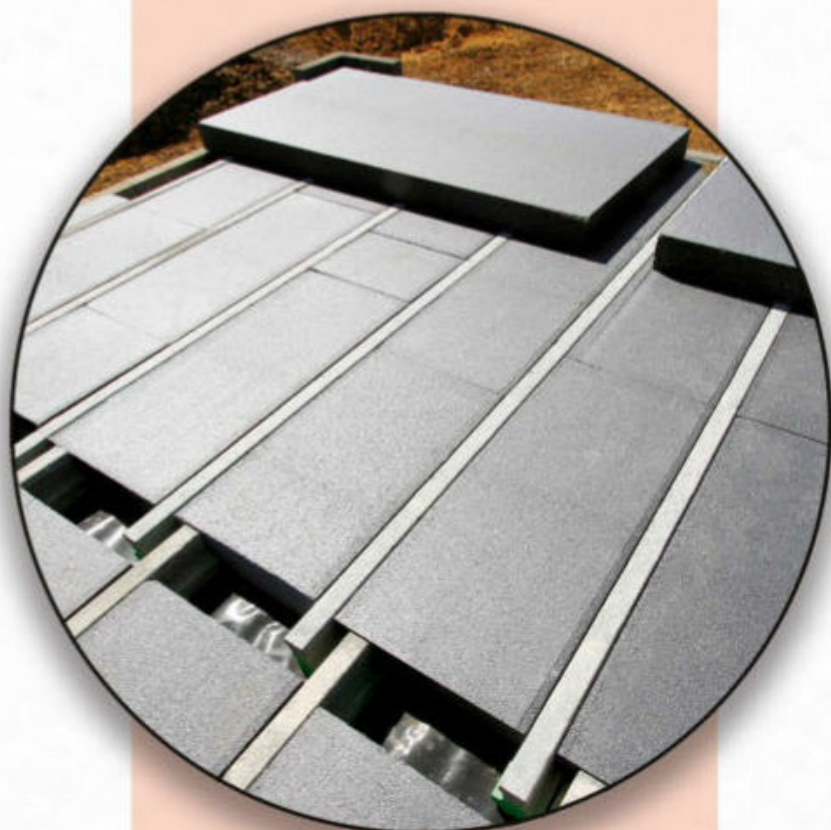
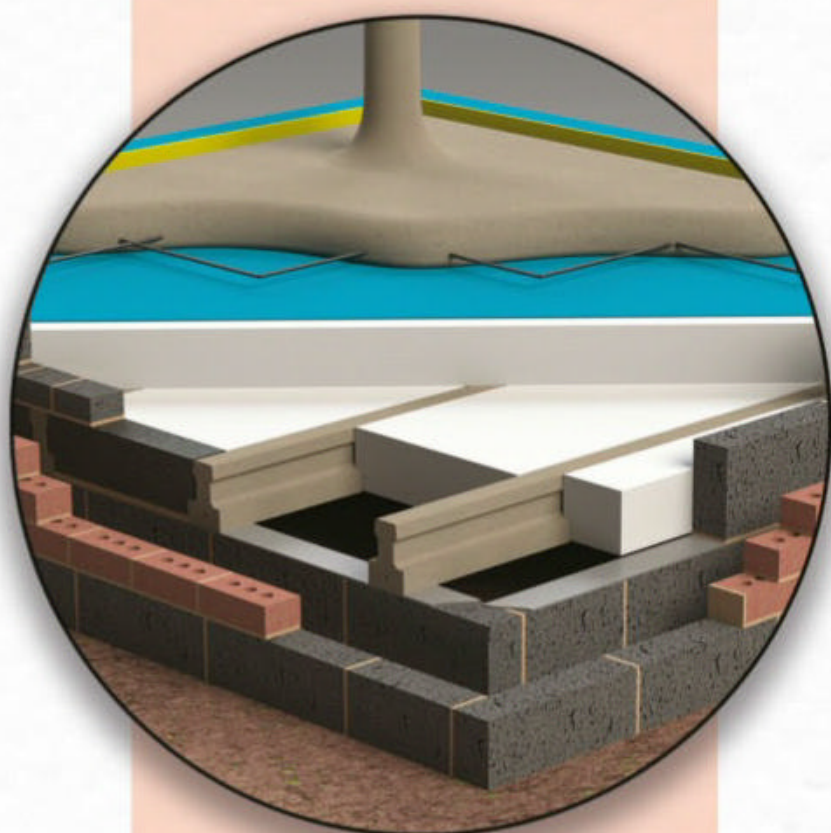
ENTER BY POST

Send postal submissions using the form on page 41 to: **The Daily Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards, 2 Sugar Brook Court, Aston Road, Bromsgrove, B60 3EX.**

Your project must be complete (or at least very nearly finished) in order to qualify for the competition. Shortlisted projects may be visited in person by our Awards panel and will be featured both in the magazine and online, so you must be prepared for you and your home to be photographed. **17 May 2019 is the closing date** for submitting your entry.

CATEGORIES

- Best Contemporary-Style Self-build
- Best Traditional-Style Self-build
- Best Extension
- Best Renovation
- Best Conversion
- Best Eco Home
- Best Custom Build Project
- Spirit of Self-build
- Best Self-build Starter Home
- Home of the Year



WarmFloor

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Insulated Thermal Ground Flooring

WarmFloor Pro by Milbank Concrete Products offers home builders a simple, cost-effective solution to quickly assemble a thermally insulated ground floor.

Reduced initial construction costs and a lower heating expenditure make WarmFloor Pro a compelling alternative to a standard beam and block floor.

A cut above the rest

- ✓ **Simple to install** – No specialist tools or skills are necessary.
- ✓ **Fast to install** – EPS panels are the same length as five regular concrete blocks.
- ✓ **Sustainable** – WarmFloor Pro is designed to last the lifetime of the building while maintaining its exceptional thermal performance.
- ✓ **Clean, easy and safe to work with** – EPS panels weigh just 2Kg (approx.).
- ✓ **Compatible with underfloor heating** – Plastic pegs push into the EPS panel and hold heating pipes in-situ.
- ✓ **Proven, Trusted Technology** – Used now for over a decade.
- ✓ **Industry compliant** – Milbank WarmFloor Pro is fully certified and has an A+ green guide rating.
- ✓ **Cost effective** – WarmFloor Pro is designed to save you money: faster installation speeds combined with reduced waste and excavation removal allow for an increase in overall savings.
- ✓ **Bespoke** – A wide range of EPS panel depths and grades are available to satisfy your U-value or budget requirements.

THE CATEGORIES

BEST CONTEMPORARY-STYLE SELF-BUILD

A category for the most cutting-edge self-build projects in the UK



Folding Doors 2 U are leading suppliers of aluminium rooflights, bifold doors, sliding doors and windows throughout the UK. We offer an affordable range of high-quality aluminium glazing products designed to enhance any home extension, new build property or renovation.

BEST TRADITIONAL-STYLE SELF-BUILD

The judges are looking for exemplary homes built in a period style, perhaps using natural materials and demonstrating fine craftsmanship



Rationel was founded in 1954 in Denmark to focus on strong workmanship and innovation for modern window production. Since its conception, Rationel has paved the way for made-to-measure window and door products, putting customers first and producing innovative, unique design features. Rationel specialises in Scandinavian design. Slim, straight lines, high-quality timber and unique ironmongery, along with the flexibility to stand tall, slant or curve to your requirements, mean our windows and doors add something truly special to your home. Our network of local distributors means we're never far away to assist you.

BEST STARTER HOME

The judges are looking for first-time homeowners or those under the age of 40 who built their way onto the property ladder with their self-build or renovation project



Selfbuild and Contract Flooring Ltd are specialists in the design, supply and installation of wet underfloor heating systems and flowing screeds to the self-build and renovation housing markets, including new builds, restorations, extensions and barn conversions. Our team has over 25 years of direct industry experience and we understand the process involved in achieving a successful self-build conversion or project. We do not use subcontractors, and our in-house professional installers are fully trained and certified to industry regulations to produce the highest standards of work possible.

BEST EXTENSION

Have you extended your existing property to create a home that works perfectly for your lifestyle? Then enter this category



Architects Certificate offers the most cost effective Structural Warranty ABC+ in the UK, which is mortgage lender approved and also suitable for those purchasing their homes under the government's Help to Buy scheme. Clients can rest assured that they will receive high-quality support that meets their needs and does not exceed their budget.

BEST RENOVATION

We want to see previously unloved homes that have been saved through restoration, imaginative remodels or ambitious renovation



Yeoman Rainguard supply quality aluminium, cast iron, GRP, copper, zinc and stainless steel rainwater systems to suit all budgets and styles. Free site surveys, samples and itemised quotations available.

BEST CONVERSION

The judges are looking for barns, schools, churches and other buildings not originally built as dwellings that have been transformed into homes fit for 21st-century living



Etex (Exteriors) UK Ltd, part of the Etex group, supplies a comprehensive range of quality fibre cement products for the building envelope. Eternit Slates provides a range of fibre cement slates to suit all tastes as part of the Etex (Exteriors) UK Ltd portfolio. Produced to the highest standards, Eternit Slates are supported by industry-leading levels of technical support and customer service.

BEST GREEN HOME

Have you built or retrofitted a home to the very highest sustainable standards?



Ecology Building Society specialises in lending for ecological new homes (including self-build and custom build), renovation or conversion of derelict buildings, and energy-efficiency improvements to existing buildings. We welcome unique and unusual projects and will consider mortgages for non-habitable properties or non-standard construction types.

BEST CUSTOM BUILD

This category is open to custom build schemes of all shapes, sizes and budgets



Icynene is a spray-applied insulation system with an open, cellular composition that provides outstanding insulation performance yet still allows the building to breathe naturally. Icynene expands 100-fold within seconds of application, sealing all gaps, service holes and hard to reach spaces, minimising air leakage and cold bridging, helping reduce energy bills.

SPIRIT OF SELF-BUILD

Has your home delivered against all odds, does it represent exceptional value for money, or has it significantly improved the lives of its occupants?



For 40 years Hörmann UK has been the recognised leader in the garage door, entrance door and internal doors market, and is dedicated to providing high quality and innovative products for all areas of the home. Hörmann UK's wide range of steel and aluminium entrance doors are popular with homeowners looking for impressive levels of security, style and thermal efficiency.

HOME OF THE YEAR

This category celebrates the most outstanding project entered into The Daily Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards 2019.

The winner of Home of the Year will be chosen from the shortlisted projects and will receive £1,000 of John Lewis vouchers.



STRUCTURAL WARRANTY SITE INSPECTIONS SITE INSURANCE



Before pulling the foundations or laying the first brick, make sure you and your project are protected during the build and after completion ...

Self-Build Zone provides Site Insurance and 10-Year Structural Warranties for anyone starting new building works, as well as covering any Existing Structures on site. We can facilitate Building Control, Technical Audits and Project Management through our in house Technical Services Company, Build Zone Survey Services Ltd. At the end Self-Build Zone can provide you with a 10-Year Structural Warranty.

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WWW.SELFBUILDZONE.COM **0345 230 9874**

Please complete and return with A SET OF FLOORPLANS AND INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR PHOTOS to:
The Daily Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards, Future PLC, 2 Sugar Brook Court, Aston Road, Bromsgrove,
B60 3EX. THE DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES IS 17 MAY 2019. You may use a photocopy of this form. Your project
must be completed by the time judging takes place in summer 2019, and should have been completed within the past
three years. By entering, you agree to potential publicity in *The Daily Telegraph* and *Homebuilding & Renovating* magazine.

NAME OF ENTRANT

ADDRESS

EMAIL TEL. NO:

NUMBER IN FAMILY AND AGES

Size of property (internal area) in m²:

Please provide the area of any garages separately. Please also state the number of bedrooms
and the number of storeys:

.....

Which best describes your property? (please tick):

- ☐ New build
- ☐ Conversion (eg barn or church)
- ☐ Remodel and/or renovation of an existing house
- ☐ Extension of an existing house

Which category/ies are you entering? (please tick):

- ☐ Best contemporary-style self-build
- ☐ Best traditional-style self-build
- ☐ Best extension
- ☐ Best renovation
- ☐ Best conversion
- ☐ Best custom build
- ☐ Best green home
- ☐ Spirit of self-build
- ☐ Best self-build starter home

Name of the owner and address of property (if different from above):

.....
.....
.....

Date when work commenced:

Date occupied/completed:

What was the cost of the building plot/house?

(please provide an estimate if already owned)

.....

What was the cost of the project/the build?

.....

What is the current/estimated value of the property?

.....

Please provide the name of the designer or architect:

(if applicable)

.....

What makes your project special?

(you may provide additional information to support your entry)

.....
.....
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.....

If your project is shortlisted we will contact you and may request further
information. The initial round of judging is based entirely on the details on
this form, and importantly, the images of the outside and inside of your house
that you provide with your entry.

These images do not need to be of professional quality but in order to portray
your home in the best way these should be comprehensive and, if possible,
taken on a bright day with a well-lit interior.

Rules of entry: 1. The competition is open free of charge to anyone aged over 18 (including architectural practices) except for employees of The Telegraph plc and Future Publishing and their families. 2. The closing date for entries is 17 May 2019. 3. Responsibility cannot be accepted for entries lost, damaged or delayed in transit. 4. Photocopied entry forms will be accepted. 5. No cash alternatives will be offered in lieu of prizes that may be offered. 6. We cannot guarantee the return of entries, including drawings and photographs. 7. Details of entrants and their projects (not including specific location details) may be published in *The Daily Telegraph* and *Homebuilding & Renovating* in print and online at the discretion of the editors and may be used in publicity material (including publicity material used by the sponsors). 8. The judges' decision will be final and unchallengeable. No correspondence will be entered into. 9. The judges reserve the right not to award winners in any category if entries do not reach the required standard. 10. Unsuccessful entrants may not necessarily be contacted or have their entry returned. 11. In addition to these rules, standard Telegraph rules apply and are available on request from: The Daily Telegraph, 111 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 0DT. 12. You are advised to keep a photocopy of this form for your own information.

☐ Please tick if appropriate. I wish to receive offers from The Telegraph plc, Future Publishing or companies approved by The Telegraph plc or Future Publishing.

☐ I agree to be bound by the rules of entry. Signed Date

EXPONA®

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ACOUSTIC LUXURY VINYL FLOORING

LESS TIME FITTING
MORE TIME ENJOYING



When it comes to designing the ideal home interior scheme, aesthetics are just as important as practicality. Expona EnCore Rigid Loc offers a flooring solution that caters for both. The rigid construction, acoustic layer and use of 5Gi click-locking technology provides superior performance in a quick to install floor covering all in a stunning collection of 12 faithfully replicated wood designs.

Find your new floor at polyflorathome.com

QUICK & EASY TO INSTALL

Due to its rigid construction, Expona EnCore Rigid Loc lays beautifully over most even subfloors, this means less subfloor preparation, less disruption in your home and even more time enjoying your new floor.

BUILDING A FUTURE

@mulberry_selfbuild



During university, Lucy and Sam began planning their forever home close to Lucy's family in North Yorkshire. The couple are just 26 and 28 and the contemporary home they are building will be the first they own, a fact they seem unfazed by: "As soon as we both had jobs and savings, we applied for planning permission and waited eagerly," Sam explains.

The SIPs-built (structural insulated panels) house is situated on Lucy's parents' farm, where her family has lived for generations. "My Granddad spent a lifetime creating a haven for wildlife by digging a lake and planting an extensive woodland area. I knew I wanted to one day build my own family home here."

Although the initial planning application was refused, they convinced the committee to overturn the decision and it worked — "Perseverance pays off!" they smile.



Not shy of getting their hands a little dirty, Sam, a chartered engineer, designed the house himself and the pair have endeavoured to do as much DIY as possible, learning the skills they needed along the way.

"We wanted a place where our family and friends could keep track of the progress and for us to look back on in the future, so we documented the journey on Instagram," they add. "At low points we look back and realise just how far we have come." **H**

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Self-build advice @selfbuildarchitect



Self-build top tip: You may think we are banging on a bit about finance, but it's important to know if and how you are going to fund your build before you start.



YOUR THOUGHTS

We have found the magazine really interesting as we have worked on our self-build project. We project managed the build, and the advice and reviews have been very helpful in working our way through the regulations, choices and potential problems.

JON & RUTH GOOCH (VIA EMAIL)

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Tim Pullen is an expert in sustainable building methods and energy efficiency in residential homes (tim@weatherworks.co.uk)

THE NOT-SO-SMART METERS

Introduced to save us, the consumer, money on our bills — this is a matter for debate, says Tim Pullen

There has been a good deal of coverage in the national press around smart meters of late, mainly about them becoming redundant meters when the customer switches energy supplier. Energy companies use different communication protocols and smart meters lose functionality when we switch supplier. The zeitgeist seems to be that switching energy supplier on a regular basis is the best and only way to ensure we are getting the best deal. But are smart meters a barrier to doing exactly that?

What smart meters are supposed to do

The simple answer is they are supposed to save you, the consumer, money. How much money and how long it takes to recover the not insubstantial cost of a smart meter (estimated at £420. No upfront cost but it is added to your energy bill) is a matter of debate. Most experts suggest it will take in excess of 10 years.

They are also supposed to make sure that your bills are accurate. But aren't the energy suppliers supposed to do that anyway? And why should you, the consumer, have to pay extra for the privilege of paying the right amount for what you have bought?

What smart meters actually do

- 1 Allow the energy companies to get rid of the army of meter readers they currently employ.
- 2 Help the energy companies forecast more accurately how much energy they need to buy, avoiding penalty payments for under or over-buying.
- 3 Allow energy companies to vary the rate they charge us according to the time of day.
- 4 Allow the energy companies to cut off the supply without the necessity of visiting the property and the embarrassing fist-fight that is likely to ensue.

What smart meters could do

Surprisingly there is a distinct potential upside



to smart meters. It's not here yet, but it is to be encouraged. And it relates primarily to electric cars.

The major problem facing renewable energy producers is energy storage. As an example, PV panels make electricity during the day (obviously) and we use it mainly in the evening. Renewable energy needs storage, but industrial-scale battery banks are massively expensive and have relatively short lives. So what about electric vehicle batteries? They cost the energy producers nothing and with motor industry experts predicting sales of electric vehicles will rise to 125 million by 2030 there's scope to 'plug' into this.

New battery technology provides more storage capacity and shorter charge-up times, which means a car's battery is doing nothing for most of the day. The car would be plugged in at home (to charge-up) and smart meters could allow supply companies to charge the battery when there is a surplus and take it back when there is demand. The smart meter would measure this activity and allow consumers to receive income from the grid operator for allowing the supply company to use the battery. It is an idea that has been mooted for a couple of years, and there is still work to do on how the system would operate, but the potential is there.

In the interim, if you are interested in saving energy (and money) do all the sensible things first: upgrade the insulation, buy energy-efficient white goods, switch stuff off when you're not using it, etc. And wait for third generation smart meters to see if any of the benefits that the energy companies currently enjoy pass down to us, the consumer. **H**

“Surprisingly there is a distinct potential upside to smart meters — it's not here yet, but it relates primarily to electric cars

Graven Hill: Inside the UK's biggest self-build site

Experienced builder Mark Brinkley goes behind the scenes to find out what Graven Hill has to offer and explains why it could be a game changer for self-builders

A bleak Saturday in late January. Traffic in Bicester is heavy and there are queues to get into Sainsbury's rooftop carpark. On the south-east corner of the town, there are even longer queues to get into the world-famous Bicester Shopping Village. Nobody here seems to give a hoot about the inclement weather, even though the mall is not undercover. Sleepy it's not. Things seem to be happening in Bicester.

Just 10 minutes' walk from the Shopping Village is another development that is starting to draw national interest, too. It's called Graven Hill and it's the first self-build village in the UK.

It's come about thanks to the local council, Cherwell District Council, that has thought long and hard about how new housing should be delivered and has come to a very different conclusion to those of other councils. Instead of selling off land to developers in the normal manner, the council has retained the land at Graven Hill and is acting as its own developer, via a council-owned company called the Graven Hill Development Corporation





(GHDC). And what's more, their brief is to divide the large, ex-Ministry of Defence site into individual plots and then sell them on to ordinary people. For those of us interested in self-build, it's potentially a game changer. Here plots are really easy to find and building on site comes with the prospect of moving into a community of like-minded people.

When Graven Hill is completed, sometime in the 2020s, it will be home to something like 5,000 people spread across 1,900 houses and apartments. There will be a primary school, a pub, shops and cafés. Parkland will be laid out and part of the area will be given over to sports pitches and allotments. And at the top of the hill, around which the site wraps, is an ancient woodland that has laid undisturbed for decades and will, in time, be opened up with paths and clearings for the residents to enjoy.

Not surprisingly, Graven Hill is attracting interest from far and wide. My visit is to take part in a 'Hard Hat' tour of the development. As it's still very much a building site, casual visitors are not yet encouraged and are instead pointed towards the Graven Hill Plot Shop which acts as the nerve centre of the whole enterprise. At the moment, the Plot Shop is located in central Bicester, just over a mile away, but it will shortly be moving to the site itself. Tour visitors are currently taken to site by minibus and on the day of my visit all five tours are fully booked.

We are led through four partially built homes, all custom builds (more on page 51). As the whole site is under strict health and safety controls, we are all required to wear hi-vis jackets and hard hats.

The first custom built house we visit is a four-bedroomed timber frame property, built by Silva, which is on the market for £435,000. If buyers come forward early enough in the process they are encouraged to customise the finish and even the room layouts. The next three homes are at first fix stage. Interestingly, they are all the work of Beattie Passive and, as the name suggests, they meet the Passivhaus energy-saving standard. That's something you would struggle to find anywhere else in the country.

Our minibus carries 20 people and it's a very mixed bunch: some locals from either Bicester or nearby Oxford; the others are mainly Londoners looking to escape to the country. The rail connection to London is good, helped by the proximity of the Shopping Village which has its own dedicated train station. Some of our group have been before and are keenly looking at how Graven Hill is progressing.

Richard Frith, an energy assessor from Oxford, is on his second visit with his wife and is interested in a self-build plot, but isn't sure when to make the move. The couple love gardening and they're not sure the plots will be large enough for them, but they are attracted by the site plans for allotments.

At the moment, Graven Hill looks very much like a giant building site with miles of security fencing and only the merest hints of landscaping, but you can see that a lot of attention has been given to the future development and that within a fairly short period, the central section, known helpfully as Phase One, will be looking very smart. The whole development should take about 10 years to build out and the mix of custom builds to self-builds will reflect market demand.

A UK first

It's not easy for us Brits to comprehend just how different Graven Hill is in either its context or size. On the Continent, developments like this are widespread and in the Netherlands there is a new city, Almere, which is made up entirely of self-build and custom build homes. The GHDC has templated many of Almere's innovations in order to facilitate the development, and consequently there are a number of concepts to be explored here that are unfamiliar to us.

There is quite a difference between self-build and custom build and Graven Hill provides opportunities for both routes. While our tour advertises itself as a custom build event, it becomes apparent that several of the group are more interested in self-build and so a lot of time is spent explaining just how they differ. It's an education in itself. You learn a lot just visiting the site and its Plot Shop. Failing that, there is a very informative website up and running which shows you both the extent of the site and what is currently available.

As the summer months arrive, the Plot Shop and the marketing suite will move down to the Graven Hill site itself and visitors will be welcome to come and look around without the need to book ahead.

There are already a fair number of interestingly designed homes in place and it's obvious that this is no ordinary housing estate. Expect interest to grow as more and more people become aware of Graven Hill (particularly in the wake of *Grand Designs: The Street*) and that it is possible to build your own home here in a relatively easy way.





NO ORDINARY SELF-BUILD SITE

One of the self-build site rules is that a build must be completed within two years. Another is no caravans on site. Some may decry that this goes against the spirit of self-build but the reality is that the soon-to-be neighbours want some guarantee that the build phase will be relatively short and that they will have a street to live on that they will be proud to call home. DIY caravan-based self-builders better look elsewhere.



THE SITE

The Graven Hill Plot Shop is currently based in Bicester centre, but will move to the Graven Hill site later in the year. Our reporter Mark Brinkley (pictured right and below) took part in one of the 'hard hat' tours, visiting the site and some of the projects underway.





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GRAVEN HILL: A JARGON-BUSTING GUIDE

Custom build at Graven Hill

The term ‘custom build’ is widely used in other countries, notably the US and Australia, but is little known in the UK. What we are more familiar with is the idea of buying off-plan, especially when buying new flats. Instead of the buyer self-building, which involves paying for the land and the construction, custom build involves working with a builder or developer and making changes to the specification before or as the house gets underway. The earlier the buyer gets involved, the more they are able to influence the completed house. It may be that the level of customisation amounts to no more than changing the tiles in the bathroom and the spec on the kitchen finishes, but it could also amount to changing room layouts.

Currently the Graven Hill site is split more or less 50:50 between custom build and self-build. The website makes it clear by colour coding how all the different plots are to be developed.

All the custom builds are timber frame, mostly built off-site. There are a number of suppliers who contract to the GHDC and they mostly build to the same energy-efficiency standards, although the Beattie Passive homes meet the higher Passivhaus standard and are consequently a little more expensive as they include features such as triple-glazed windows and very high levels of airtightness. The price differential is around 5% per unit floor area.

On my visit in early 2019, there were 33 custom build plots available where the homes were under construction and they ranged in price from £300,000 to £455,000. There are other housing sites in Bicester, notably the huge Kingsmere Estate where many of the major housebuilders are present. Compared to these, the Graven Hill custom builds seem to be very good value. As with conventional new build homes, the government Help To Buy scheme applies to the custom build offerings, but not to the self-builds. There is as yet no such help for self-builders. (Although Graven Hill has partnered with several specialist self-build mortgage brokers, including BuildStore, to provide support.)

Self-build at Graven Hill

The self-build process is more complicated than custom build and it is here that we start running



A MIX OF OPPORTUNITIES
Graven Hill features a 50:50 split between self-build plots – some plots have already been purchased, with the builds underway (above and above centre) – and custom build opportunities (top).

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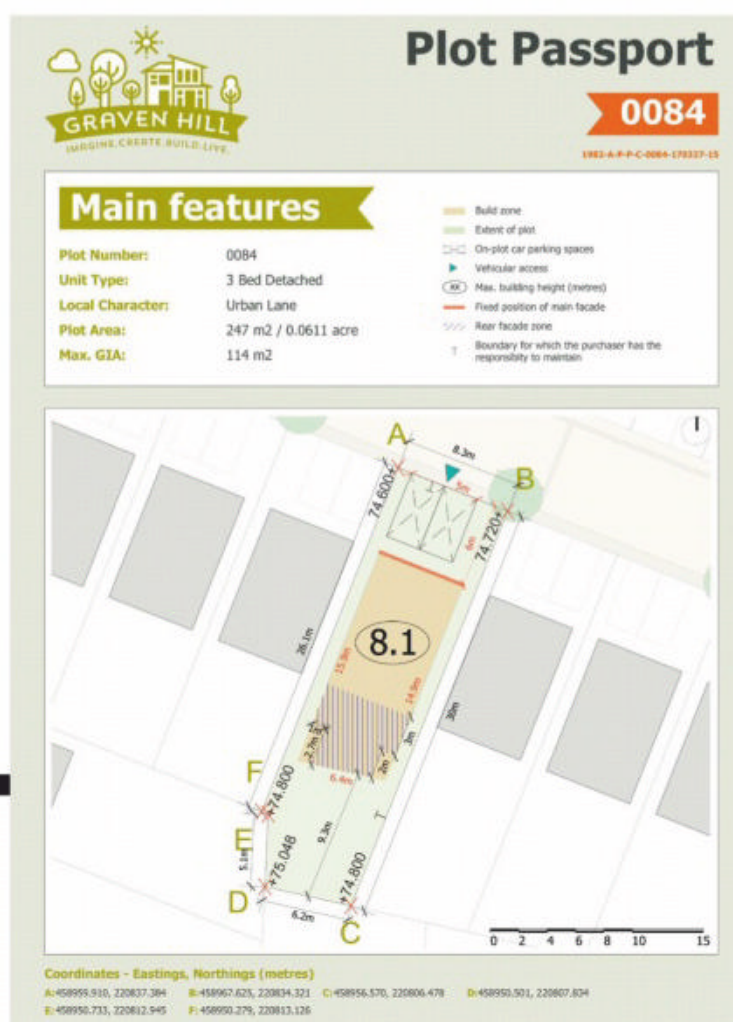
into unusual jargon, such as ‘golden brick’ and ‘plot passports’ (more on which below). The GHDC aims to provide serviced building plots, which takes much of the hassle out of self-build. The GHDC have already built some of the road network around the site and laid the various services (electricity, gas, water, drains and broadband). So each site that comes onto the market is ready to go.

At the time of my visit in early 2019, there were 19 self-build plots on the market, ranging in price from £125,000 to £320,000.

● ‘Plot Passports’

Planning can be a long and complex process for many self-builders, but on a site like this where there is a masterplan, it is possible to simplify the planning process by restricting the options. As such, each site has a ‘plot passport’ (bottom right) which delineates the habitable floor area, the maximum ridge heights and the choice of materials for the walling, roofing and the boundaries, as well as the overall building standards which are somewhat higher than those set out in standard Building Regulations. Again, this all helps simplify the traditional self-build process.

The easiest way to understand how this works is to look at the Graven Hill website (www.gravenhill.co.uk). Drill down to the ‘find a plot’ page and you will reveal a large-scale plan of the whole development. Use the filters to find out which plots are available and then move the mouse over one of these plots. This pulls up a small window with the price, the number of bedrooms and the maximum permissible height. Click on the link for ‘full details’ and all is revealed, including the planning rules governing the build and the choices of materials. I was delighted at the range of materials which could be used — there was just about anything that a 21st-century self-builder would think of installing. In fact, the whole website is a joy to use; easy to navigate and full of really useful information.



PLOT PASSPORTS
Each plot comes with a ‘plot passport’ (left) which sets out key features such as the plot size, maximum floor area, maximum ridge height and the number of bedrooms. Details of the plot can be found on the Graven Hill website — or at the Graven Hill Plot Shop (above).

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● 'Golden Brick'

The golden brick package, which is optional, includes both the plot price and the cost of building the groundworks and service connections, which the GHDC undertake themselves. There is a small tax advantage in GHDC doing it this way as it avoids the self-builder having to pay VAT on this element of the work.

The site has a lot of clay soils and these tend to require engineered foundations such as piling. As anyone who plans to build their own home will discover, there is always an element of the unknown when it comes to building foundations. So, rather than let individuals find this out for themselves, the GHDC has undertaken extensive ground investigations and has come up with cost-effective solutions for each plot.

The final cost of the package will depend on the groundworks and what is going to be placed on top, and that's down to the individual self-builder's designs, so the groundworks can't be quoted until there is a detailed plan in place. This, perhaps, is the major downside of this approach, as there can be no fixed price until the planning process is complete. However, the GHDC are able to give ballpark figures for the groundworks, so it is possible to get a good idea of what the likely total costs are going to be.

● Mix and Match

There is a new category which GHDC is exploring and that is a halfway house between self-build and custom build, which they have termed 'mix and match'.

On my visit, there was only one such plot on offer and it could be built out to two different designs by two different companies: Benchmark or Kingspan Potton. Both designs were for a three-bed house but featured different layouts. Because both designs have already been fixed, the golden brick foundation costs are explicit so that you can see exactly how much you will be paying for the plot, the foundations and the superstructure and finishes.

Overall, the mix and match approach gives you a home that is about 10% cheaper than the custom build route. There is equity here to be made for being more involved in the process, but almost all the risk is removed as Graven Hill provide the foundations and the builders provide the superstructure and the finishes. **H**



"We bought a custom built home"

Sandra Dunn shares her experience of purchasing a Passivhaus-standard custom build home at Graven Hill

Sandra Dunn moved into a one-bed coach house with husband Jimmy last year. They previously lived in another part of Bicester in a three-bed house but were attracted by what was on offer at Graven Hill.

"Like many people, our custom build journey started in the Graven Hill Plot Shop in the town centre," says Sandra. "We really liked what we saw and liked the prices, and in November 2017 we put down a £1,000 deposit to reserve 'Plot 176'. The building had just started but we could see it was going to be really nice as there were already some similar coach houses [illustrated above] which had been occupied. Two months later, with a little family help, we exchanged contracts and paid 10% of the agreed sum."

Only after this were the Dunns able to start the customisation process. "Beattie Passive were the builders, and they offered two options on the room layout. One featured a small study and a large entrance hall; the other a much larger downstairs room with a smaller hallway. We opted for the latter and haven't regretted it. We really liked the look and feel of the place and the prices looked good as well. Our custom house cost us £228,000, which made it slightly cheaper than what else was on offer in Bicester."

"As the job progressed, we were able to go into the Plot Shop and pick out the finishing options: flooring, taps, sanitaryware and the kitchen. They even finished the garden off with paving and a lawn."

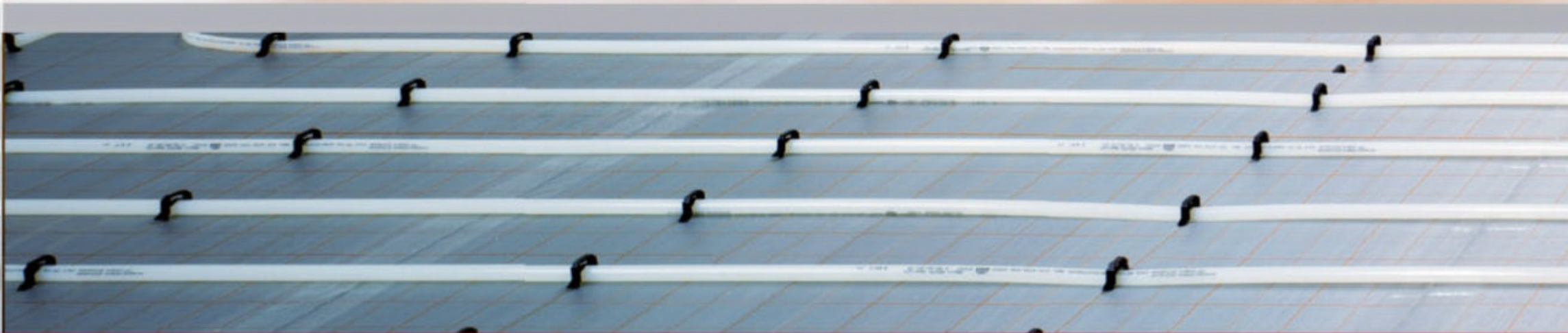
One of the features which was a surprise to the Dunns was that the house was being built to Passivhaus standards. "We didn't really understand the idea of a Passivhaus before beginning our build, however the prospect of cheaper bills caught our eye at an early stage. Passivhaus standards mean that running the house is extremely economical. We benefit from triple-glazed windows which not only keep the heat in, but also keep any noise out.

"We have really noticed how comfortable the house is, whether it's the height of summer or when there is snow on the ground. Our home is always an even and comfortable temperature."

The Dunns are already planning their next move and it's going to be another custom build in Graven Hill, this time a little larger. "It's been so painless that the thought of doing another move doesn't phase us at all. And it's turning out to be a great neighbourhood to live in. The neighbours are a very mixed bunch but all seem pretty easy to get along with."

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Designing a kitchen on a budget

Your dream kitchen need not break the bank — our top tips reveal how to create a stylish kitchen for less

There are few more exciting stages in a self-build or renovation project than designing and planning a new kitchen. However, this initial excitement can soon fade when the quotes start coming in. According to the 2018 UK Houzz Kitchen Trends Study, kitchen renovations average £10,300, with the averages ranging between £8,100 and £11,700.

Experts advise that a maximum of five percent of the overall value of your house is a sensible amount to budget for a kitchen if you want to avoid losing money when you come to sell.

But there are ways to achieve a stylish new kitchen without creating financial strain — in fact, with the right planning, a little creativity and the resolve to shop around, you could get a new kitchen for as little as £5,000. And here we set out some of our money-saving top tips...

1 Mix standard with luxury

You don't have to restrict yourself to buying from off-the-

shelf budget kitchen suppliers, nor are 'luxury' items off limits. Presumably you want not just a cheap kitchen, but also one that is up to the job of handling whatever your life throws at it — and looks great too.

It pays to mix and match your supply sources. Yes, it is more time-consuming than buying your entire kitchen through the same company, but it saves money and leaves you in control of where your funds are going.

Begin your search by approaching a couple of kitchen suppliers with your ideas and the dimensions of your space. They will usually come up with layouts for free, as part of the quotation process. This allows you to form some idea of the costs involved — you are not obliged to buy your kitchen from them but you will be able to start to see which individual elements you need to make up your kitchen and how much they are all likely to cost.

2 Plan for the basics

All kitchens need to have certain elements — non-

negotiable items that turn the space into a fully functioning powerhouse of culinary and social productivity.

Examples include: storage, usually base units (sometimes wall units), worktops and major appliances such as a cooker, extraction and fridge, along with a sink and tap. These are what make a kitchen. There will also be an unquestionable need for lighting and flooring, both of which should be budgeted for.

On top of these items there will probably be additional items and features you will want to include to ensure that your kitchen works for your individual household — appliances, such as a dishwasher or built-in coffee machine, and features such as an island unit or breakfast bar, shelving, and feature lighting.

Once you have worked out what your basics are going to cost, something which will depend on the size of your kitchen, you can see what you have left for additional items.

3 Flat-pack kitchens — a good idea?

While window displays and glossy brochures for high-end kitchen companies are hugely tempting, these are not going to be the first port of call for anyone on a limited budget. However, they can provide inspiration. As long as you are realistic about what can and can't be copied and achieved, using these companies to build up an idea of the styles you like is a good idea.

There are several types of kitchen supplier worth considering when on a tight budget. At the cheapest end of the market lie the DIY warehouses, some of which sell entire flat-



NATASHA BRINSMEAD
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Natasha has
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CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Ikea's Metod 600mm x 600mm carcasses cost £82, whilst the Ekestad doors to fit cost £46 (www.ikea.com); Husk specialise in doors to fit Ikea units and other off-the-shelf carcasses. Doors are made from high tech laminate with a birch ply core. A small Husk kitchen starts from £1,500 (www.madebyhusk.com); This undermounted stainless steel sink from Screwfix costs just £79.99 (www.screwfix.com).





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Those older than 55 are most willing to splurge, on average spending nearly twice as much as those under 35 (£11,200 vs £6,100).*



DIY Kitchens

Although time consuming and a little fiddly at times, fitting a kitchen on a DIY basis is a job that can save between £250 and £1,000 depending on the type of kitchen you are opting for, and the size of the space.

packed, off-the-shelf kitchens for as little as £400-£500, ready for you to assemble once you get them home.

Packs consist of chipboard-based carcasses and doors — sometimes the doors are already fixed to the carcass. These units are usually melamine-faced, with doors perhaps encased in vinyl, PVC, laminate or melamine.

While the range of styles should span most tastes, be aware that not all flatpack kitchens are created equal in terms of quality. Visit showrooms and spend some time checking over any display units they have on offer. They will rarely exude quite the same high-end finish as more expensive kitchens and can be flimsy in their construction. In addition, due to their chipboard cores, damage to the outer covering is hard to repair.

4 Customise low cost carcasses

Buying standard, off-the-shelf carcasses allows for design flexibility while still granting control over your budget. Carcasses are simple to fit on a DIY basis, with most coming complete with adjustable feet to ensure a level finish.

With the carcasses sorted, you are free to choose door and drawer fronts from wherever you like. You might, for example, ask your joiner to make up solid wood door fronts, or take a look at one of the companies specialising in door and drawer fronts, such as Second Nature Kitchens (www.sncollection.co.uk).

Additionally, some companies, aware of the desire for bespoke kitchens for less, specialise in upscaling standard units. Take a look at Plykea (www.plykea.com), Husk (www.madebyhusk.com) and Superfront (www.superfront.com), all of which supply bespoke plywood-based fronts and worktops suitable for fitting to both Ikea carcasses as well as other off-the-shelf products.

5 Unpainted kitchens

A great way to get a bespoke kitchen for less — albeit with a little elbow grease required.

Perfect for those looking for a classic Shaker or country-style

ABOVE: Specialising in plywood doors to fit Ikea kitchens, Plykea also offer drawer fronts and worktops. For a guide on prices visit www.plykea.com.

LEFT: Oak laminate worktops from Worktop Express offer a realistic-looking surface and cost from £100/3m x 600mm run. (www.worktop-express.co.uk).



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Design & Materials

Hidden kitchen costs

LIGHTING

Task lighting above the hob and work areas is a must and if you are creating a kitchen diner, multiple 'layers' of light help to define zones.

FLOORING

Durable flooring is a must. If you like the idea of stone, consider a cheaper variety such as slate, or take a look at ceramic as a lower cost alternative. Some of luxury vinyls, linoleums, as well as rubber, can also work well.

APPLIANCES

Don't scrimp — read reviews before buying.

WALL TILES

Wall tiles need not be expensive, but if you fancy something a little out of the ordinary, use them in small quantities around the sink or behind the hob.

SPLASHBACK

Tiles and stainless steel panels both work well.

EXTRACTOR HOOD

You will need some form of extraction in the kitchen.

Aim to have yours ducted to outside. Wall-mounted extractors tend to be cheaper than freestanding.

UPSTANDS, PLINTHS AND CORNICING

Plinths will be required to conceal the legs of your base units and the underside of wall units. Consider skipping cornice above wall units. Worktop upstands are not necessary. If you want some an upstand, tiles tend to be cheaper.



kitchen, these units come pre-assembled, built to fit your space, but are unpainted and fitted on a DIY basis. Although they are a great way to achieve a sturdy, quality kitchen for less, there is a fair amount of work required — knotting, priming, sanding and painting will be needed.

They are easy to repair if damaged, plus you get to choose the paint colours (and can change them as often as you like). An eggshell paint is best for its low sheen, wipeable and durable finish.

A 600mm base unit from Pineland costs around £315. Other companies to take a look at include Old Creamery Furniture (www.oldcreameryfurniture.com).

6 Look at used and ex-display kitchens

A used or ex-display kitchen can be an absolute steal — plus it is an eco-friendly way of buying a new kitchen.

In the case of second-hand kitchens, sites such as The Kitchen Exchange (www.kitchenexchange.co.uk) and The Used Kitchen Company (www.theusedkitchencompany.com) offer a whole range of designs, including high-end designer brands complete with appliances and worktops. Their condition will be specified, as will their age and in most cases delivery can be arranged. You could sell your old kitchen through these sites.

Ex-display kitchens come ready assembled, will never have been



used and should have all the bells and whistles, such as handles, storage, etc., included. You can either leave your details with kitchen showrooms or regularly visit to be the first to know when they are dismantling displays. Kitchens bought in this way can have up to 70 percent knocked off their original RRP.

On the downside, you will need somewhere to store the kitchen if you are not quite ready for it but don't want to miss out. Plus, you may need to ensure the chosen kitchen range, should you need any additional door fronts or similar to complete your kitchen.

7 Shop around for worktops and extras

Rarely will you get the cheapest deal by buying your worktops as part of your kitchen 'package'. A kitchen supplier can

TOP: This ex-display Dalesmade kitchen from The Used Kitchen Company comes complete with worktops, Silstone and solid oak worktops, sink and taps, £9,950 (www.theusedkitchencompany.com).

ABOVE: Unpainted kitchens from Pineland start from £300 for a 600mm x 600mm base unit, with door (www.pineland.co.uk).



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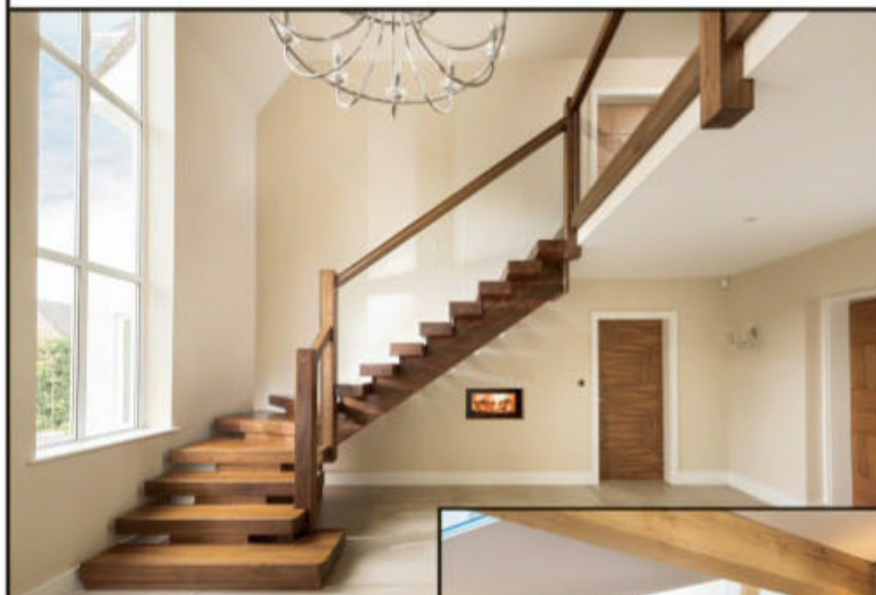


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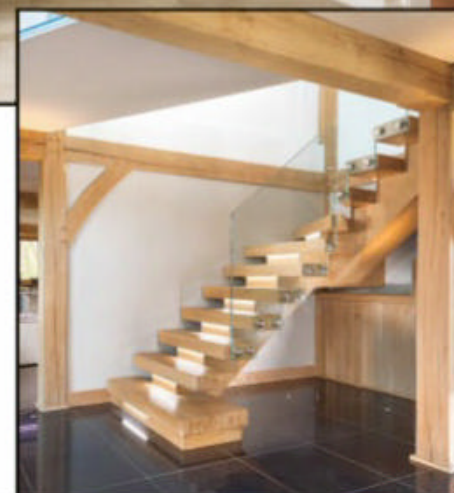
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Buy the best fixings you can afford

Although they remain hidden from view, it is these little fixings which hold the kitchen together. Wall hanging brackets should be concealed and adjustable, sturdy soft close hinges might add £20 per door but they are well worth it and should be concealed as opposed to surface mounted. Also opt for adjustable legs on your base units to make your kitchen easier to fit.

You should also check how many pre-drilled holes there are in the sides of your chosen cabinets — some cheaper units have less than three positions. The more holes, the more options you have for positioning your shelves. Check the weight limit of drawers too — some cheap, flimsy units struggle to hold the weight of pots and pans.

include worktops within their quote, but don't take the easy route if you are budget conscious.

Shop around at online worktop specialists, local timber merchants and stone masons. Solid oak worktops can be ordered for as little as £100 per 3m run.

It is also worth considering whether a solid stone worktop will eat up more of your budget than is necessary. Consider alternatives like quartz composite. Some laminates are also very realistic and a world away from the cheap-looking bumpy laminates of old — look for 'solid laminate' products which consist of several layers of laminate and are much more hardwearing.

Another great money-saving route is to mix and match worktop materials — combining solid stone or composite with a cheaper timber, for example. Use the expensive worktop material on a smaller but more prominent area of the kitchen, such as on a kitchen island.

8 Stainless steel sinks: practical and stylish

There is a good reason why professional kitchens have stainless steel sinks. They are stain and heat resistant, hardwearing and easy to clean — plus they are often one of the cheapest options. Ceramic and composite sinks might look beautiful but often come with a hefty price tag. **H**



TOP: The Gala kitchen from Lifestyle Kitchens, shown in grey, costs from £3,000 (www.lifestylekitchens.com).

CENTRE: This second-hand Hacker kitchen with island, granite worktops and appliances sold for £6,500 (www.theusedkitchencompany.com).

BOTTOM: The ready to fit Madison kitchen from Wickes starts from £853 for an entire kitchen (www.wickes.co.uk).

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Striking staircase designs

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Light it up

Below: Ensure your staircase gets the attention it deserves by taking time to consider how it will be lit. This staircase design by Emily Todhunter uses concealed strips from lighting specialist John Cullen, meaning its chunky cantilevered treads really stand out, while casting interesting shadows on the wall beneath.

The quick makeover

Right: For a speedy and inexpensive transformation, consider stair stickers or paint. These Victorian tile stair stickers from Purlfrost cost £12.25 per step and are easily applied, yet have a huge impact on the appearance of the staircase. If you plan on painting stairs, ensure you use a product designed for purpose.



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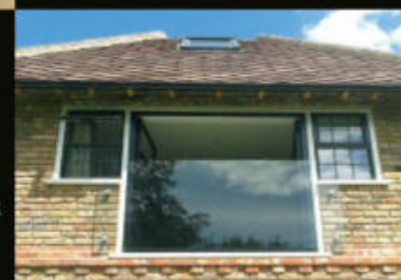
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Design & Materials

The storage staircase

Right: Definitely one up from the understairs cupboard, this bespoke staircase by Bisca incorporates a run of cupboards made from solid wood, combined with a toughened low-iron glass balustrade and stainless steel rails. Staircases with storage under are a great way to make the most of your space.



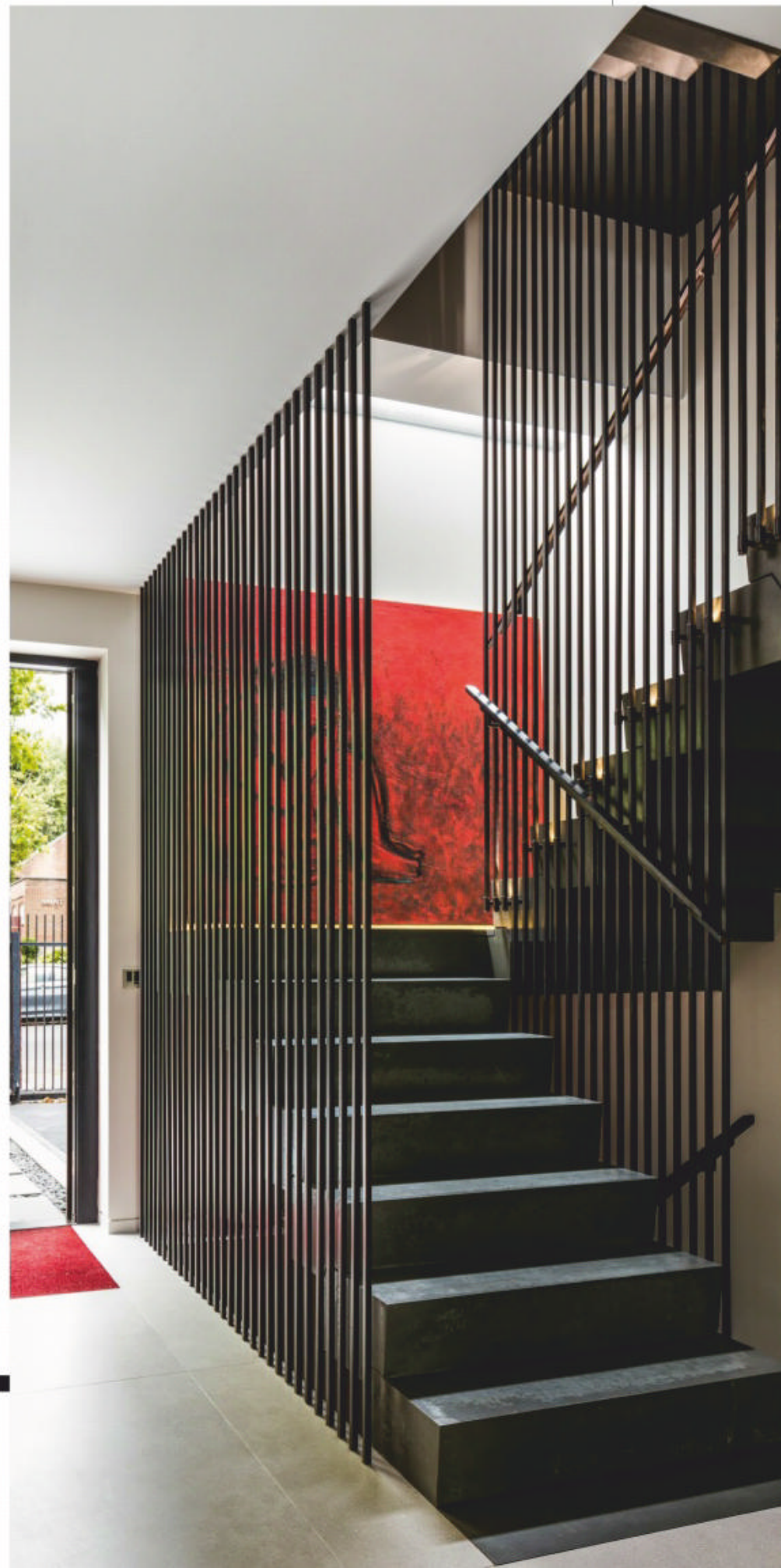
Glass spindles

Below: For a twist on solid glass balustrades, consider glass spindles. This design is from Neville Johnson and uses glass spindles fixed directly into a rebated base rail, making up part of the oak staircase. Glass spindles are great for those after a design that allows light to flow through their stairwell. The spindles offer an understated contemporary look.



Full-height balustrading

Right: The staircase was a key design element in this project by Granit Architects. Made from cast polished concrete, the wrought iron full-height balustrade was formed by hand. The design not only forms a striking architectural feature but also allows light to enter the stairwell from above and below.



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Small space solution

Right: This slim, helical staircase from Bisca features oak treads and risers and a white-painted bespoke plaster balustrade, as well as a sculptural soffit. Designed to make the most of the small space, the recessed handrail increases the usable width of the stairs and is highlighted by LED lighting.

Staircase pod

Below: This staircase pod was a design response to both budget restrictions as well as the large open-plan spaces within the barn conversion. The 'pod' has been created using OSB, with the staircase within leading to a mezzanine level — slot 'windows' ensure the space is not dark.



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The glass box

Above: The owners of this project wanted a way of separating the staircase, whilst ensuring the space still felt light and open. Bisca's response was to design a staircase in materials that reflected those in the adjacent kitchen — American walnut and glass. The staircase is supported by two glass walls and also features a glass 'dog gate'.

The updated classic

Right: A contemporary take on a classic form, this staircase from Neville Johnson combines oak newels and handrails with panels of glass in the balustrade. The glass allows light to flow freely between all three levels that are spanned by the staircase, whilst the newels on the upper level extend below the base panelling for added interest.





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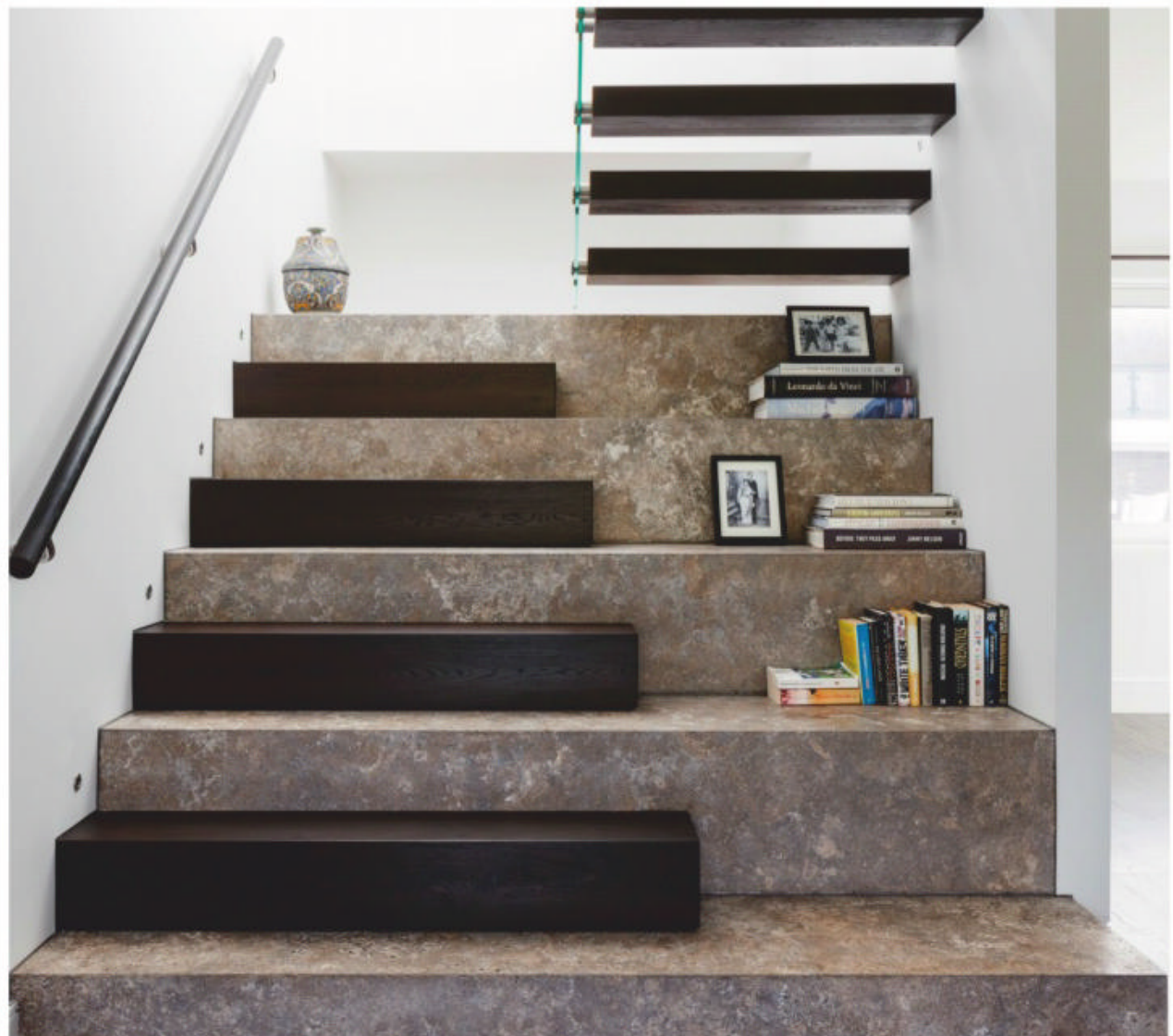


The staircase renovation

Left: An entirely new design is not the only option — consider what could be done with your existing staircase to minimise costs and disruption. This project by Abbott-Wade has transformed a dated boarded staircase (FAR LEFT) with a pre-finished oak staircase with a sandblasted glass balustrade.

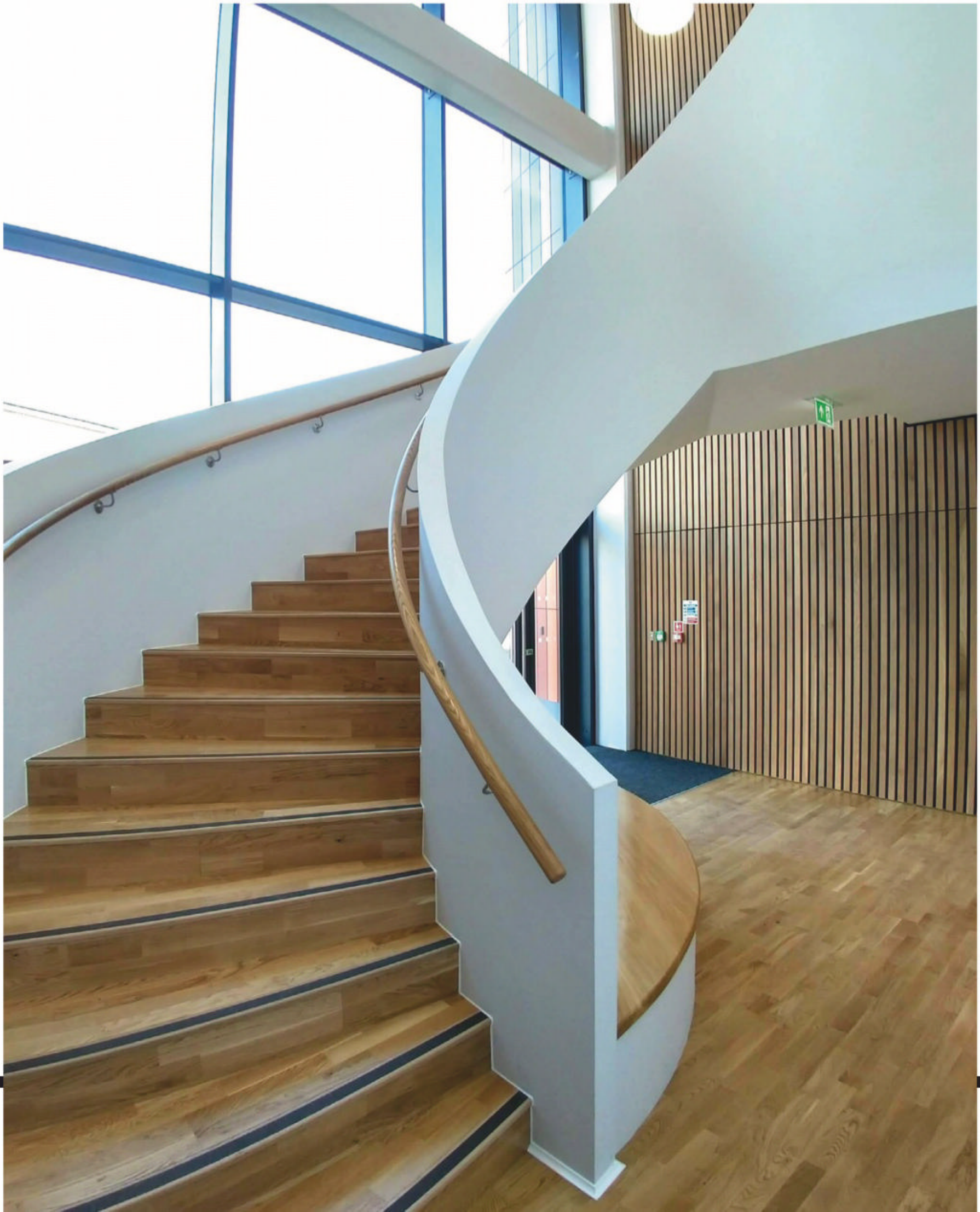
Extra-wide stairs

Right: The owners of this house, designed by Granit Architects, wanted a staircase with wow factor so the existing staircase was replaced with an oversized stone and timber design. Italian limestone has been teamed with dark stained oak, with the lower treads extended to full width in order to create space for displaying artwork and books, or it could even be used as a seating area.



Introduce natural light

Below: Consider how to draw natural light into your stairwell. A large window running alongside the stairs, such as here (this staircase was designed by Kallisto Stairs), a roof lantern or rooflights in the ceiling above, or even a glass balustrade that allows light to flow from one floor to another all work. 





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PAUL HERVEY-BROOKES is an award-winning landscape designer based in the Cotswolds

How to drought-proof your garden

Landscape designer Paul Hervey-Brookes explains how to design a new garden or prepare an existing one for summer drought and other extreme weather conditions

Sustainable gardening is big news. We have become aware of the importance of biodiversity to sustain our populations of pollinating insects and bees. We know that a mixture of shrubs and trees that mature at varying heights are much better for small birds, and we are getting better at leaving little areas of the garden un-manicured for other vital insects and small animals such as hedgehogs and toads. All good news for the garden.

One of the most important and easy to overlook steps is thinking about weather patterns and how to incorporate smart solutions into the design and planting choices of our gardens. Almost everyone now accepts the reality of man-made climate change, and it's easy to see the effects. Plants like tree ferns, Dicksonia and olives are left unprotected outside through our increasingly mild winters, while summers are tending to switch between warm and wet or long, hot and dry. Last year was very dry with the grass turning brown in gardens and public parks from London to Newcastle.

In our gardens, plants have not really adapted that well to these changes. Newly planted areas are the hardest hit, either dying under the strain or making poor stunted growth and thus taking longer to become established. Mature planting is not so noticeably hit but prolonged dry periods can cause shorter flowering periods as the plant's natural desire to produce seed becomes its main focus in the heat. As homeowners, we need to plan and build in ways to work with the climate and with nature in our gardens.

Perhaps the most important and easiest way to do this is to collect rainwater. Rainwater can be easily saved in the traditional way with large water butts harvesting the watershed from your house and outbuilding roofs. Storing the water can be slightly more problematic. With existing properties where major landscape changes are difficult, tanks tend to be the answer. These tend to be plastic or galvanised and positioned vertically on a wall of the house. They can also, where topography allows, be dug into

the ground. Alternatively, if you have a basement and are willing to electrically pump the water back out, they can be positioned in basements and therefore not in full view. Both options may require reinforcing work from on-site specialists.

Collecting pools

If you're building a new house or carrying out major landscaping works, large collecting pools that store the water in a more naturalised way can be installed. This will need an electrified pump and filter system if you intend to use the water on ornamental borders or vegetable gardens.

The benefit of collecting pools is they can also become filtration systems for grey water from laundry and kitchen use. This means the water is not simply draining into the mains (and sometimes overloaded) system but cleaned with a series of water pools and plants which are naturally adapted to filtration. This sort of system will need to be designed by an expert, though.

The importance of permeable surfaces

Alongside the increased likelihood of long, dry seasons are wet events that deliver large quantities of water in a short space of time. These flash flooding events are increasingly damaging, as the ground is hard from a long dry period or saturated from prolonged wet periods and the mains drains system cannot cope, causing water to back up.

We can mitigate some of these effects in our own gardens. Water storage is one aspect but slowing the rate of flow from the roof across our gardens will also help. Perhaps the biggest difference



Perhaps the biggest difference everyone could make is to not paving over large portions of their gardens



SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING

Simple measures, such as using composted bark as a mulch and improving the garden's soil, can improve the quality of new gardens, such as the one pictured here in Cambridgeshire.

A detailed illustration of a forest scene. In the foreground, a wooden deck made of horizontal planks leads into a lush green forest. A squirrel is perched on a tree trunk on the left, and a deer is visible in the mid-ground. The forest is filled with tall, slender trees and vibrant green foliage. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a warm, golden glow. Two birds are also visible: one perched on a branch on the right and another in flight in the center. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

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everyone could make is not paving over large portions of our gardens or turning front gardens into drives.

There are permeable paving techniques which now allow water to soakaway, or you can build in-filter systems under block driving that will store a surprising volume of water, allowing it to be released back to the natural water table slowly. Alternatively, you can simply build a smaller scale soakaway system using the natural landform or man-made hollows and a mixture of dry and wet loving plants to collect and disperse the watershed. (New or replacement drives will need to feature a sustainable drainage system (SuDS) compliant surface or will require planning permission, in any event.)

Inherited gardens

Many of us inherit neglected gardens, with soils in a poor condition. Poor soils also play a part in water movement and plant health. There is a simple way to check if your soil is healthy: just count the worms in a given square meter. If there are less than 10, then you need to improve your soils. This is not as daunting as it sounds: aeration is key. Dig over planting beds to get the air into the ground. This will have a dramatic effect on mature trees and shrubs that have suffered under compaction.

Next add in natural well-rotted manures or look for a relatively new product called bio-char which can be broadcast (scattered) and dug in. Both will improve the soil's structure and importantly allow the development of beneficial soil-based fungus, which in turn promotes plant health. Bio-char

also traps nematodes which attack stressed roots and for a prolonged period increases soil aeration.

Once this is done, a mulch can be applied annually to help retain moisture through long, dry periods and to suppress weeds. Mulches vary, so be careful. A layer of 5cm is best for areas of bare ground, but around the base of trees and the crowns of perennial plants you'll need a thinner layer. I tend to use either Miscanthus (a straw-like grass) clippings in hilly, visible areas, or composted bark. In out-of-sight areas I tend to use straw, or if it's land I want to dig at a later date into a vegetable patch I cover with a layer of cardboard and a thick layer of up to 10cm of composted bark. This will break down, improving the soil while killing off the chances of annual weeds.

I don't use fresh bark or wood clippings or nuggets of bark for planting beds. This material leaches nutrients out of the soils to start breaking down so it is best left for paths and access areas. Don't be tempted to cover open soil areas with plastics, either. These do not naturally break down in the soil and we already know about the devastating effects of plastics in the oceans.

If you spend time this spring investing in water collection efforts, reducing watershed rates across your garden and improving the soil structure of planting beds, then even without new planting or design you will see a dramatic difference in the visible health of the garden and have made a good inroad into weather prevention planning. **H**

NEXT MONTH: DESIGNING A LIGHTING SCHEME FOR YOUR GARDEN

5 TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS

1. Check if your soil is healthy by counting the worms in a given m². If there are less than 10, you'll need to improve your soils (see tip 2).



2. To improve your soils, dig over planting beds to aerate them, then add well-rotted manure or bio-char.



3. In visible areas, use miscanthus (a type of grass) clippings or composted bark as a mulch.



4. Saving rainwater in large water butts is an easy way to harvest watershed from the house and from the roofs of outbuildings.



5. To manage the effects of flash flooding, avoid paving over large portions of your garden. Permeable paving solutions are a very good idea.





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This traditionally hand-blown lamp is an elegant and modern option, perfect for creating ambient lighting in a bedroom. The Cowbell is priced at £75 from Loaf. (www.loaf.co.uk)



The beauty of the slightly smoked Huxley wall light's (£70) contemporary design lies in the finish and form inspired by minimalist industrial styles. (www.johnlewis.com)



Finished in matte black and antique brass, the Regis light by My Furniture has an elegant and refined design. Available for £69.99. (www.my-furniture.co.uk)



The elegant glass shade and industrial rustic base of the Ledbury light (£240) from Fritz Fryer would be a subtle yet stylish addition to any bathroom. (www.fritzfryer.co.uk)



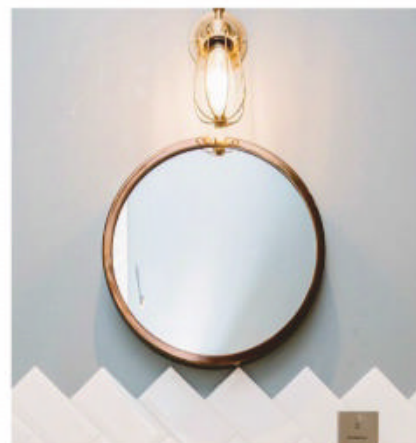
Tom Raffield's Hanter features a sustainably sourced steam-bent oak arc with a solid timber base; a warmer take on industrial style, £145. (www.johnlewis.com)



Buster & Punch's extra large vertical wall light is bold and daring, finished with a black marble base and filament bulb. It costs £725. (www.hollowaysofludlow.com)



The Florence, £198, highly mirrored metallic light bulb creates a stunning appearance when turned off or a warm transparent glow when switched on. (www.thelightyard.com)



Industville's Orlando wire cage light (£49) would be perfect in a period bathroom or hung in a cluster to create a standout feature. (www.industville.co.uk)



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MICHELLE GUY is *Homebuilding & Renovating's* Assistant Editor and is an experienced homes journalist. She is currently planning a kitchen renovation

Freestanding VS built-in sanitaryware

Space-saving designs, extra storage, full-on luxury — the sanitaryware you opt for depends a lot on the fitting, its form and function. Our guide will help you decide before you buy



When it comes to choosing sanitaryware for your bathroom, there are generally two categories — built-in and freestanding. Which style you choose will depend on the space you have to work with, the bathroom design scheme you want to create, and how you use it — will it be a busy family space or a master en suite, for example.

Built-in bathroom products tend to conceal pipework. Built-in basins and WCs are often encased either in the modular unit that the basin is sat in, for example, or hidden behind a purpose-built studwall in the case of WCs, which can be tiled or painted to match the bathroom decor. Wall-hung options also conceal pipework and keep the floor clear helping to create the illusion of space, which is great if you have a smaller bathroom.

Freestanding designs are often synonymous with more traditional styles, such as claw foot baths, pedestal basins and WCs with a chain flush. But more contemporary freestanding designs are now widely available, featuring curved bateau baths, deep bowl pedestal basins and push-flush freestanding WCs.

Design before you buy

How you'd like your bathroom to look will influence the type of sanitaryware you choose. "Try not to think about how you currently use your bathroom but imagine how you would like to use it," says Barrie Cutchie, Design Director at BC Designs. "It will inform your fixtures, fittings and the colour scheme."

So, before you make a decision measure your bathroom carefully.

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Note down existing plumbing, windows and doors, and the room dimensions. Think about whether the new space can accommodate changes to the layout or whether updating the sanitaryware in situ with new flooring and decor is the way to go. “Rearranging your plumbing won’t be cheap and can double the cost of the project in some cases,” explains Barrie Cutchie. “This doesn’t mean you have to compromise on a freestanding bath, for example, as there are options out there that have plinths that can hide the majority of your plumbing work.”

And don’t think you have to exclusively pick one design over the other. You can mix and match freestanding and built-in styles; it just pays to know how much they cost and what work is involved to install the items before you choose so you know the impact on your budget.

Built-in...

BATHS Built-in baths are designed to sit within a cradle, which can be bought along with the bath. Alternatively you can buy them with adjustable ‘legs’ that you or your bathroom fitter will level up. Acrylic side and end panels can be bought to fit around the bath to hide it and the pipework. They are often the cheaper option, but aren’t always the most aesthetic choice.

Another option is to build a timber frame for the bath to sit in. The frame you build can be as deep as you like and you can cover it with painted timber panels, or plasterboard and tile it. Don’t forget the frame will conceal pipework so make sure there’s access to the plumbing in case it needs attention.

BASINS Built-in basins moulded into contemporary or period-style designs sit within or on top of a vanity or storage unit made out of timber, for example. The sink can either be fully visible, known as a countertop, or moulded under-counter so the basin is flush with the top of the unit. “Basin vanity units require no special works,” says chartered surveyor Ian Rock, “and in some ways are easier to fit than traditional pedestal basins since the plumbing is concealed.”

WCs Built-in WCs have their cistern and pipework built into a studwall, or a unit built out from the wall. “Hanging heavy fittings like freestanding WCs from walls

is easier with solid masonry walls because the bolts or screws have something substantial to bite into,” explains Ian Rock. “Where you’ve got hollow studwork walls, localised strengthening can be done by cutting out a small section of plasterboard and inserting extra studs or thick offcuts of plywood or OSB.

“Normally a short internal ‘stub’ stack with an air admittance valve fitted on top is all that’s required to vent the system. These are normally boxed in and decorated or tiled; plumbers advise that the valve should be accessible in case it ever needs replacing (e.g. with a small hatch or removable cover) but this is very rarely allowed for in practice.”



The elegantly curved Ellipse countertop basin from Waters Baths of Ashbourne (£474) has been painted in Farrow and Ball’s Oval Room Blue and is sat on top of a beautiful wooden unit.



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Freestanding...

BATHS Freestanding baths include the classic roll-top, along with a whole host of new designs — from bateau to slipper-style baths to creations formed from stone. Freestanding baths often require a wall or floor-mounted tap so you'll need to make sure the plumbing can accommodate it. "Freestanding baths are often supported on very small 'feet', so the pressure can be intense at these points on the floor," explains Ian Rock. "With timber floors, to prevent baths sinking it's advisable to beef up the floor structure with timber noggins fixed alongside or between joists. Visible pipework needs to be neatly executed in quality materials. Pipes, both waste and hot and cold supplies look best emerging from the floor directly beneath, but try to avoid cutting joists more than about 1/8th from the top if running hidden pipes so as not to weaken the joists. With concrete floors it may be possible to cut shallow channels for pipe runs, with a fitted cover for future access, perhaps tiled to match."

BASINS Freestanding basins include pedestal and semi-pedestal designs. Traditional pedestal-mounted basins are open at the back which is where the plumbing resides and is hidden from view. Semi-pedestal basins are usually wall mounted but are available in traditional or contemporary styles.

WCs Freestanding designs include low-level models and traditional high-level designs. They are the cheaper option and less time-consuming to install, but can lack the seamless and more modern appeal of built-in designs. **H**

A quick comparison of the options...

BATHS

FREESTANDING

PROS

- They are the ideal way to create a focal point
- There is a huge choice available, from traditional roll-tops to contemporary stone models
- They can look more elegant than a built-in bath and can take up less space

CONS

- They tend to lack the storage opportunities that built-in baths offer
- They are not always practical where a shower over the bath is required

BUILT-IN

PROS

- They offer lots of storage potential
- The frame can be tiled to match the rest of the bathroom
- They tend to work out cheaper than freestanding baths

CONS

- Less opportunity for 'wow factor'
- More work is involved in the installation

BASINS

FREESTANDING

PROS

- Standard designs are cost-effective
- Easy to conceal unsightly pipework if they feature a pedestal
- Perfect for traditional-style bathrooms

CONS

- No space is provided for storing bathroom essentials
- Full pedestals are at a set height which may not suit everyone or every bathroom

BUILT-IN

PROS

- They offer huge storage opportunities
- They look sleek and are available in materials such as timber or composites, to complement the rest of the suite and interior scheme
- They can be set at whatever height you wish

CONS

- They can take up more space than freestanding
- They tend to work out slightly more expensive



WCs

FREESTANDING

PROS

- Generally work out cheaper than built-in
- Suit traditional-style bathrooms really well

CONS

- More spaces to get lodged with dirt
- No space for storage

BUILT-IN

PROS

- Ideal for creating clean lines
- Possibilities for creating storage space

CONS

- Needs to be built-in into a stud wall or unit
- Can work out as a more expensive option



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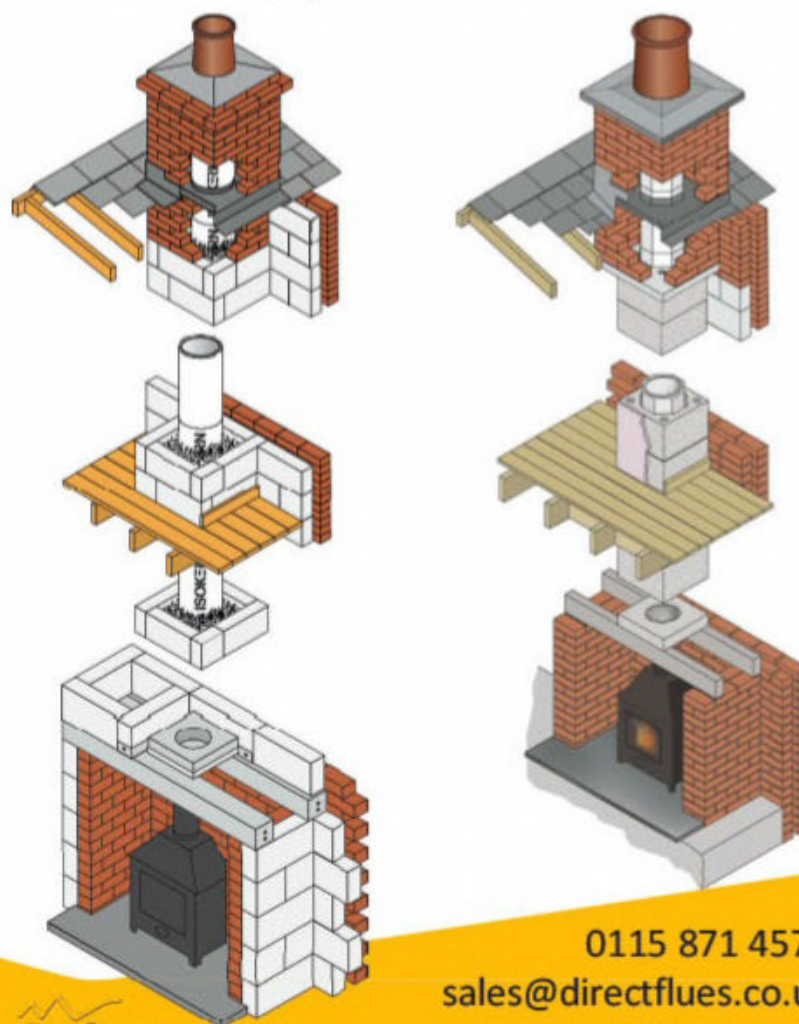
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Do you need an interior designer?

Still consider interior designers the reserve of commercial projects or for those with bottomless project budgets? Think again...

While the majority of commercial housebuilders and developers routinely hire interior designers to tailor their homes and businesses to their clients' exacting needs, self-builders and renovators are far more likely to take on the job of planning, furnishing and decorating their interiors themselves.

This works out just fine for some design-savvy DIYers and homeowners out there. However, all too often the end result of months or years of hard building work are not shown off to their full potential due to an interior

design scheme which just doesn't suit the house.

In some cases, the additional cost of an interior designer just isn't something that can be squeezed out of a build budget and, understandably, an entirely new interior scheme isn't always financially feasible. However, the level of involvement an interior designer has in a project is decided by the client, rather than being a fixed factor — meaning no surprise bills and hidden costs.

What does an interior designer do?

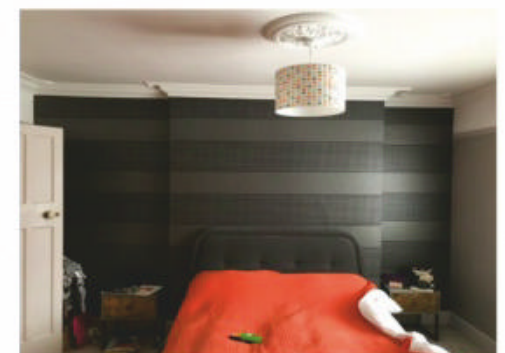
"The level of involvement a designer has varies with each project so most will offer a flexible design service to accommodate these needs," begins Fiona Duke of Essex-based Fiona Duke Interiors and one of the founding members of Interior Design Collective (www.interiordesigncollective.co.uk), a community of 27 independent designers all out to make interior design more accessible, along with Karen Knox, of Making Spaces. "Some people may simply need a little assistance

A BEDROOM TRANSFORMED
In this scheme, by Fiona Duke Interiors (www.fionadukeinteriors.com), the aim was to bring the room in keeping with the rest

of the home. It had been stripped of its original features (below), so those that remained were highlighted. Shutters at the windows were replaced and a bold wallpaper introduced.



NATASHA BRINSMEAD is *Homebuilding and Renovating's* Associate Editor. She's just finished renovating and extending an old cottage



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or guidance regarding a small redecoration project, while others may need a far more complex package which will involve managing a project from design to completion.

“Some clients may be looking for more of an ‘advisory service’ which could focus on anything from reviewing initial architect plans to giving a few helpful pointers on how to make a room work better in terms of layout and design,” explains Fiona. “These discussions will help the client take their first steps to developing a concept design which will provide the starting foundations for the overall vision of a scheme.

“Once a concept design is chosen, clients often hire an interior designer to develop this into a complete design – design detailing, sourcing and final specification – providing them with all the information to start their project. This could include measured drawings such as room layouts, floorplans and elevations, detailed visuals, finishes and samples for presentation, detailed itemisations of sourced items and design of any bespoke items needed for the project.

“From this point, clients can facilitate and implement the designs themselves, or they hire the interior designer to manage this for them,” Fiona adds.

“The client can hire the interior designer to coordinate the implementation of the design and manage the project to help it run smoothly. This requires regular site visits and meetings with the chosen contractor and other specialists.”

How much does an interior designer cost?

Unfortunately there is no fixed

How do I find an interior designer?

There are several factors to take into consideration when selecting an interior designer for your project. As with most things, nothing beats a trusted personal recommendation — particularly if you are able to visit completed projects. However, if the recommendation comes from someone with wildly different tastes to you, it may be best to think twice — although a good interior designer should be able to tailor their designs depending on their clients’ wishes. Ask to see their portfolio of work if you cannot visit their projects in person.

You should also bear in mind location — if you can find a local interior designer who ticks all the boxes all the better. Not only will they be easily on hand should you need them in a hurry, but it is likely they will have built up a wealth of local suppliers and contacts to call on or recommend, and will understand the market in your area.

Finally, meet with several designers and see which one you have most of a rapport with before making your final decision. An initial consultation should give you a clear idea of how they work, how they view your budget and whether you are generally on the same wavelength.

answer to this as individual designers will have their own set of fees. Some will work for no less than a set amount, while others are happy to tailor their services.

A set fee may be offered, but if a project overruns, you may still be charged extra. Hourly fees are useful if you just plan on asking a designer for a couple of hours’ of advice or consultation or if you want to monitor the spend on a project as this can be invoiced more regularly than set fees where payment or partial payment is often required upfront.

According to www.designforme.com, a website that offers a service matching homeowners to architects and designers based on their projects and budgets, interior designers’ fees are commonly calculated as a percentage of your overall project budget — usually 10%. This will vary depending on the level of service you require for your

project, where in the country you are and the experience and size of the design practice.

“This is always a tricky one to answer and always a hot topic of discussion,” adds Fiona Duke. “People have carried out various research on this subject and still don’t have all the answers.

“Each designer has their own way of costing for a project so it is up to the client to discuss this with them at the very early stages.

“Most designers, however, will always stress that this is an ‘estimated’ fee. This is because projects can often overrun or the scope of a project can change mid-way through so the designer may be involved in a project for a longer period than was initially agreed and work levels may therefore increase.

“Sometimes a client may not know how much their proposed works are going to cost or have a clear idea regarding the scope of the project. Therefore it is very



I’ve not been involved in one project yet where I’ve not tweaked the architect’s plans a little in order to enhance and improve the internal layout

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difficult to work out a set fee at this early stage.”

When should you bring in an interior designer?

It is often (wrongly) assumed that an interior designer will not be needed until the latter stages, once the building work is complete and all that is left is for the final flourishes to be made. But by this stage it is often too late.

“I actively encourage those about to undertake a project to hire an interior designer before the build begins,” explains Karen Knox of Making Spaces. “I’ve not been involved in one project yet where I’ve not tweaked the architect’s plans a little in order to enhance and improve the internal layout. Every time I’ve been asked to offer interior design advice or a full concept design service after the build, we’ve needed to undo several aspects of works in order to achieve the best possible design. More often than not, the TV aerial is in the wrong place, radiators are on the wrong wall, a door opens into the room in such a way that ruins the flow.”

A good interior designer will ensure spaces are designed in such a way that everything from natural light and ceiling heights, to furniture and electrics are planned to perfection — therefore early involvement is crucial.

“If you’re spending £100k on a build but don’t see spending at least 1% of that on an interior design consultation, that’s absolutely fine, but that £1,000 might save you another £5,000 in the long run. It’s not about cost, it’s about value,” explains Karen. “Clients I’ve worked with often comment on how much money I’ve saved them in the long run by not having to undo mistakes.

“Another really good reason to speak to an interior designer before undertaking a big build is that you might not actually need to do that build after all. A lot of people already have the space they need to get their dream home — it’s just poorly laid out. Re-jigging an existing internal layout could save you thousands.”

How do you get the most from an interior designer?

It is one thing deciding to hire an interior designer but quite another to ensure that you are both on the same page. Be clear about your budget, your brief and how you want the partnership to work from the outset.

“I’m often asked by clients in initial consultations ‘what would you do in here?’ And I can answer that of course, but that’s not the right question,” begins Karen Knox. “My job is to answer a different question: ‘What could we do in here?’ It’s then for the designer to tease and find out exactly what they think you want.

“I like to see all of a person’s home so I can ensure the new project is in keeping. Encouraging clients to incorporate pieces of their existing furniture, lighting, artwork, etc., into a new scheme can make a room feel authentic. Rooms where everything is new, completely ‘box fresh’ often have an air of show-home about them, something I like to avoid.

“The interior designer is there to take all the information presented to them, verbally and non verbally (body language, family dynamic, lifestyle) and present back a cohesive scheme that solves design problems whilst encompassing the loves of the client and interiors expertise of the designer.



“The initial concept is sometimes agreed upon after the initial presentation, but there’s normally a second phase where small tweaks and changes are made based on the client’s feedback. Reaching the final design concept is a process the client and designer work through together — it’s all about clear communication and compromise, but it also needs to include an aspect of challenge. The designer is there to gently push the client towards something more than they would normally go for. It’s our job to ensure your spaces reflect you and your family, while stretching the boundaries of what you thought was achievable.

“Great design doesn’t just come from a single decision, it comes from a series of smaller, often seemingly ‘unimportant’ decisions; each and every one impacts on how successful a project is. Success should be based on both the function and form of a completed space,” Karen Knox concludes. **H**

OUTSIDE THE BOX
Interior Designer Karen Knox of Leeds-based Making Spaces (www.making-spaces.net), chose to sacrifice a box room in her own project in order to create her dream staircase up to the newly converted second floor. Doing this has meant she was able to create a light, bright office space on the landing.



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The self-build

WORDS Alison Wall PHOTOGRAPHY Matthew Smith Architectural Photography

The Daily Telegraph
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contemporary
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PROJECT NOTES

HOMEOWNER Lucy Cook

PROJECT Contemporary self-build

LOCATION Ely, Cambridgeshire

SIZE 152m²

CONSTRUCTION SYSTEM

Prefabricated timber frame

BUILD COST £434,368

CURRENT VALUE £700,000 (estimated)

If there's one thing that sets a successful self-builder apart, it's vision — and a willingness to think long-term. Step forward Lucy Cook, an accountant with a tech start-up in Cambridge, who built this striking home next to her former home in Ely for herself and adult son Ronan. “I made a decision not to build as low cost as possible just to maximise returns,” she says. “I wanted to build a lovely house to live in for the rest of my life.”

Designed by Mole Architects, the two-storey detached house, at 152m², is relatively modest in size, but the design concept is anything but — making it a worthy winner of the Daily Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards' Best Contemporary-Style Self-build category in 2018.

“The house has certainly created a lot of interest as local drivers slow down to look at the house,” Lucy comments.

First, there's the overall profile: the slim vertical lines and a steeply pitched gable roof are both designed to suggest the soaring lines and lead-covered roof of nearby Ely cathedral. And then there's the highly decorative white brickwork and tiled porch of the front elevation, a modern take on the home's Edwardian neighbours. Typically, such early 20th-century homes have a showy front elevation, with plainer (and cheaper) flank wall elevations hidden from public view. The vertical

DECORATIVE DETAILING
Bricks (supplied by Bea Clay Solutions) have been laid at 90°, creating a striking aesthetic. The use of brickwork draws on the vernacular, but provides this house with its own contemporary identity. The front elevation also incorporates coloured encaustic tiles, defining the entrance space.

saw-tooth pattern of the brickwork was another idea borrowed locally, this time from the Norman stone columns at the entrance of Ely cathedral.

Inspiration for the build

Surprisingly, for such an imaginative façade, these are standard bricks, cut where necessary on site. Finding someone to take on the brickwork was key: luckily a local bricklayer (known by all as ‘Jumbo’) rose to the challenge, despite never having done anything similar before. “I came down and worked on setting out the first few rows together before he took on the task,” remembers architect Hugh Craft, a member of the design team at Mole Architects.

Executing the intricate patterning was one challenge. Finding the right colour for the bricks was another. The plan was to find a creamy white hue that would complement the local Cambridge white bricks of the Edwardian houses on either side. The first choice was rejected as it was too pink; then a brick factory in Spain came up trumps.

Beneath the distinctive façade, the home conforms to more conventional standards of modern construction, with a prefabricated timber frame and dense concrete blockwork (for extra thermal mass). The building contractors, Salmon Brothers, worked closely with the architects, with Lucy taking a hands-on role as client. “I felt very involved, but



PARED-BACK INTERIOR
The house utilises pale ash interior cladding and flooring from WOODlife, making the spaces feel fresh and contemporary. The workspace under the solid ash staircase (right) was Lucy's idea.







without the stress,” she says. “The architects had drawn up really detailed plans, so we didn’t have many changes — I’d watched plenty of disasters on *Grand Designs* and realised that you shouldn’t change things halfway through!”

The builders did come up with several interesting additions, though, including a motion sensor for the light in the downstairs cloakroom instead of a light switch inside, and a push-button door leading into the pantry. Even the home’s cat flap found its way onto the project’s fortnightly on-site meeting; a standard-sized cat flap was transformed into a generous aluminium ‘cat tunnel’, located under the stairs, complete with a bit of carpet off-cut to clean muddy paws as the cats come home.

One of Lucy’s main aims was to create a light, bright home with plenty of open-plan spaces for entertaining family and friends (a snug at the front of the house provides a useful retreat). “I’ve lived in five or six different houses and knew that I wanted light and flow — no pinch points or little corridors,” she says.

A rooflight on the south side of the house, set above the dining area and staircase, brings light deep into the interior while working with planning restrictions that meant that only clerestory windows were allowed on the side elevations.

THE SNUG

A TV room at the front of the house provides a private space away from the more open-plan kitchen/dining/living space at the rear of the house.

“

I wanted to build a lovely house to live in for the rest of my life

Designing for efficiency

Sustainability was also high on the agenda. The large south-facing windows ensure good solar gain, which is absorbed by the dark stone floor inside, while the internal blockwork walls on the ground floor improve the thermal stability of the house throughout the year. To avoid overheating, solar shading sits above the large glazed areas to the garden, while a mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) system ensures good all-year round ventilation with negligible heat loss.

Even the use of lime mortar for the brickwork — chosen mainly for its aesthetic qualities — means that there were less CO₂ emissions during manufacture than would be the case with cement-based mortars. It also means that the bricks can be re-used at a later date (those bonded with cement can only be used for hardcore), meaning the house’s environmental impact is reduced in the grander scheme.

Visiting the house on a hot summer’s day, the thermal comfort levels are evident. But what is it like to live in, long-term? “The running costs are about half what they were in my old house, and the air temperature is very constant, with no hot or cold spots,” says Lucy. “And the experience of living here is so easy — everything just flows. I feel so uplifted living here; it is a very relaxing space to live in.” **H**



KITCHEN DESIGN

Lucy chose the teal green for the kitchen island base (Tomas Kitchen Living) with its curved profile; the worktop is Silestone. "The kitchen designer was really pleased that I'd chosen the green as most people chose a pastel colour," she says. "I'd also given Mole Architects a detailed list of all my storage needs, such as the number of pan drawers I needed — I'd gone through a major decluttering before I moved so I didn't need that much storage."

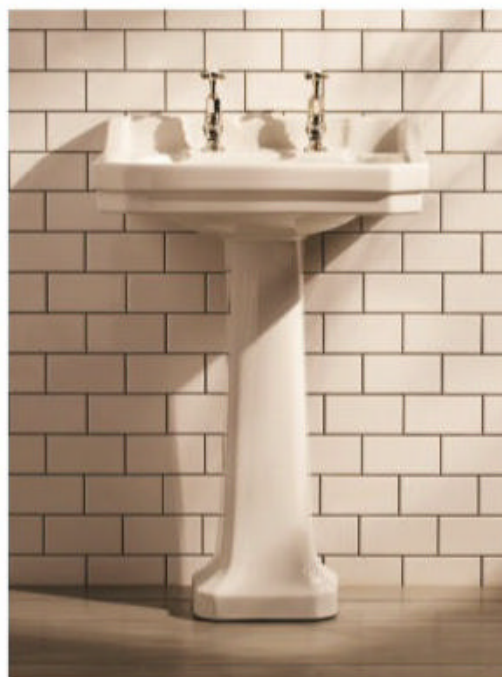
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MODERN GLAZING

Narrow vertical and horizontal glazing features throughout the house, providing glimpses of the world outside and flooding the interior spaces with light. The composite VELFAC 200 windows have been finished internally with a clear lacquer, in order to complement the ash cladding and other timber finishes.

VAULTED CEILING

The second storey spaces benefit from vaulted ceilings (right) with exposed beams that provide a modern character to the minimalist design scheme.



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THE FLOORPLAN

The ground floor of the house is, in the majority, open plan, with the dining, kitchen and main living areas positioned at the back of the house with large sliding doors opening onto the garden. A more private snug area sits at the front. The first floor harbours a family bathroom and three double bedrooms, one with an en suite.



GROUND FLOOR

- | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| 1 Living | 3 Dining | 5 Lobby | 7 Utility |
| 2 Kitchen | 4 TV room | 6 WC | |



FIRST FLOOR

- | | | |
|------------------|------------|------------|
| 1 Master bedroom | 2 En suite | 4 Bedroom |
| | 3 Bedroom | 5 Bathroom |

PROJECT TIMELINE

PLANNING APPROVED	Feb 2016
START ON SITE	Jan 2017
PRACTICAL COMPLETION	Oct 2017

SELECTED COSTS

ARCHITECTS' FEES	£52,823
GROUNDWORKS	£28,082
FRAME	£18,000
WINDOWS	£7,128
DOORS	£13,273
PRECAST WINDOW SURROUNDS	£5,742
BRISE SOLEIL	£5,101
MECHANICAL INSTALLATIONS	£38,515
ELECTRICAL INSTALLATIONS	£9,101
KITCHEN	£34,365
STAIRS	£7,477
BATHROOM FITTINGS	£3,994

SUPPLIERS

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www.molearchitects.co.uk
BUILDING CONTRACTOR Salmons Bros:
www.salmonsbros.co.uk
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20 ways to save money on your build project

Want a stress-free build? From keeping the design simple to shopping around for the best trade prices, we list 20 ways to help ensure your build costs stay on track

1 DECIDE YOUR BUDGET FROM THE OUTSET

“Determine your budget early on. Your architect should have years of experience designing and building projects to a budget so take advantage of this,” says Robert Bednar of Research + Design.

2 KEEP IT SIMPLE

If you have decided you would like to extend or build your home from scratch, a great way to minimise your budget is to stick to a simple configuration. A rectangle with a pitched roof (see right) can work out cheaper than a complex design that requires bespoke fittings and increases labour costs. As architectural designer Charlie Luxton says: “Every junction, corner or valley increases cost and time.”

Also try to use off-the-shelf products or those that are readily available. Any products that have to be made to order will naturally increase the final costs. Designing in standard-size doors and windows, for instance, can cut costs.



4 CAN YOU CONVERT OR REMODEL?

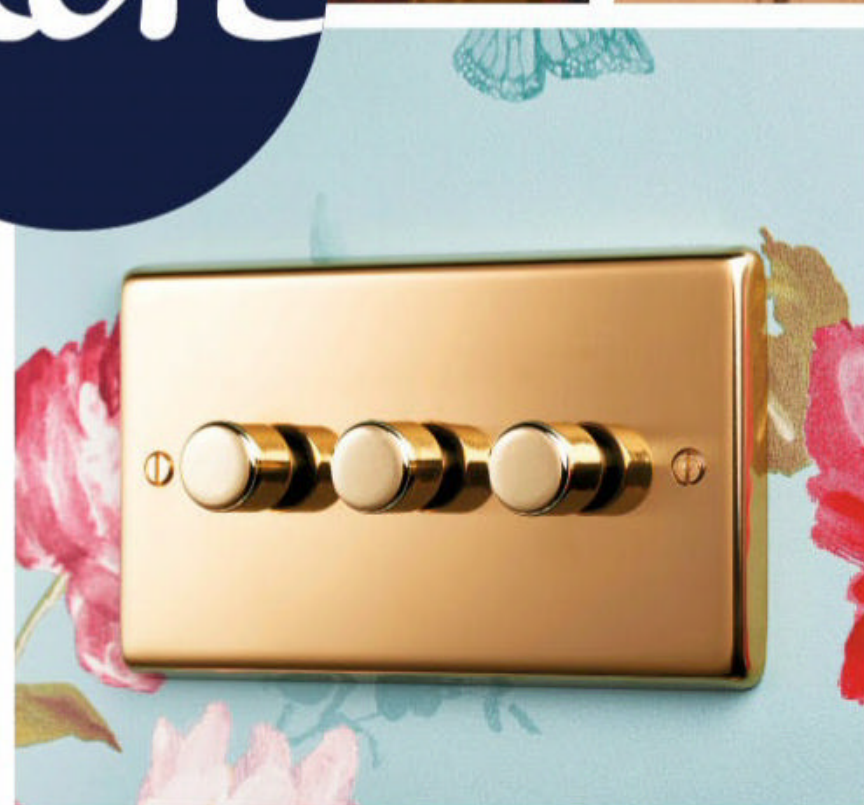
A sure-fire way of making the most of your budget is asking yourself if extending is the right choice for your needs. Although it is tempting to think you need an all-new living space, is there scope to convert the seldom-used garage or loft space in your existing home, for instance, instead? Both can provide extra living or utility space for a fraction of the cost.

Remodelling usually overcomes most negative aspects of a house's layout, from a minuscule kitchen, a ground floor bathroom or inadequate bedroom sizes. In some ways this requires a little more imagination, but postwar houses and Victorian terraces lend themselves nicely to being re-jigged to work for modern living.

Be sure to also take into consideration which project will add most value by researching ceiling prices of the road you live on and making sure the cost of building an extension or knocking down and rebuilding is worth it.

3 DON'T OVERLOOK THE HIDDEN COSTS

Get familiar with the often overlooked fees involved with building projects to avoid any nasty surprises later on. For example, when putting together your budget, remember to include professional fees for surveyors, architects and engineers, as well as those for planning and building control, not forgetting fees for arranging funding and insurance. These costs should be laid out next to your labour and material costs to ensure that you don't realise halfway through the planning stages that your expectations are unachievable.



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5 RE-USE, RECYCLE AND RE-PURPOSE

If you are renovating, it makes sense for you to re-use as many of the existing materials as you can — bricks, original floor tiles, even roof tiles that remain in good condition can all be recycled. Old wooden floors can be brought back to life and even quite dated kitchens may be concealing unit carcasses in sound, reusable condition.

Not only will re-using existing materials save you money, but in the case of old houses, it can also ensure that the alterations you make don't impact upon the intrinsic character.

There are also bargains to be had at salvage yards and charity shops — from old troughs and buckets that make perfect basins (below, right) to mix-match seating you can upcycle yourself.

Not only will this route save you money, but it is also a great way to do your bit for the environment.

6 SELL WHAT YOU DON'T NEED

If you can't re-use or recycle existing materials like door furniture, doors or kitchen units, sell them on to top up your project budget, or advertise them for free on a site such as Freecycle. Either way, your skip will not become jam-packed with large items — reducing skip usage means lower skip hire costs, too.

Really looking to trim costs? As a private householder, don't forget that you can use your council recycling centre for free (which can be really cost-effective if it's located nearby). Although do be careful if you're visiting in a van or with a trailer, as you'll likely require a permit.

7 KITCHENS: MIX BASIC WITH LUXURY

It's definitely possible to create a kitchen that looks high-end but without the hefty price tag. To reduce the cost without compromising on style, follow these tips: Go to a smaller local firm for low-cost, high-quality units. Suppliers such as Pineland Furniture will be able to supply units with no chipboard or ply for a kitchen for less than £5,000 — cheaper if you paint them yourself.

Pick out the better ranges at high street names. The mainstream kitchen

suppliers offer impressive ranges. Make the most of (almost-constant) sales or be prepared to negotiate on price and what's included.

Mix basic and luxury fittings. You can pick out standard carcasses from trade outfits and mix them with doors from high-end suppliers, or you could mix standard units from a DIY chain with top-quality handles and worktops.

Alternatively, if you're extending your kitchen and the carcasses are in good order, keep them and pick new doors or update the look by painting them.

8 TOP UP A CONTINGENCY

Every project budget should include a contingency fund. There aren't many builds that run without dipping into the contingency pot for some reason. Whether it's an unforeseen issue with the foundations, a window that gets accidentally broken or bad weather stopping play — it's wise to leave aside 10% of your overall budget.

As your project progresses you might make savings on a few things as you go. But don't go off and spend it just because you've got it. You might be tempted to squeeze an extra square footage out of your design or to change things around with the internal remodel, but be cautious. Pop the extra money into the contingency fund, that way anything that crops up will more likely be covered and you'll stay within budget. Look to spend it once the build is complete!





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9 LIVE ON SITE

For many people living on site in one way or another is the only way to afford a project. Living on site, either within part of a renovation project or in a caravan or static mobile home, can save thousands on rental costs. You might also consider turning an existing outbuilding into temporary accommodation.

Living on site has many benefits other than cost savings — you will be on site to keep an eye on progress and answer questions from your builder or trades, you can ensure the security of building materials and be available to take deliveries.

10 SHOP AROUND FOR THE BEST TRADE PRICE

“It is far easier to go to just one builders’ merchant, but for the cost of a couple of phone calls, it is surprising what savings can be made by shopping around for the best price,” says chartered building surveyor, Jonathan Durndell. **“Also make sure you are asking for trade prices and know what materials cost before purchasing. Merchants may reduce their price if you pull them up on their prices being more than a competitor.”**

“Don’t forget to factor in the delivery costs too: smaller builders’ merchants can often deliver for free and can save you time having to travel around to pick materials up,” Jonathan concludes.

11 WORK WITH COST EXPERTS

“Only work with designers who can demonstrate a thorough knowledge and understanding of costs. It’s all too easy to get carried away with esoteric and grandiose design concepts, which will have a knock-on effect on costs,” says serial self-builder David Snell.

“Yet that doesn’t mean that the self-builder or renovator with budget restraints always has to put up with the boring or mundane designs. There are many ways of achieving that wow-factor without necessarily incurring significant extra costs.”

“What one must avoid is the total disconnect between design and costs that can lead to a whole lot of work, plans and money ending up in the bin. If you suspect that your designer or architect is not paying attention to costs and the budget, then cut loose from them as quickly as possible.”

12 MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR CHOSEN BUILD SYSTEM

“Design your home to maximise the efficiencies of your chosen build system. Using SIPs (structural insulated panels) as an example, the panels are 1.2m, so if you lay out your house on a 1.2m grid you won’t be cutting the ends of a panel. Every process carried out in a factory has a cost, so try and eliminate waste and unnecessary cuts!” advises architect Allan Corfield of AC Architects.





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13 USE YOUR DIY SKILLS

While you might not consider yourself a DIY expert, if you want to keep your costs down, now is most definitely the time to expand your skill set. Individual projects can be split into three groups: beginner, intermediate and advanced.

Beginner jobs might include decoration, such as painting, hanging curtains, some tiling jobs and small areas of plasterboarding, for example.

Intermediate includes tasks such as laying engineered flooring, fitting kitchen units (not worktops), helping dig foundations and hanging internal doorsets.

Advanced could include some electric and plumbing work, fitting windows and building roof structures.

Some jobs are considered 'best left to the experts', such as plastering, electrical and plumbing work (certainly anything involving gas) which must be completed by a certified 'competent person', carpet fitting, intricate joinery. Don't risk losing money on expensive mistakes and only take on what you can realistically cope with.

14 BUY IN BULK

"Taking advantage of any economies of scale that are available to you is a great way of keeping spending on track. Skilfully using the same materials throughout the build – exterior and interior – can be one option. Buying materials such as bricks, roofing materials and interior products such as bathroom tiles and flooring, for instance, in bulk, could afford you a stronger buying position than picking smaller, multiple products," says serial self-builder David Snell.

"If you are able to store the materials securely on site, you can also save some money by having these delivered at the same time, avoiding having to pay for multiple deliveries."



15 WEIGH UP LONG-TERM SAVINGS

When building a new home or undertaking an extensive remodel, the addition of solar panels, heat pumps or smart home tech used to be prohibitively expensive for those building to a tight budget. Now they are real alternatives to more mainstream options in terms of cost.

You will have to consider the initial capital cost, but do factor in how these measures will reduce your monthly living costs once you have moved in to your new house.

16 BECOME A SAVVY SHOPPER

From tiles to kitchen units, you can save a fortune by looking for ex-display items (above); just make sure your order is precise. Another way to save is to use reclaimed materials such as bricks, roof tiles, fire surrounds and bath tubs from private sellers, on the internet or from salvage yards. The bargains are out there.

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17 UNDERSTAND THE IMPLICATIONS OF DESIGN DECISIONS

“Vaulted ceilings can create fantastic open spaces but come at a price. Using scissor trusses as opposed to beams/purlins and loose rafters can be a cost-effective way of achieving a vaulted ceiling,” begins timber frame expert Mike Cruickshank.

“Also instruct your architect or architectural designer to design to ceiling heights that will accommodate standard plasterboard dimensions — typically 2,400/2,700/3,000mm + 5mm. Unnecessary extra costs will result if a ceiling height of, say 2,550mm, is designed, as you’ll be paying for 2,700mm sheets of plasterboard, paying labour costs to cut it down 150mm in length and filling up skips with off-cuts incurring landfill costs. However, if it was designed to be 2,705mm you benefit from an increased ceiling height, no additional labour cost, no need for skips and no landfill costs.”

18 HIRING VS BUYING

One potential way of saving money on a self-build or renovation project is weighing up the costs of hiring equipment vs buying outright. For instance, it can pay to look at the cost of buying/hiring facilities such as site huts and toilets, and equipment such as concrete mixers, mini diggers and tools. “Hire rates are sunk costs and it may make financial sense to buy the equipment up front, use it for the duration of the build and then sell it on afterwards,” says serial self-builder David Snell.

“You’ll often be able to recoup most of your money, and even if you end up making a small loss, it may still work out being less than you would have paid in hire costs. Of course, this requires more initial expenditure, but it can add up to sizable savings when you come to sell the equipment.



19 LEARN A NEW SKILL

“DIY can be a great way of reducing build costs. We have some clients who have really embraced self-build and gone to extreme measures to get the home they want. One client wanted a standing seam metal roof, but couldn’t afford one. So, he went on an approved installer course (free, if you buy their fitting tools) and then fitted his own metal roof — which, as he was a certified installer, came with a 20-year guarantee,” says architect Allan Corfield.

20 PLAN AHEAD

Control costs by paying early attention to the finer details — such as how many switches and sockets you need and where they will be positioned — and planning ahead. If you can design the interior scheme early on you’ll save money on the cost of making alterations or snap decisions later down the line. **H**

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5 things to do before buying at auction

Property auctions offer a great kind of market-value transparency for a plot hunter that traditional private tender processes don't, but make sure you know what you're getting yourself into before you bid

1 Do your homework

Register your particular interests with auction houses outside of the regular auction cycle: they will know about plots becoming available before they go into the auction and being kept in the loop may be essential in securing your plot.

There may also be an opportunity to make an offer on a plot or property in auction houses' catalogues; while some may not accept pre-sale bids, others might. Showing you can complete quickly could work in your favour, too.

2 Don't get carried away

Set a limit before you attend an auction as it is easy to get swept up in the moment. Establish a price you're happy to pay by valuing the plot or renovation project: work out an estimated end value for the completed project, subtract estimated build costs and add an extra 10-20% for contingencies.

However, if the bidding is creeping up, don't lose your plot for a few hundred pounds — try topping it by one last throw of the dice, doubling the increment rise.

4 Read the legal documents

At the viewing stage, the auction house will be able to provide a copy of the legal documents. Get solicitors to read through in order to help you understand any potential pitfalls (e.g. restrictive covenants) and explore as many of the issues (access, services, rights of way, title) as possible in the time preceding the auction. It's a good idea to undertake a survey, and/or ask a local builder to join you on a viewing if you're really keen on a project to assess the condition. While a survey will inevitably cost you money before securing a property, it will throw up any unforeseens in advance.



3 Arrange funding in advance

It's a good idea to get all your funds lined up prior to the property auction. The time between the announcement of the auction to the sale night is usually four to six weeks. If you are successful with your bid, you'll be expected to pay 10% as a deposit on the day, and the remaining amount within 28 days, so there's no time to lose and it can pay to ensure finance (via a mortgage, savings, etc.) are available. (Remember to take along a form of photo ID.)

5 Go to a few local auctions

Get to grips with the pace and process by attending a few 'practice runs' at local auctions. Sometimes they are easy to follow, however the delivery of an auction can be stylised or very fast causing the time to fly by in a blur. Be sure you don't miss out and find your feet before you attend one containing anything you might be interested in. 

**KEN DIJSMAN**

Ken, a former planning officer, is a planning consultant and owner of Dijkman Planning LLP. He is also the author of *The Planning Game*

PLANNING PERMISSION: The ultimate guide to success

The planning process can be an onerous affair so the more you know about it, the better equipped you'll be, says planning consultant Ken Dijkman, who shares his top tips here

Planning permission is the key that unlocks a self-build project. It turns the corner of a field into a building plot or a large garden into a tax-free, mortgage-paying opportunity to build your own home. In the south-east of England, an acre of agricultural land is worth about £15,000, but with planning permission for residential development, after all costs are deducted, it's worth over £500,000.

Plots are so scarce and residential land is so valuable because getting planning permission is not easy. Demand for building plots massively outstrips supply in most of the UK and land prices reflect this. With the right attitude and understanding, and bit of luck, you can get planning permission and you can build your own home.

Here, we set out nine key points which could help you unlock potential in a plot, or major renovation/extension opportunity.

1. Be realistic about the cost and time involved

You may want to refurbish a house or build a new one, but quite apart from buying the land, getting planning permission is not cheap and it can quite easily take over a year between submitting the application and starting on site. Architects' and designers' fees can vary enormously. You

may need to make more than one planning application in order to reach agreement with the council and make revisions to your plans accordingly, too. A minimum budget of around £20,000 (including architects' plans and specialist reports) is probably realistic for getting planning permission, and setting aside 18 months for the process should give you enough time.

2. Know when to take advice

I encounter a lot of optimists and a lot of people who know their own mind and are clear about what they want. All key attributes of being successful perhaps, but sometimes being positive is not enough — you may have to settle for slightly less than you hoped for. You may need to give up and start again with a different site or a different design. Planning consultants, architectural designers and builders have very different skill sets and can be quite ignorant of each other's line of work. As a client outside of the industry you will know less than they do and it's important to recognise the value of the advice given by experienced individuals who, let's face it, you will be paying for the privilege of using.

3. Be flexible

You want to build a house or refurbish an existing one — and the good news is that there are loads of different ways of dealing with any one site. Planning is inherently flexible, because there are numerous different ways of developing a parcel of land and all kinds of schemes can get permission. And remember, one planning permission does not supersede another. If you have a property with five different planning permissions, it's up to you which one you implement. In some cases, it will be possible to implement parts of two separate permissions on the one piece of land. For example, the garage granted under one consent, and the new house granted under another. This allows some creative thinking, but you also need to be prepared to negotiate and compromise; there is rarely one right answer for you or the planners.



4. Be diplomatic

Like it or not, when you build things, you risk upsetting people. They may not have rational grounds to be upset but it won't stop them. People get very emotional about changes that they fear will affect their home, their view or their property value. Or even just changes made to the street they live on. So it pays to be polite, to talk to neighbours and to show them the plans. If you can accommodate minor changes without undermining your goals then it might be worth doing.

I'm not suggesting meekly bending over backwards to accommodate different people's unreasonable (and often contradictory) demands, but a little bit of diplomacy can sometimes take the sting out of local objections or avoid them entirely. After all, if you're going to live in a new area, it would be better to get on with your neighbours from the outset.

5. Look to the local area

When you look around the area you live in you will see a huge diversity: different extensions and alterations to existing houses, and infill plots and new dwellings. If you go to any local authority website and search their planning pages, there is usually an interactive map which shows you how many applications have been made in that area over the past 10 or more years. You will be amazed at just how many planning applications have been made. It's worth genning up on what has been achieved (and what has been rejected) in the local area before designing your home.

6. Be patient

Particularly when it comes to dealing with local planning authorities and planning officers. The planning officer dealing with your application may be under extreme pressure, dealing with large numbers of different proposals.

They usually officially work 37 hours a week, which may sound like a comfortable working week, except planning officers often don't have the physical time to deal with the sheer number of applications on their desk. This means many work long hours that they don't necessarily get paid for, and get highly stressed as a result, and of course get no additional reward related to what they achieve.

Planning officers are also stuck between often fairly desperate applicants, angry neighbours, interfering parish and town councils, and local elected councillors who don't want to be caught in the political crossfire. So pretty much whatever decision a planning officer makes, they are going to upset somebody. If they try and negotiate improvements to a scheme they're going to upset neighbours and cause delay; if they don't negotiate they may be seen as unreasonable and they create more work through planning appeals. Therefore, when you're dealing with the planning officer, it pays to appreciate the difficulty of their role — try not to be too critical of them when timescales extend, decisions are delayed or their line manager pulls the rug from underneath them and they end up having to reverse the advice they gave you only yesterday.

BE GOOD NEIGHBOURS

Darren and Lucy Henderson bought a brownfield site in Bournemouth and had grand plans to develop the plot into a family home. The planners insisted that the house be no higher than single storey so Darren decided to build down instead of up creating a basement below ground. The work involved in excavating a site can be full-on, noisy and disruptive to the surrounding neighbours. "People don't normally accept change well, but they're far more accommodating when you talk to them and let them know what's happening," explains Darren. So the Hendersons made a conscious effort to keep in regular contact with their neighbours to appease any unease during the build.



WARRANTY



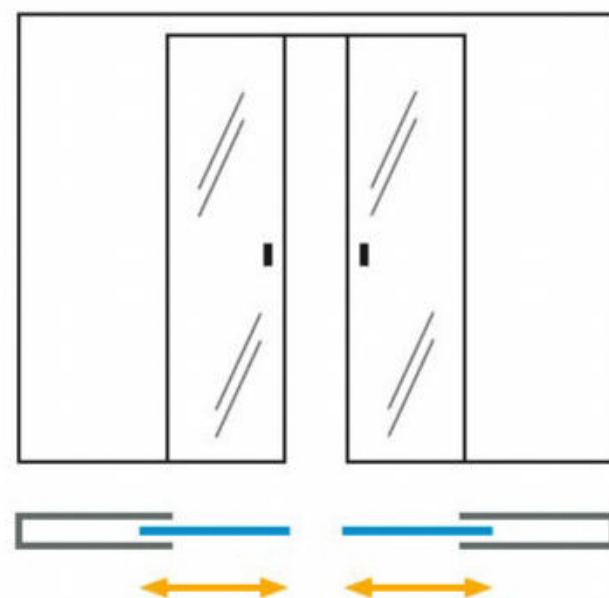
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7. Stand your ground

I would always urge people to avoid confrontation, but that does not mean you just give in when faced with opposition to a planning application or if you meet resistance to a particular design. You will probably spend hundreds of hours coming to the design solution for the house you want to build. The planning officers, neighbours or local councillors will look at your proposals for a comparatively short length of time and may feel quite confident in requesting major changes or significant redesigns that could fundamentally spoil what you're trying to achieve. Sometimes these requests are not justified in planning terms and are just a knee-jerk reaction to unreasonable neighbours, made because of their own personal opinions or because of a misunderstanding about the scheme.

I find that face-to-face meetings are helpful in thrashing out the justification for objections. Requests for changes should be based on planning policies and they should be rational and consistent with other recent decisions in the area. To resist major surgery being imposed on your scheme and to seek an explanation for what is being required can often limit the scale of changes, and if it doesn't, at least you tried.

8. Get permission

This sounds blindingly obvious but you'd be surprised how often people do not prioritise this. This goal really goes together with being flexible and knowing when to take advice. If what you really want cannot be achieved but 80% of it can, then just get the planning permission. You will always be in a much stronger position if you have a planning consent.

Once you have a permission you can apply to amend it, to expand it, to change it, all before you actually build anything. Many building plots are sold with planning

permissions and the first thing the buyer does is submit an alternative scheme. So, if you're struggling to get permission for two houses on a plot, get permission for one. Then try again. When a local authority is confronted with a planning application, they must compare what you want with what you've already got. If there isn't a planning problem, they're duty-bound to grant permission.

9. Appeals are a last resort...

And one that may well be necessary if you are advised that your chances of success are high and you can afford the time and money to achieve your goal. Be aware that planning appeal decisions are the litmus test of the planning system and they are read very closely by planning officers; they set the goalpost for similar proposals.

So, if you win an appeal that's great, but if you lose, the appeal inspector may make comments that you will bitterly regret and that may undermine the development of land or property for the foreseeable future. So, perhaps once you have achieved 80% of what you want, submit an application then go to appeal on the final 20% of the development. Then if you don't win you still have a fallback position, and if you do it was worth it. **H**



CHOOSE PROFESSIONALS WHO KNOW THE AREA

When Sheryl and Andrew Wilson bought their house, it came with an adjoining redundant water tower, which had been converted by a previous owner. But the space was damp and dingy and in a bad state of repair. It wasn't until they spoke to architectural practice PAD Studio six years later (originally about adding a new porch to their house) that conversations about renovating the tower ensued. Talking to and involving local architects so early on helped the Wilsons establish a clear strategy for making the tower watertight and introducing more natural light. The architects from PAD Studio knew the sensitive nature of planning in the New Forest, where the house and tower reside, which helped them propose solutions that passed planning.

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Jargon buster

Overwhelmed or confused by construction or architectural vocab? Don't fear — we're here to help decode the building jargon

SIDE RETURN EXTENSION

One of the most common domestic building projects to terraced or semi-detached homes, a side return extension is a small addition to the side of an existing property, typically filling in the narrow space that runs alongside the rear of the house.

DOT AND DAB

A method of finishing interior walls, typically used by housebuilders, dot and dab involves adhering sheets of plasterboard to brick or blockwork walls. Benefits include a reduced risk of hairline cracking (as compared with wet plaster), but this method can make fixing heavy items such as shelving and radiators more difficult, unless superior strength plasterboards are used.



INSULATED CONCRETE FORMWORK (ICF)

This construction method sees formwork, typically made of polystyrene panels or blocks, filled with concrete. The formwork is made in a factory and installed on site, with the concrete also poured on site. As the formwork is left in place, it acts as an insulative layer and offers great thermal performance.



POCKET DOORS

Pocket doors are a great solution for minimalist interiors and/or smaller rooms where space is a premium. They glide into a cavity built into the adjacent wall. In fact, many pocket doors are housed in steel-framed casing that takes the place of regular studwork. As such, it's important to plan for pocket doors before building your internal walls.

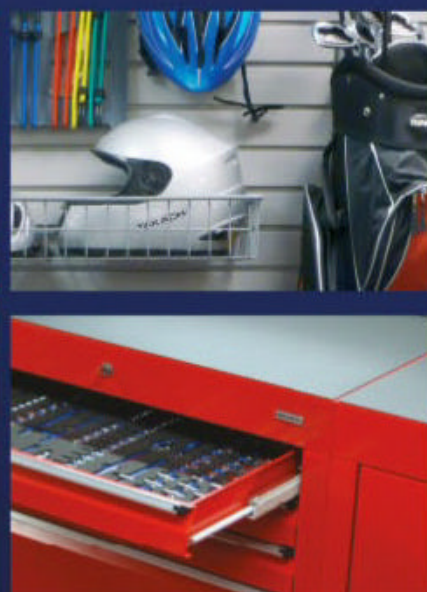
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COASTAL MAGIC

This contemporary house in Lyme Regis makes the most of the stunning coastal views



OUTDOOR LIVING
The outdoor spaces were as important as the interiors for the owners of this Baufritz home on the Dorset coast.

“The family already knew what they wanted in terms of the interior layout. What was as important to them was the outside spaces, and how the pool and gardens related to the inside of the house,” says architect Anthony Cooper. “We often speak about how a house relates to the outside, here they were given equal billing. The stunning views to the south look down the valley to Uplyme and the sea beyond.”

The drive meanders through the trees and then passes by the timber-clad element of the house to reveal the white rendered home beyond. The intention was to make the house still feel relatively modest up to this point.

Visitors then walk down towards the entrance. They are confronted by a light and airy entrance with glimpses of the incredible views. The centre of the house accommodates the lobby and staircase. Living space is on the ground floor and sleeping on the floor above. Using the slope of the land, there is a third basement level which provides access to the garden, pool, cinema rooms, gym and sauna.

The living area is a large space and the use of colour makes it warm and inviting. The location of the kitchen at the entrance is perfect, with the ‘hidden’ spaces of the utility room, home office and pantry not obvious.

“Our favourite room is the kitchen dining area. It’s where family time is spent, where we spend time with our friends, it’s where we feel most at home,” say the owners of this Baufritz home.

For simplicity the building is finished using three materials: timber cladding, render and large areas of glass. The timber-clad element has a sloping roof to reduce the scale on approach, and uses an anthracite-coloured modern clay tile. “The need to build in a traditional method isn’t necessary any more,” say the owners. “A lot of people would ask



us why are we building a house made of wood but when you see it being built it’s incredibly solid, it’s incredibly well-engineered. It took about two and a half days for the house to go up. It was quite amazing to see.”

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MARK STEVENSON
has worked in construction for more than 30 years and is Potton's managing director

How to begin your build on time

Get your timelines clear, and there's a good chance you'll keep your project on track. Mark Stevenson explains how



The only way to guarantee your build starts on time is to have a plan and follow it to the letter, with a big dose of tenacity and lots of determination to get things done. Without enough commitment to follow a coherent and well thought-out plan, your project risks being at the mercy of chance and most probably will get knocked off course and delayed by unexpected issues, as well as frustrating bureaucracy and procrastinating bureaucrats.

The importance of setting a realistic

start date is even more important than you might first think. Start too early and you run the risk of disruption during the build, resulting in additional cost caused by not being ready and able to work efficiently. Pushing back the start may not be the answer either, as costs tend to increase over time and delaying the start too long may risk the planning consent expiring. There's also the problem that unless you have a well-defined objective, the pre-start timeline becomes unmanageable with the absence of focus and purpose for why

Before you start on site...

In this series, I explain how to get ready to start your project. We've already covered what needs to be done after securing planning approval, and setting up a project team. In this issue we focus on managing the project timeline. In future I will look at: financing the build and managing money; legal matters and site investigations;

completing the design and finalising specifications; Building Regs and warranties; choosing the best route to build; setting quality standards; health and safety compliance with CDM; appointing contractors and suppliers; and setting up the building site. These topics will help you understand what's involved in successfully starting your self-build project.



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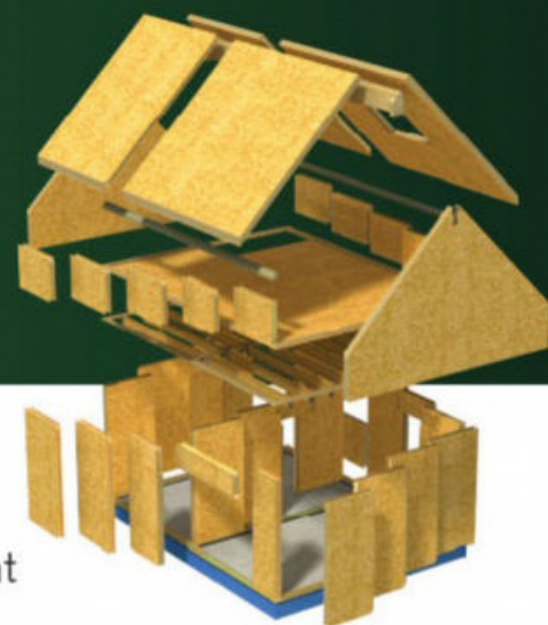
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JARGON BUSTER

CIL (community infrastructure levy) is a fee payable to the local authority when a new dwelling is created — most self-builders are exempt, so long as they follow the right process.



When self-building, money is the oil that must flow appropriately to keep the wheels of industry moving

things need to get done.

Managing the pre-start timeline can prove quite tricky, particularly if you haven't built before. The trouble is there are lots of things to do and there's often 'too many cooks' which, as they say, can spoil the broth!

Generally speaking, my advice in managing the pre-start phase is to get informed, learn to ask the right questions and surround yourself with the right people who share your ambition of getting your project started properly. Here's a few ideas that might also help you to prepare for the start of your project:

● Build the right team

Last month, we looked at how to put together the team that will bring your build to life. Now you have assembled the professionals, they need managing. It's best to start your working relationship by being clear about who's who and what they will do on your project. Don't forget to let the wider team know who has been appointed as this will aid free flowing communications. Managing such a broad team can feel a bit

like herding cats so make sure you have some order to proceedings.

● Find out what needs to be done

Take time to talk with your professional team and ask them what's involved and how long each element will take. If you've appointed the right people, they should be experienced and will be happy to guide you in the right direction.

They will also have a good idea about the best sequence of events and will have a good understanding of what others should also be doing. Time invested 'interviewing' your professional team is invaluable and will ensure your expectations are realistic and specific to your project.

● Be deadline focused

Do ask lots of questions and agree, with clarity, what each person and/or company will do, when they will do it and what needs to be done to enable them to complete their work. It's best to write down what you've agreed (and paid for) as this will form the basis of a coherent pre-start plan.

15 key questions to establish the best date to start your build

- Does the build budget stack up — are the figures realistic and affordable?
- Is finance for the build in place and do you have enough cash to reach the first stage payment?
- When does the planning consent expire? And, are there any pre-start planning conditions to be resolved before work starts on site?
- Has the site investigation identified any site constraints, contamination or underground problems that must be addressed first?
- Is the design complete and is there anything outstanding that affects the initial building work?
- Has Building Regulations' approval been obtained? If so, has building control been notified of the start date?
- What insurance policies are required?
- Has the warranty provider been appointed and have they approved the proposed design?
- When are the initial contractors and suppliers available to start work? What lead-in periods do they require?
- Are there any materials on long delivery periods?
- How should the site be set up and organised?
- Is safe and legal access available?
- What health and safety arrangements are needed — have all the notifications been submitted?
- Are mains services available and can these be brought onto the plot? What about temporary services for site welfare?
- Do you plan to claim CIL exemption — if so, how long will it take to receive confirmation of your exemption?

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Avoiding decisions will lead to indecisiveness which eventually delays projects



By doing this, once you have started, you can keep everyone's focus on what's important and what has been agreed. Remind people of the implications of letting things slip and don't be afraid of holding people to account (in front of their peers if necessary), especially if you find that promises have been broken.

● **Test commitment before starting**

It's quite common that busy people will tell you what you want to hear but the reality of what gets done can be quite different. Never take what's said at face value; always test their commitment to understand if they really intend to do what they've said. It can sometimes be useful to introduce an element of jeopardy to help reinforce why something needs to get done. Explain the consequences of something not getting finished, as most professionals won't want to be seen as the reason for a delay. This can help you identify 'weak links' in your team before the build.

● **Facilitate the conversation**

As the client (and bill payer), you are at the hub of everything that happens, so it's important that you help to keep communications free flowing and share

information when necessary.

Don't sit on emails or dwell on information that requires your comment and approval. Try to be prompt and, if possible, respond to requests immediately while you have the focus and attention of the professional concerned.

● **Make timely decisions**

Avoiding decisions will lead to indecisiveness, which eventually delays projects. If you've been asked for a decision, make it but make sure you are informed and armed with the information necessary to make the right decision that suits you and your build.

● **Don't forget the 'oil'**

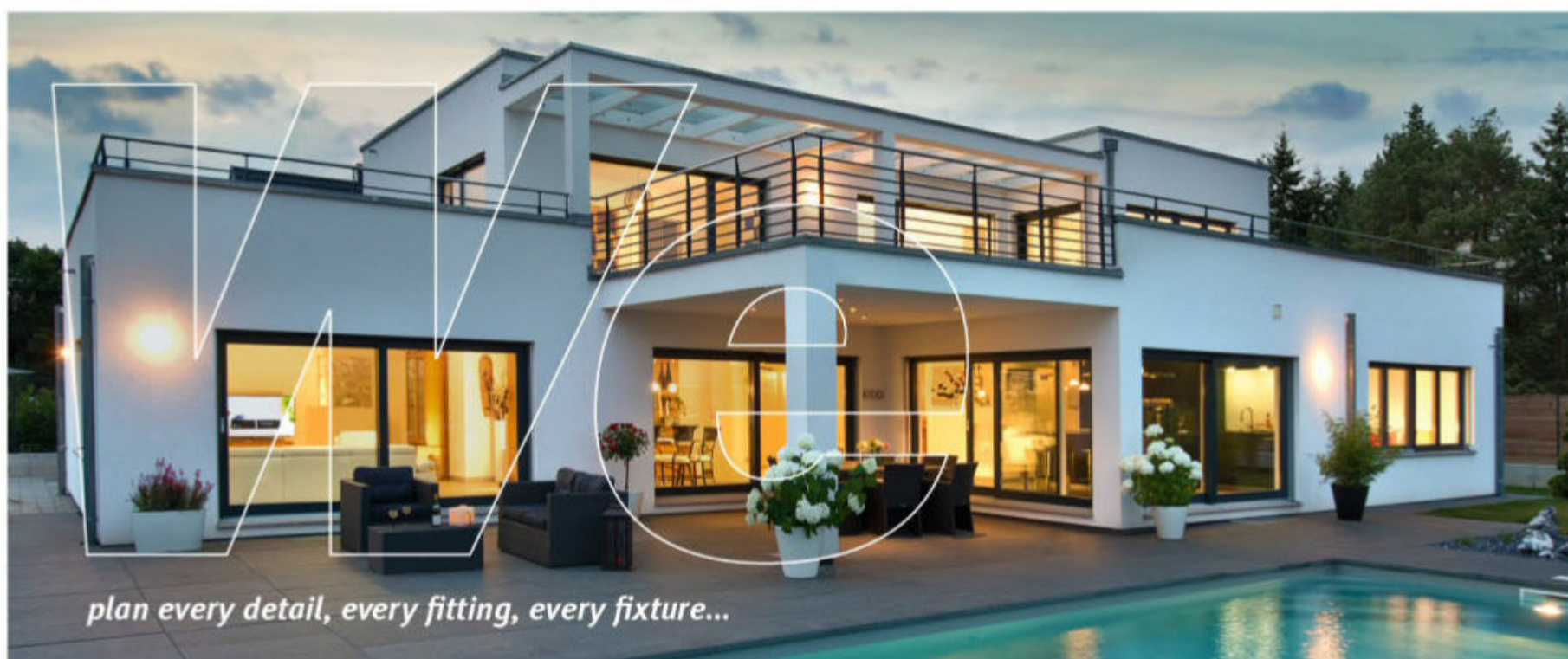
Wheels turn better when oiled — fact. When self-building, money is the oil that must flow appropriately to keep the wheels of industry moving. When it comes to money, it's important not to be naïve — always make sure there is a sufficient 'carrot' to offer motivation and to encourage work to get finished.

This doesn't mean you should withhold money as a threat (a retention), as this will just prove expensive. It's better to break up quotations at the very outset into stage



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EXAMPLE PRE-START PLANNER*



Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions and agree, with clarity, what each organisation will do

payments for work done, as the next stage provides the carrot to maintain momentum.

● Create a pre-start plan

A pre-start programme is simply a chart (an example is provided above) that sets out the tasks that need to be done and works out the best sequence of doing them to enable the project to commence properly. The pre-start programme is a really helpful document as it not only orders your 'to do' list but also provides you with a tool to manage the pre-start phase and monitor the passage of time before your self-build can begin.

It's vitally important that the information contained within the pre-start programme is reliable and accurate. Under no

circumstances should information be 'assumed', as this will lead to inaccuracies and a plan that's flawed, which, if followed, will just lead to disappointment and possibly an abortive start.

Managing the pre-start timeline and ensuring your project starts properly requires more than just a plan — it must be realistic and requires commitment from all involved to work as a team and get things done. Don't forget, plans are 'out of date' the minute they are issued so keep a close eye on how things progress and, if necessary, change your plan to account for problems and unforeseen issues. **H**

Next month: Managing finances

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ANDY STEVENS

Andy is an award-winning builder, member of the FMB and managing director of Eclipse Property Solutions

How to... create a wetroom

Tanking and thorough preparation of walls and floors are key to creating a leak-free new wetroom

Wetrooms of old have a bad reputation. The products available and methods for installing wetrooms have, however, moved on considerably in the last decade or so. Installed in the correct way, a wetroom with that seamless line of tiles without a shower tray can look stunning — and more importantly, be leak-free. Done in the wrong way, not only can the work look substandard but can lead to repair work, potentially costing thousands.

The buzz word is ‘tanking’. This is where a waterproof seal is created over the subfloor and any adjacent walls so that if any water does find its way through, it sits within this layer rather than leaking through to the ceiling and room below. (I will discuss tanking in more detail overleaf.)

However, I must point out that this is a backup option — a belt and braces approach as it were. You should still make sure the work is carried out properly (with walls and subfloors thoroughly prepared) and not simply rely on the fact that there is tanking in place.

In my opinion, you should install the wetroom as if nothing was there behind it:

this means ensuring the work is carried out well. Years ago, tiles were laid on sand and cement with nothing else. I have worked on many houses where these materials are still intact, and in fact are a nightmare to pull up! It goes to prove, if the work is carried out properly then that backup tanking layer really is there as a last resort.

I will now take you through how to create your dream wetroom.

THE RIPOUT

When removing the existing bath/shower suite, all your water outlets should be turned off. Typically there should be valves cut into the pipework that supplies the hot and cold feeds to the sanitaryware. These simply need turning off so that you can remove the items without water going everywhere. However, you will more than likely need to turn the water off to remove the shower valve if it is surface-mounted or chased into the wall.

When the floor covering (tiles, vinyl, etc.) is removed, it is worth closely inspecting the existing subfloor. For suspended floors, this subfloor may be ply, chipboard, OSB or floorboards. The quality of the existing subfloor will determine if it needs replacing. Remember your finished floor – and wetroom – will only be as good as the subfloor beneath it.

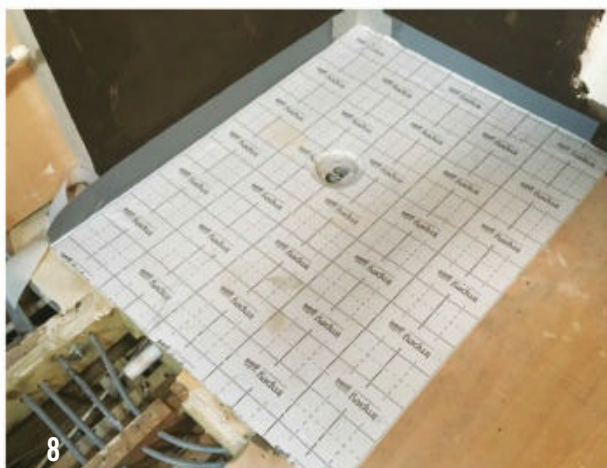
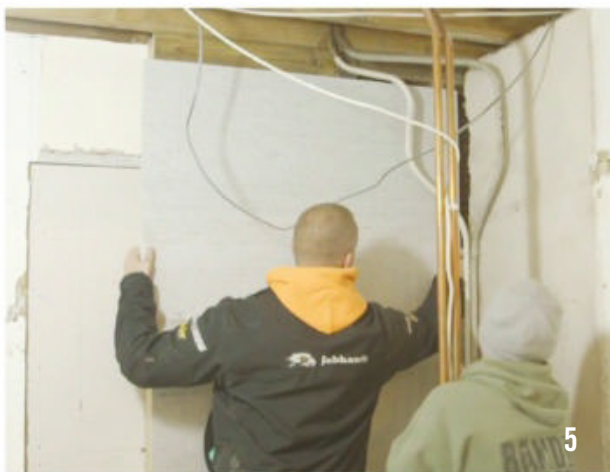
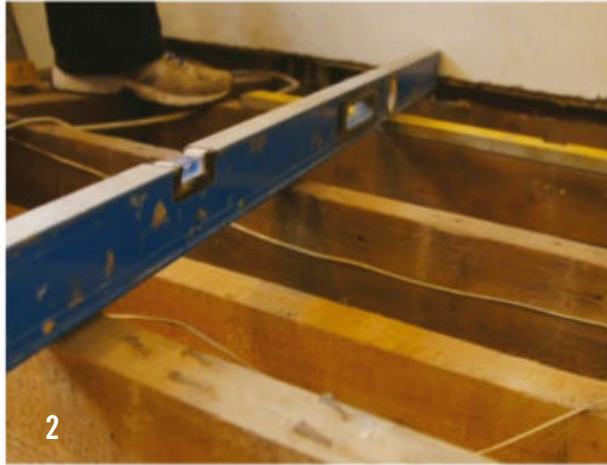
PREPARING THE SUBFLOOR, AND FIRST FIX WORK

One of the most important things when prepping a wetroom is to ensure the floor is level. If you have ripped out the subfloor, you can cut packers/firings or blocks to bring the low spots up to create a level floor. You will then lay your new subfloor on top of this.

If there is any ‘bounce’ in the timber floor you will need to strengthen the floor, either with noggins or doubling up on the floor joists (especially if they are old and thin).

Ideally you should introduce a good quality marine ply on top of the floor joists. However, with the recent weakening of the Pound against the Euro and other factors, you can be looking at £70-£80





STEP BY STEP

1. When the existing bathroom floor is removed, the condition of the subfloor should be assessed — and replaced where it is not fit for purpose.
2. Ensuring the floor is level is key when installing a wetroom. Packers can be used to level out the floor.
3. Noggins can be introduced to help strengthen old floor joists.
4. First fix plumbing and electrics can be undertaken at this stage.
5. The walls may also need to be assessed. Here, a concrete board is installed against new studwalling.
6. A preformed wetroom tray has been installed here — these trays incorporate a fall towards the drainage.
7. Marine ply is abutted against the preformed wetroom tray.
8. Here, the corners and junctures have been taped and a tanking membrane installed.

“

The buzz word is ‘tanking’. This is where a waterproof seal is created over the subfloor and adjacent walls

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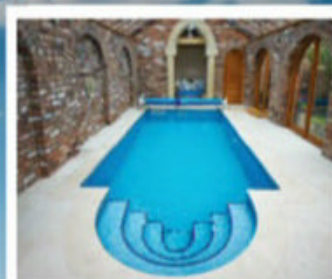
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TOP TIP

When the walls and ceiling of your bathroom or wetroom are plastered, if you have already put down your subfloor, make sure you cover it up as you don't want this covered in bonding and plaster.

SEALING STONE TILES

It is worth bearing in mind that natural stone needs sealing. I find it is best to put one coat on before you start laying the tiles. This will help prevent a lot of adhesive being absorbed into the tiles. As you lay them, clean them as you go.

Then, when all the tiles are laid, give them a clean and seal with another coat or two. This is vital because if you don't do this before grouting, some grout will inevitably 'bleed' into the stone tiles and the finished floor will look awful. Once grouted, you can then give them a final clean and, depending on manufacturer, one final coat of seal.

excluding VAT for a 8ft x 4ft sheet. This can soon add up on a big floor. There are alternatives, but do not go with the budget options as the layers can separate. You could also use a $\frac{3}{4}$ green chipboard. Another option, which is again expensive but very good, is a cement board.

If you're not ripping up the existing subfloor, you can use a self-levelling compound. This usually comes in 20kg or 25kg bags that you mix with approximately 5 litres of water. (Always check the bag as different manufacturers will provide different guidelines.) It is vital that you don't add extra water to try and get the compound to go further; this will result in it not mixing correctly and becoming watery in areas.

If your existing floor is level but has an inferior wood quality, such as floorboards, anti-fracture matting or a decoupling membrane can be used to pull the whole subfloor together. One product I have used many times is Schlüter®-DITRA. As it's a high-end product, it's not particularly cheap but does save you money as you won't have to rip up your existing subfloor and replace it. Also, if you're tiling the floor (regardless of whether you have a timber or concrete subfloor), then you should be using a decoupling membrane; it will absorb any floor movement, thus preventing the tiles laid on top breaking and/or cracking.

While the subfloor is up, this is the stage to install your pipes and cables as part of first fix electrics and plumbing.

You'll then be ready to install a wetroom tray (wetroom floor former) if using one. They're great as they can be tanked and tiled over, but provide a fall to allow water to drain towards the drainage outlet. Alternatively, products such as Unidrain (pictured on page 144) can be installed against the wall, thus only requiring one slope to be created. "The gradient of slope is another factor that must be considered; we advise a gradient of 1.25-2%," advises Birgitte Arendsdorf Olsen of Unidrain, for UK contact Wetroom Materials (01332 840820; www.wetroommaterials.com).

TANKING YOUR WETROOM

Nowadays, there are a number of different options for tanking your wetroom. In basic terms, there are paint or roll-on liquid solutions or membranes (which are generally self-adhesive), which can be used on the floor and walls.

These products are often provided as complete kits, which typically include a primer, tape (to seal corner and junctures between walls and floors) and the tanking layer. Whichever system you, your builder or your bathroom installer opts for, ensure you follow the manufacturer's instructions very carefully as these can vary considerably.

Your subfloor will have a bearing on the product you use. With concrete floors, you only typically need a thin membrane to prevent any leaks; these are generally thin self-adhesive products. For timber floors, a thicker membrane is required to prevent leaks and incorporate decoupling properties. These too are self-adhesive so you can start tiling as soon as you finish laying it.

Before applying a tanking layer, you need to ensure the wetroom area is clean, dry and dust free. You will then prime the whole area. Next you should apply the reinforcing tape over all joints, the corners of the walls, around the drain and where the floor meets the walls. Then the tanking layer can finally be applied.

TILING

Once the tanking layer has been installed and has fully dried out (in the case of roll-on/paint-on solutions), you can begin tiling.

It is worth taking advice from your tile supplier as to what adhesive they recommend. Don't just grab the first one you see or the cheapest; there will be a specific adhesive and grout for the type of tiles you are using, the subfloor, etc. For example, a different adhesive will be needed for natural stone tiles (more on which left) as compared to porcelain tiles and ceramic tiles. I can't emphasise enough to seek advice from an experienced stockist. **H**

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EXTENSIONS: building firm foundations

Constructing solid foundations is a critical part of any build. Ian Rock explains all the necessary processes and procedures you need to follow



When you're designing a new extension the question of precisely how deep your foundations need to go is often shrouded in a miasma of uncertainty. Whereas the above-ground parts of the structure such as roofs, walls and floors are normally fairly straightforward to pin down at the design stage, when it comes to groundwork there's often a lingering element of doubt that can persist right up until the moment the foundations are constructed. Fortunately there are some simple precautions you can take to minimise the risk of nasty surprises.

How deep do I need to go?

The vast majority of extensions today are built with conventional strip or trenchfill foundations, typically comprising 600mm-wide trenches filled with ready-mix concrete. However, the depth you need to excavate down to will depend on a number of site specific factors. As a rule of thumb, if your home is of fairly modern origin (i.e. constructed since the 1990s) the chances are your new foundations will be acceptable if they replicate those on the existing house. But travel further back in time and the foundations on older properties become progressively shallower; for example, stepped brick or stone footings on Victorian houses are generally less than half a metre deep. Although an old house will have stood the test of time, perfectly well squatting on relatively shallow boots, this argument stands precisely zero chance of influencing your building control officer because all new habitable buildings today must be firmly bedded onto solid load-bearing ground (with the notable exception of 'raft foundations', which we will explore in more detail on page 153).

So the fundamental question is really how far do you need to dig down to meet with dependably firm ground? Some local authorities stipulate minimum depths for all new buildings, but the actual distance required will very much depend on what you're digging into. Ultimately, the decision on the depth and type of foundations

The Build

CASE STUDY

“Due to the nature of the site a piled wall was required”

To achieve planning permission to extend and renovate their Victorian home in Oxford, Jeanne and Tim Flynn needed to put forward a sympathetic and clever design (with the help of Riach Architects) as part of a project that was to go under and out at the rear on a small site with restricted access.

Piled foundations were required explains Sporn Constructions’ Robin Sporn, the main contractor for the project: “Due to the nature of the site, a contiguous piled wall was required. The basement is approximately 5m deep, while the water table is at around 3m; once we hit 3m we constantly had to ‘dewater’ the site.”

A concrete-reinforced slab (which forms the lower ground floor) was then introduced; this served to hold the piled foundations in place while the lower basement level was dug out beneath.

Some 635m³ of spoil was moved from the site, with the skip hire provider visiting the site a couple of times a day.



will rest squarely on the shoulders of your building control officer. Their final verdict will however be strongly influenced by information that you have already provided.

To comply with Building Regulations in the first instance you normally need to submit scale drawings accompanied by design calculations, including details of the proposed foundations. To produce the necessary calculations you (or your designer) will need to consult with a structural engineer as early in the process as possible.

There remains however one slightly inconvenient truth; the fact is, no one knows for certain what they’re going to find under the ground until they start digging. And where there is uncertainty the usual procedure is to dig trial holes, one to expose the foundations of the existing property and at least one more in line with your new extension’s planned trajectory. Trial holes are best dug by hand (about a metre square) to avoid damaging any hidden pipes and services, which should in any case be exposed so that their whereabouts is a known quantity prior to construction.

What problems are commonly encountered?

The land that you want to build on next to your house is unlikely to be entirely unblemished virgin territory. Digging down will swiftly reveal whether the garden has at some point been ‘backfilled’, perhaps by the original builders burying surplus bricks, broken tiles and general rubbish. More rarely you may come across footings of old outbuildings or even an ancient well, which would raise questions about the load-bearing capacity of the ground. Where gardens are proved innocent of harbouring old relics there will normally be things like patios and drains to contend with.

But the big question is what type of ground you’ve got, since this is the most critical factor affecting the stability of most new structures. Subsoils like chalk are excellent for building on; others like sand and clay also have good bearing capacity. However, shrinkable clays across much of Britain are notoriously prone to seasonal volume changes and hence generally require deeper excavation down



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How to dig the foundations

to firm ground of good bearing strength. But problems can be exacerbated by the proximity of nearby trees and shrubs. Some species like willows and poplars are notoriously thirsty and can cause ground instability particularly in years of droughts. So to determine foundation depths you need to consider the shrinkability of the subsoil, the distance to any trees, and the water demand of the species. The obvious solution, cutting down trees, can also cause problems where the clay then gradually expands as it absorbs the moisture no longer taken by the trees, so the foundation design needs to allow for this.

Another thing to watch out for with trial holes is where they start to fill with water, normally indicative of a high water table. The main concern is that when wet waterlogged soil freezes it will expand, putting pressure on the building's structure, although modern foundations over a metre in depth should be able to bypass such problems. Either way it's advisable to hire a pump on the day of excavation to ensure that your building control officer can see the bottom of the trench, and so the concrete doesn't get diluted and weakened.

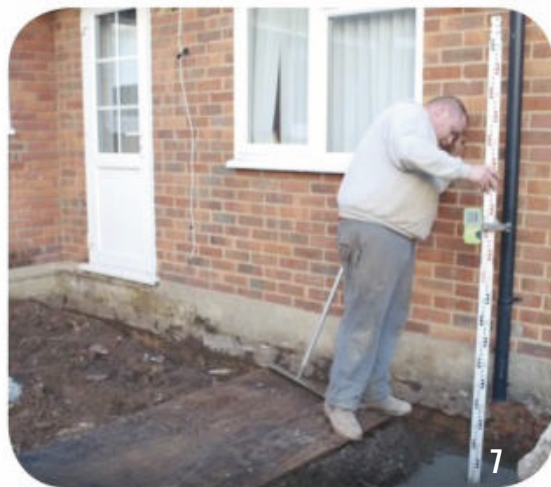
Foundations: The options

Extensions with main walls constructed of cavity masonry or panel timber frame construction will, in most cases, be perfectly compatible with standard trench foundations. However, once trenches need

DIGGING FOUNDATIONS

1. Measure the area; this extension measures 4.5m x 4.5m.
2. Use a string line to mark out a straight line for the footings.
3. Dig out the foundations. A digger took about three hours to excavate the trenches to a depth of 1m with a footing width of 600mm.
4. The building inspector must come out and approve the footings before concrete is poured.

5. Once approved, the concrete can be poured. If you're using ready-mix, ask for concrete mix specifically for footings.
6. Tamp the concrete with a 'T' shaped metal or wood bar to get the air bubbles out.
7. Check the levels with either a laser or spirit level.
8. Here, the new footings have been poured to the same height as the existing footings to meet perfectly with the old ones.





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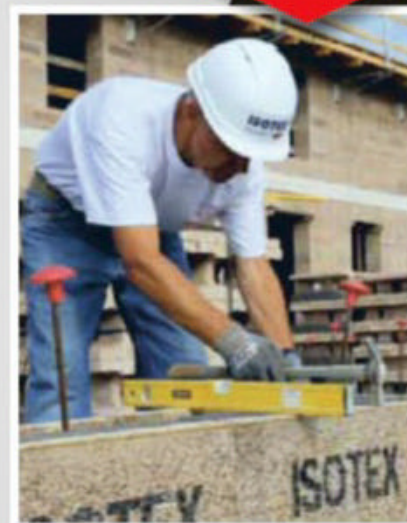
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to go much deeper than about 2m they start to become uneconomic. There are two main problems: disposing of large amounts of excavated spoil adds significantly to the cost, and deeper trenches are much more vulnerable to dangers from trench collapse and hence require labour-intensive shoring up (bracing) with temporary timber work.

Where deeper excavation is needed it makes sense to switch to ‘engineered’ special foundations such as pile and ring beams. But, the need to construct special foundations is likely to extend the time taken to get out of the ground from around two or three days to over a week, potentially doubling your groundwork costs. Deeper stepped foundations will also be needed where gardens have a distinct slope, again adding to the cost. But this may provide a useful opportunity to add extra space by incorporating a basement to fill the void under the projecting floor structure.

On land with poor bearing capacity the main options for extension foundations are:

Option 1: Deeper trenches

The simplest solution is usually to dig down a little further to reach firm ground unaffected by seasonal changes. Modern beam and block ground floor structures will happily bridge across the surface of any less stable terrain in between the walls. In some clay areas, however, the ground around the sides of the foundations will still be prone to periodic expansion and contraction as it becomes saturated with rainwater and swells, and later shrinks when dry. To resist this pressure the sides of the trench can be lined with a flexible ‘slip membrane’ which allows the clay alongside to move independently.

Option 2: Pile and ring beam

Piled foundations are normally the most economical solution where load-bearing support can only be found at deeper levels, such as on shrinkable clay with deep-rooted vegetation, perhaps where planning requirements stipulated the retention of nearby trees. Piles are concrete

columns formed by drilling deep into hard bedrock to securely anchor the building. This method has become much more common since the advent of affordable hired mini-piling rigs (aka ‘micro piles’). Construction involves placing piles every 2.5m or so under the main walls and at the corners. Once firm stratum is reached the piles can be constructed and then topped with mushroom-like ‘pile caps’ onto which horizontal reinforced concrete ring beams are placed. The main walls are then built up as normal over the base beams.

Other types of foundation

Where ground is particularly unstable, new homes are sometimes built using reinforced concrete raft foundations. Essentially these are very thick concrete slabs that extend under the whole building. But because rafts are designed to absorb movement by effectively ‘floating’ on the surface they are not ideal for use on extensions because of the greater risk of ‘differential movement’ against the existing house structure. Although the interface between the old and new structures can be designed to accommodate movement, raft foundations are comparatively expensive, which tends to rule them out as an option, too.

One alternative method that can be worth considering is pad foundations. These are designed to carry individual ‘point loads’ and suit extensions with skeletal structures, such as oak frame structures with the posts supported on a number of small concrete pads. Construction involves excavating a series of large holes at least a metre deep spaced just over half a metre apart. Holes are normally dug by machine, and hired mechanical post-hole borers are sometimes used. The pads are cast by pouring concrete into each individual pit. Brick piers, or small concrete plinths, can then be built onto each pad foundation with posts bolted on top. As with piles, it’s also possible to modify pads with reinforced concrete ground-beams spanning between each pad, making them suitable for supporting lightweight panel timber frame extensions. 



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on the depth
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will rest
squarely on
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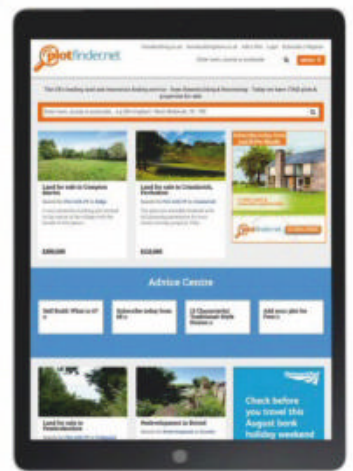
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pg. **161** > Letting light into a dark cottage
pg. **163** > Reusing leftover materials

Ask the experts

Our team of homebuilding experts provide the need-to-know answers to your questions. This month, they advise on DIY tasks, introducing light, landscaping and more



BRUCE BENDALL
Bruce is a third generation builder with over 30 years' experience. He has recently completed his latest self-build



Lydia Robinson
Lydia runs the award-winning practice Design Storey. She is currently renovating a Grade II-listed property



IAN ROCK
Ian is a chartered surveyor, author of eight popular Haynes House Manuals, and a director of www.rightsurvey.co.uk



ROB DWIAR
Rob Dwiar is a landscape designer and writer, RHS gold medal winner and 2016 RHS Young Designer finalist. On Twitter: @RobDwiar



JASON ORME
Jason is Homebuilding & Renovating's Content Director. He is an experienced self-builder and has just finished renovating a 1960s home

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RENDER ISSUES

Q The previous owners of our home had the rendered walls treated with some sort of 'miracle' coating. Now it's all coming off in patches. How can I fix it?

LIZ ASTON

BRUCE BENDALL SAYS:

This is a problem that I am seeing more and more as these coatings that are supposedly guaranteed are failing. They are a prime cause of damp issues, especially in buildings with solid walls, as the moisture gets in through any cracks and is trapped behind the coating until it comes away. I have seen so much water trapped that the coating balloons out and you have to 'pop' the bubble to drain it! It doesn't take a genius to realise the damage that this causes to the fabric of the building.

The only way to fix it is to mechanically remove it which can be as straightforward as scraping it off but tougher areas will require the use of a needle gun or scabbler — although that may be a bit too harsh for some instances. A sander and some diamond impregnated sanding pads can work well (www.alphacut.co.uk is good for ones that last).

WHAT ARE COST-EFFECTIVE WAYS OF DECORATING A HOME?

Q I am looking to complete my home in the most cost-effective way without scrimping on the final quality of finish. I have plenty of time, but limited DIY skill and confidence and am looking to make a difference in the most effective way. Any ideas?

CHARLES SMITH

JASON ORME SAYS:

While decoration is the natural go-to trade for homeowners to substitute in some DIY, the decorating trade element is skilled and requires tools that many DIYers struggle to justify investing in — from ladders to the very best application tools. Yes, it's possible to do, but don't underestimate the time to turn bare plaster into smooth internal walls, apply several coats to woodwork and carefully ensure a consistent finish on ceilings. There are significant savings to be made, for sure, but approach with caution.

In many ways the more fun, rewarding and cost-effective DIY element for homeowners is landscaping. Most keen DIYers would relish having a go at using a mini-digger, vibrating compaction plates and the like — particularly with very high costs of laying things like patios (£30-£50/m² plus the slabs). One particularly satisfying task — and relatively achievable — is building small garden walls with bricks (particularly leftovers from the house). There's a fabulous tool called the Bricky which, for around £40, is a plastic template allowing novice bricklayers to lay perfectly neat 10mm mortar beds — and even apply mortar evenly to the perps (vertical joints). Given the very high costs of employing bricklayers, it can potentially save you £1,000s.





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The Build

HOW CAN I INTRODUCE NATURAL LIGHT IN TO MY DARK COTTAGE?

Q *I've just bought a cottage to renovate. While I was initially drawn to the property's character, the interiors do feel dark (and there are a number of small rooms). The property also features an extension, which is structurally sound but in need of renovation; it currently contains a sitting area and utility space. My question is, how can I look to introduce natural light, and make the rooms feel more inviting?*

JOE OWEN

LYDIA ROBINSON SAYS:

You have bought a cottage because you clearly like the cosy, unpretentious atmosphere which typifies these kind of properties. However, most cottages were built in an era when people's lifestyles were much simpler and not as demanding as they are today. Classic cottage characteristics include low ceilings, exposed beams, and smaller windows and room sizes. Because of their compact size they have often been extended over time, which can make the layout rather warren-like, lacking connection with the outside.

In terms of layout, the first thing to consider is relocating the spaces where you would like more natural light, such as the kitchen, to the areas of the plan at the perimeter, such as the existing extension.

This will enable you to increase the amount of glazing by introducing large sliding doors and/or rooflights, ensuring light penetrates the spaces that are deeper in the plan and increasing the connection with the outside space.

Often making a cottage fully open-plan isn't viable as they are typically constructed from loadbearing masonry and have restricted head height. Open-plan layouts can be at odds with the character of the original building too, but small changes can be used to improve the flow and light. Consider widening a doorway, removing a couple of doors altogether (as above) or replacing timber panels with glass.

Don't forget to consider the lighting and decoration in the darker spaces. A simple decorating scheme using uncluttered walls, small-scale furniture pieces and the same flooring and wall finishes running through a series of rooms will unify groups of smaller spaces. Think of these rooms as one single space with different areas rather than a series of individual rooms.

In the existing cottage, consider your window openings carefully in order to maximise the amount of glass to frame. Removing years of paint off glass will increase the amount of glass significantly, especially if there are lots of small panes, and keeping windows clean also helps.

Another way to increase the amount of daylight is to replace wooden windows with slimline steel-framed or aluminium windows which require less intermediate supports, maximising the amount of glass. Finally, consider your window coverings carefully — curtains and blinds always block out a percentage of light on small windows, but shutters can be a very practical and smart option as they fold out of the way, freeing up the glazing to allow the light to flood in.



Open-plan layouts can be at odds with the building's character but small changes — such as widening doorways — can improve flow and light

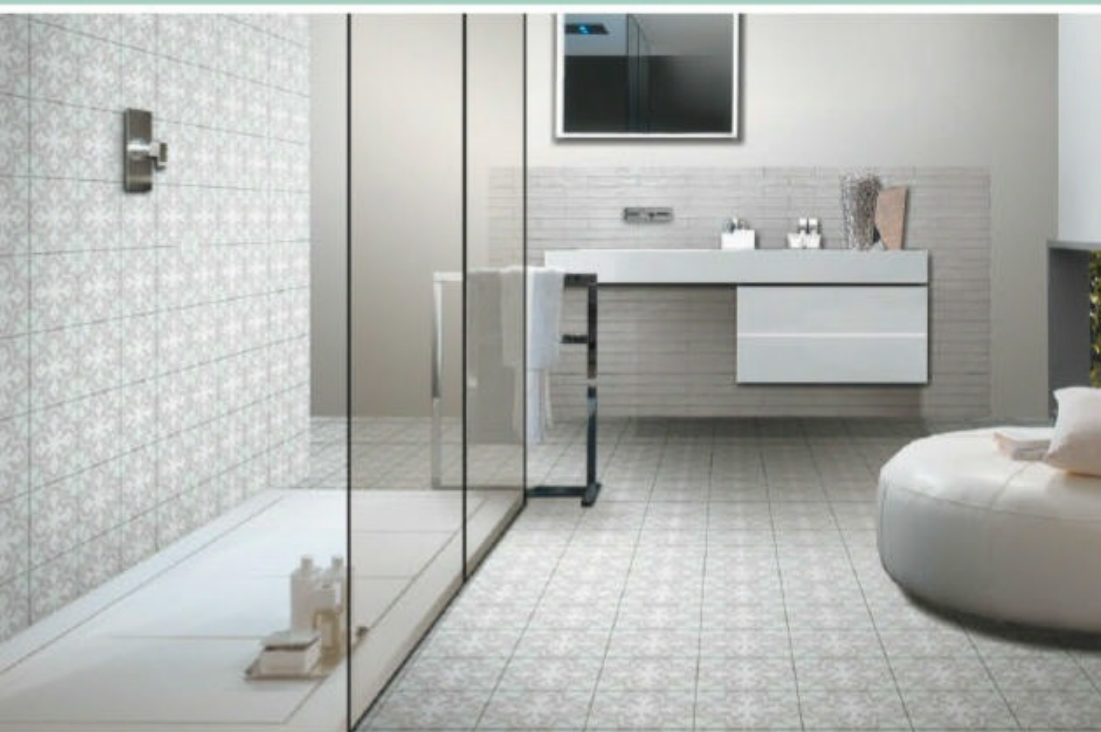


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PRODUCT NEWS

New ultra-thin A2 aerogel insulation with superior performance

The A Proctor Group, renowned for providing high-quality membrane solutions for controlling the heat, air and moisture movement in buildings (HAMM), has launched a new vapour permeable insulation, which offers superior thermal performance and fire protection behind cladding.

Spacetherm® Sientex A2 is the result of extensive research and development to produce a vapour permeable insulation with an A2 fire rating classification. The new insulation is classified as Class A2, s1 -d0 according to the Euroclass system, which classifies the reaction to fire performance of building products.

Spacetherm Sientex A2 is a flexible, high-performance, silica aerogel-based insulation material of limited combustibility suitable for use in exterior and interior applications. Supplied in a variety of finishes, the substantial layers of Spacetherm Sientex A2 meet the requirements for A2 classification (insulation, MgO and plasterboard).

The product optimises both the thermal performance and fire properties of facade systems, enhancing the thermal performance of the ventilated facade and addressing thermal bridging in the facade. It is also useful in minimising thermal bridges around windows in areas such as window reveals.

With a thermal conductivity of 0.019 W/mK, Spacetherm Sientex A2's performance credentials qualify it as one of the best insulation materials available worldwide. Engineered for space-critical applications, the product offers low thermal conductivity, superior compression strength, plus breathability allied to hydrophobic characteristics.

System benefits

- Class leading fire performance from an Aerogel insulation
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Spacetherm Sientex A2 is available in a range of laminates utilising MgO and plasterboard as well as in a cold bridging strip format.



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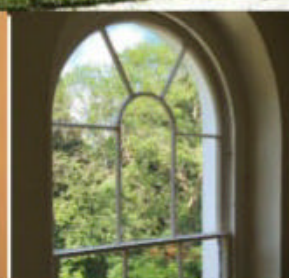
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HOW CAN I REUSE LEFTOVER BUILDING MATERIALS?

Q *We have lots of leftover bricks from our build and would like to recycle them in the garden. What would you recommend we do with them?*

ANT JAMES

ROB DWIAR SAYS:

Reusing bricks is a great way to keep wastage low and your garden is the perfect place to create something new from something old. Bricks retain their character and reliability as a material long after they've been salvaged, making them prime candidates for re-use outside. It's always good practice to knock off the old mortar before using them; it makes them easier to re-lay, too.

On the horizontal plane, bricks make wonderful



paths given their multi-coloured and multi-textured nature. This also makes them great for banding or edging to mark the extent of beds, borders and pathways. More functional uses could be to build brick walls (retaining or feature), seats, raised beds or fire pits; the latter being increasingly fashionable in contemporary gardens. There's no special treatment generally necessary when building a fire pit from bricks, though a good cleaning and washing off of any old building materials is a good way forward. And it's important to carefully fill the pit with burning material/logs to ensure the brick ring does not get exceptionally hot. If you're in doubt you can always get a fireproof lining to go inside the brick fire pit to be safe, but remember to leave a few gaps for oxygen.

Finally, a simple but striking idea is to use them as a paving threshold feature to help define different areas of the garden. This can be particularly successful when laid next to contemporary materials.

HOW CAN I LOCATE MAINS SERVICES ON MY PROPERTY?

Q I've just purchased a house and I plan to dig out the front garden to create a car parking space. However, I'm concerned that the gas pipe and underground electric cable are in the way. I know that the gas pipe is on the road but I can't find the route from the road to the property. Is there a way to find the pipe/cable locations before digging starts?

MATT TULLY

IAN ROCK SAYS:

In an ideal world every home would come equipped with a set of plans showing, among other things, the location of the incoming mains services. Regrettably this isn't the case and it's not unknown for builders to damage underground pipes and cables with diggers. Fortunately hiring detection equipment is now an affordable option. Portable devices that utilise ground penetrating radar are capable of detecting metal, plastic and ceramic utilities. Cable Avoidance Tools and Signal Generator systems (known as CAT and Genny) can cost as little as £80 to hire for a day.

To narrow down the search area, however, it makes sense to do a little research in advance.

Energy suppliers should be able to provide drawings showing the routes of their underground pipes and cables in the street. It's worth getting these as it may help identify the positions where they enter your garden at the boundary (often under garden paths).

A spot of old-fashioned detective work, tracing the route back from the house can also help. Gas and electric meters are usually located close to the point where the incoming pipes and cables enter the house. In older properties this is often via the front hallway, so with timber floors you could lift a couple of floorboards to take a peek. More modern homes will have accessible external meter boxes, although electric cables can enter the house at eaves level. Then you can carefully hand-excavate around the zone you've identified next to the main walls to, if possible, expose the pipes and cables which are often found at shallower depths than the recommended 600mm minimum.

If looking for water supplies, drainage and telecoms services, look for pavement stopcocks, small service hatches, inspection chambers and soil pipes. **H**



DAVID SNELL
The author of *Building Your Own Home*, David is a serial self-builder and has been building homes for 50 years

How I beat the cost estimator

In the third part of this new series, serial self-builder David Snell takes a good look at the roofing costs of his latest self-build, set against original estimates and budgets, sharing his cost-saving tips along the way

Part Three: Roof construction and rooflights

NEW SERIES

In forthcoming articles in this series, David Snell will also be looking at costs associated with:

- ROOF COVERING
- CARPENTRY AND JOINERY
- ELECTRICAL, PLUMBING AND HEATING
- PLASTERING, DRY-LINING, TACKING AND WALL AND FLOOR TILING



IMAGES: DAVID SNELL

Before starting my last self-build, I sent my Building Regs' plans to an estimating service. They sent back a detailed breakdown of each build stage, with costs split into labour and materials.

This month, I look at the estimated and actual costs of roof construction and rooflights. There is a choice to be made here between a cut roof, built on site using sawn timber, and prefabricated roof trusses. A cut roof is cheaper on the materials side but much more expensive on the labour side. The second (our chosen route) is more expensive, materials-wise, but saves labour and is much quicker.

This house has rooms in the roof. If we'd opted for a cut roof we'd have gained a bit more space in the rooms at the expense of the eaves storage, but not enough to warrant the extra costs and time. The attic trusses are very heavy and needed a crane to get them up and onto the wallplate, which cost around £480 (slightly more than budgeted). However, as I'd paid for the concrete pump at the earlier stage, Bruce, our builder (who was also building next door), paid for this. Having a vaulted ceiling to the centre meant that this part of the roof had to be built with loose timber. We chose rigid foam insulation, which was cut and foamed in between the rafters to provide an airtight envelope. We also bought three Velux rooflights.



THE ESTIMATED COSTS

The estimate for **materials and plant** for these works:

Roof trusses and carpentry	£5,811.47
Insulation	£1,322.97
Roof windows	£979.36
TOTAL	£8,113.80

The estimate/budget for materials and plant for this part of the works included £425 for the hire of a crane to get the trusses up onto the wallplate. We didn't have to pay for this, as it was paid for by Bruce (our builder) as a reciprocal for us paying for the hire of the concrete pump, which wasn't included in the original costings for foundations. The estimate also allowed for mineral wool insulation, whereas we opted for the more expensive rigid foam.

The estimate for **labour** costs for this part of the works:

Roof carpentry	£2,679.66
Insulation	£434.03
Roof windows	£377.30
TOTAL	£3,490.99

TOTAL LABOUR AND MATERIAL COST: £11,604.79

THE TRADES INVOLVED IN THIS STAGE

1 Carpenters are involved in the fixing of the trusses. Getting the trusses up onto the wallplate will involve general labour and, as in our case, the use of a crane.

2 Once the end trusses are in place, the bricklayers will finish off the verges, ready to receive the undercloak, which has to be bedded in mortar. (An undercloak is the slate or fibre cement laid on top of the blockwork/brickwork at the verge, beneath the overhang of the slate/tile, to support the mortar infill that is then used to fill the gap between the underside of the tile/slate and the walling.)

3 The carpenters space out the trusses, fixing them to the wallplate and crippling (cutting and trimming) them, where necessary to receive things like rooflights. Vaulted ceilings or voids are constructed from loose timber. The binders (timbers that run counter to the direction of rafters/trusses to maintain their spacing and stabilise them) must be fixed along the node points (junctions between the rafters/joints and the ties within a truss). Diagonal bracing is introduced at 45° angles, on the underside of the rafters, from plate to ridge. Flooring boards will also need to be laid and then a stable platform provided for work to start within the roof structure, including the making up and fixing of studwork partitioning and the supporting uprights to the eaves.

4 General labourers can be employed to fix the insulation, especially if it's mineral wool. Perhaps rigid foam insulation merits the input of a carpenter or the builder — cutting the sheets of rigid foam into and between the rafters needs a lot of care if you're not to end up with gaps. Even so, the boards should be foamed into and sealed within the web of the rafters.



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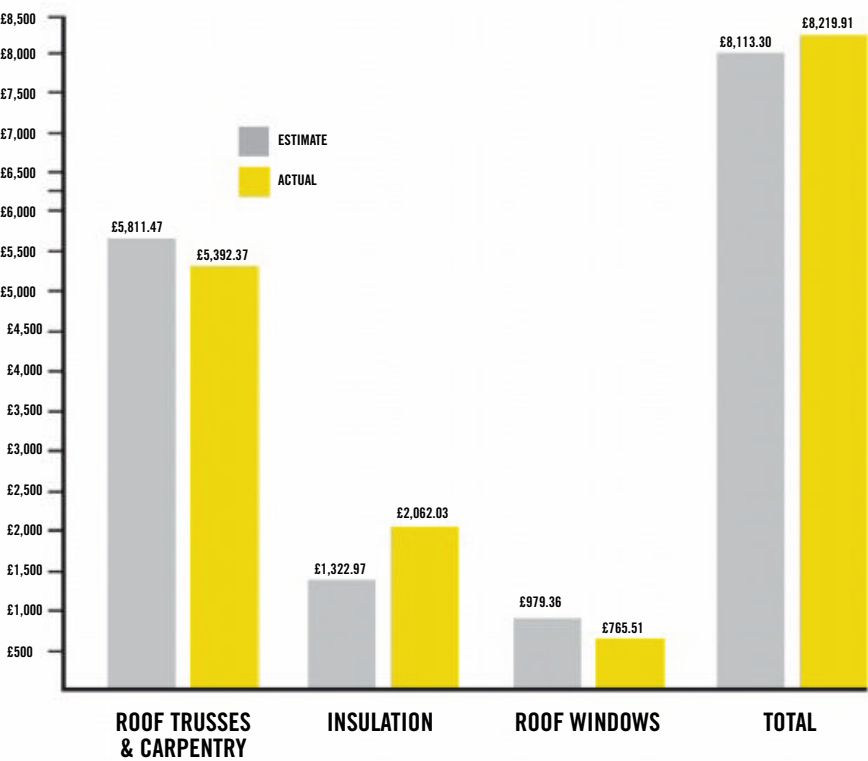
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The Build

BUILD COSTS

ACTUAL MATERIAL AND HIRE COSTS*

Prefabricated trusses	£4,626.69
Loose timbers and boarding	£526.68
Insulation	£2,062.03
Rooflights	£765.51
Facias and soffits	£239.00
TOTAL	£8,219.91



ACTUAL LABOUR COSTS*

We agreed a lump sum for the total labour costs with our builder. This was based on all of the labour estimates for each trade and section of the build within the costings that we obtained from the estimating company, and came to a total of £50,691.39. It was payable in five, more or less, equal stages:

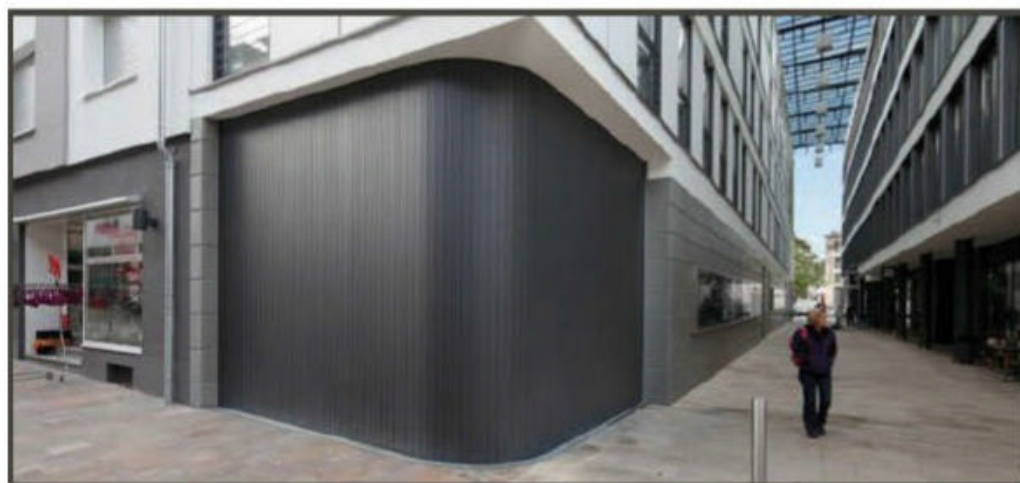
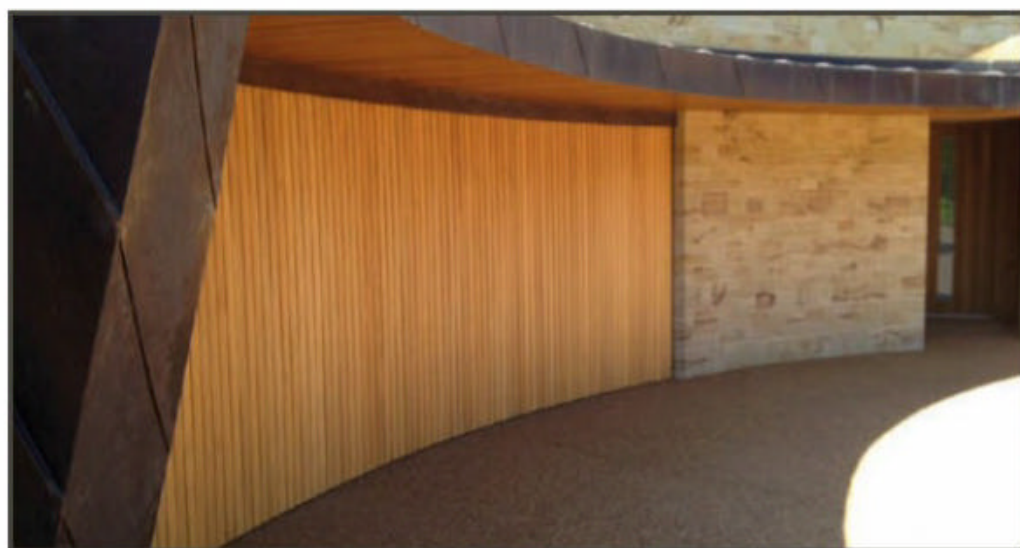
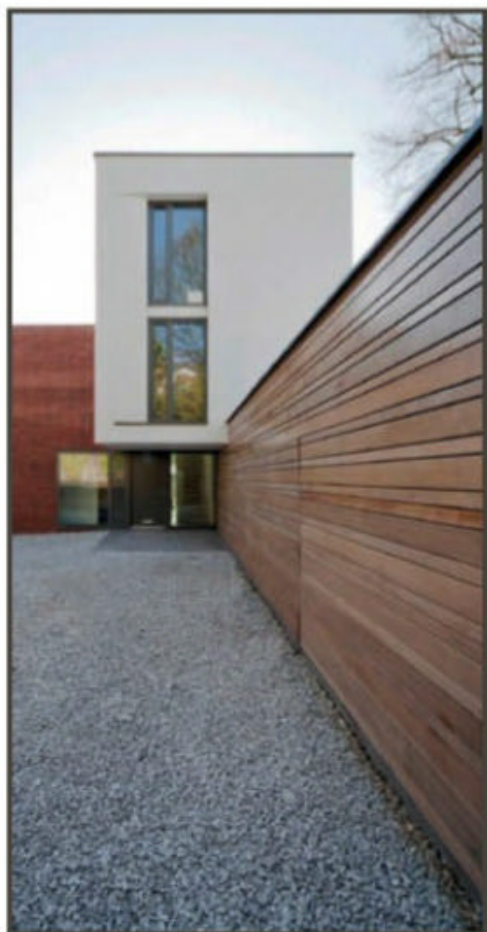
- Stage 1: £10,138.28 on completion of works up to and including oversite
- Stage 2: £10,138.28 on completion of works to plate height
- Stage 3: £10,138.28 on completion of roof and slating
- Stage 4: £10,138.28 on completion of internal plastering and external render
- Stage 5: £10,138.27 on completion of the works

General plant, such as digger and mixers etc., was provided by the builder within the contract. Specialist plant was hired in at appropriate times. Where there were understandable and agreed labour extras, these are listed as individual costs, at the relevant stages.

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DAVID'S COST-SAVING TIPS FOR ROOF CONSTRUCTION AND ROOFLIGHTS

- It's best to leave the final blocks at the gable end verges until the end trusses are 'reared' (raised up) as templates if you're not to risk getting it wrong.
- When fitting the insulation boarding, it's best to have one person on the roof with another doing the cutting.
- The scaffolders will be involved in rearing the end scaffold in order to finish off the verges. There's a temptation to use band-stands but this really isn't that safe.
- The bricklayers can build any chimney through the trusses at this juncture. Flues can wait until later, but a reinforcement pin pushed through the insulation will serve to identify the eventual position for the following on trades of roof tiler, tackers and plasterers.



Did I beat the estimator?

No. For the first time within the build, we'd spent more than the original budget for this part of the works, although materials only amounted to just over £100 more.

1 The trusses actually cost less than the original estimate: £4,626.69 against £5,200.25. In part that was because we opted to use a local truss manufacturer who delivered the entire prefabricated roof in one go. The trusses would have cost more, if we'd stuck with the pitch on the plans. But that would have meant that they would either have had trouble getting to us because of low bridges or we would have to accept them being made in two sections, which would have increased the labour costs. So we lowered the pitch, with little, or no discernible difference.

2 The rooflights also cost less: £765.51 against £979.36. We went with standard Velux windows for the rooflights but cut the number from four down to three, as we felt that one of them would have been too near the planned flue for the woodburning stove.

3 But the insulation cost considerably more at £2,062.03 set against just £1,322.97, and the ancillary bits and pieces necessary made up the rest of the difference. Some of these elements would have been over-ordered to be used in the subsequent stages of the build. You always need extra timber on a building site. A length of 100mm x 50mm timber may be used to prop something up or fill something in. It's not a specific item and it doesn't fit into any particular section or trade, but it's still necessary, it still costs money and it is part of the natural wastage that you cannot really avoid. **H**

Your build costs

Find out how much your new home might cost to build, with our self-build cost calculator

One of the most important aspects when planning your self-build or home renovation/extension project is working out how much it is going to cost. This figure will depend on the size and shape of the house, the level of your own involvement, where in the country you intend to build, and the materials you’re going to use. If you can make even rough decisions about these factors, then you can begin to work out how much it is going to cost.

As a very general rule of thumb, expect a building plot to cost between a third and a half of the end value of the finished house. The costs of building a house will then depend on the variables listed above. All building work is usually quoted on a cost/m² basis. For example, a typical new four bedroom self-built home is around 200m² (with 100m² on two storeys) and

usually varies between £1,000-£2,500/m² (although self-builders can achieve costs of between £500-£3,500/m²+).

Renovation costs are more difficult to establish as they involve many variables, but allow at least £1,000-£1,500/m² for work. This, added to the cost of the plot/house and with a 10-30% contingency, should result in less than the final end value of the house. The table below, based on information from the Building Cost Information Service (part of the RICS, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors), is updated monthly to help you work out a more accurate estimate for your self-build. Note, these figures are for build costs only and do not account for VAT, which is not charged for self-build projects.

There is a free online version at www.homebuilding.co.uk/calculator.

		BUILD ROUTE A			BUILD ROUTE B			BUILD ROUTE C			BUILD ROUTE D		
		(DIY + subbies)			(Subbies)			(Builder/subbies)			(Main contractor)		
SINGLE STOREY		Standard	Good	Excellent	Standard	Good	Excellent	Standard	Good	Excellent	Standard	Good	Excellent
<90m ²	Greater London	1366	1580	1900	1446	1673	2012	1527	1766	2124	1607	1859	2236
	South-East	1198	1386	1667	1268	1468	1765	1339	1549	1863	1409	1631	1961
	NW, SW, East & Scotland	1089	1262	1517	1153	1336	1606	1217	1410	1695	1281	1484	1784
	Mids, Yorks, NE & Wales	1042	1206	1450	1103	1277	1535	1164	1348	1621	1226	1419	1706
91-160m ²	Greater London	1251	1518	1972	1324	1607	2088	1398	1697	2204	1471	1786	2320
	South-East	1097	1331	1730	1162	1409	1831	1227	1487	1933	1291	1566	2035
	NW, SW, East & Scotland	998	1211	1575	1057	1283	1668	1116	1354	1760	1175	1425	1853
	Mids, Yorks, NE & Wales	955	1158	1506	1011	1227	1594	1067	1295	1683	1124	1363	1771
161m ² +	Greater London	1114	1461	1833	1179	1547	1940	1245	1633	2048	1310	1719	2156
	South-East	977	1281	1607	1034	1356	1702	1092	1431	1797	1149	1507	1891
	NW, SW, East & Scotland	889	1165	1464	941	1234	1550	993	1302	1636	1045	1371	1722
	Mids, Yorks, NE & Wales	849	1115	1399	899	1181	1481	949	1246	1563	999	1312	1645
TWO STOREY													
90-130m ²	Greater London	1314	1521	1868	1392	1610	1978	1469	1700	2088	1546	1789	2198
	South-East	1153	1333	1639	1221	1412	1735	1289	1490	1831	1357	1569	1928
	NW, SW, East & Scotland	1049	1214	1492	1110	1285	1580	1172	1357	1668	1234	1428	1755
	Mids, Yorks, NE & Wales	1002	1161	1426	1061	1229	1510	1120	1298	1593	1179	1366	1677
131-220m ²	Greater London	1107	1340	1700	1172	1419	1800	1237	1498	1900	1302	1577	2000
	South-East	971	1176	1491	1028	1245	1578	1086	1314	1666	1143	1384	1754
	NW, SW, East & Scotland	883	1070	1357	935	1133	1436	987	1196	1516	1039	1259	1596
	Mids, Yorks, NE & Wales	845	1023	1297	895	1083	1373	945	1143	1449	994	1203	1526
221m ² +	Greater London	1021	1308	1641	1082	1385	1738	1142	1462	1834	1202	1538	1931
	South-East	897	1146	1441	949	1214	1525	1002	1281	1610	1055	1349	1695
	NW, SW, East & Scotland	815	1043	1310	863	1105	1387	911	1166	1465	959	1227	1542
	Mids, Yorks, NE & Wales	780	997	1253	826	1056	1327	872	1114	1401	918	1173	1475



You can also use our
self-build cost calculator
online: www.homebuilding.co.uk/calculator

HOW IT WORKS

1 IDENTIFY YOUR BUILD ROUTE FROM THE FOUR OPTIONS

Your level of involvement in the project will influence the build costs. For simplicity, the four most common build routes have been identified below:

BUILD ROUTE A: **DIY + subbies**

Building on a largely DIY basis, substituting around 30% of labour costs with DIY, and employing help with the rest of the building work. Materials purchased directly.

BUILD ROUTE B: **Subbies**

Building using tradespeople hired directly — you will be project managing, but there is minimal DIY involvement. Most or all materials purchased directly.

BUILD ROUTE C: **Builders/subbies**

Building using a main contractor or package supplier to complete the structure to a weathertight stage, with the remaining work undertaken by subcontractors and most materials purchased by self-builder direct from suppliers.

BUILD ROUTE D: **Main contractor**

Building using a main contractor. Building in this way requires the least involvement from the self-builder.

2 IDENTIFY YOUR EXPECTED LEVEL OF SPECIFICATION

The standard of specification that you choose will have an enormous influence on your build cost. For estimating purposes, three general categories of quality have been identified:

Standard

This serves as a basic build quality equivalent to that offered by most speculative developers. A house may include standard softwood joinery, studwork partitions, a contract kitchen, basic sanitaryware and radiator central heating.

Good

This is equivalent to that offered by quality developers. Features may include high-end, off-the-shelf softwood joinery, blockwork partition walls, contract quality kitchen and sanitaryware and underfloor heating (UFH) downstairs.

Excellent

A very high standard. This house may include hardwood joinery, a bespoke kitchen and quality sanitaryware, and UFH, for instance.

3 MULTIPLY THE FIGURE BY YOUR HOUSE SIZE

We have used gross internal floor area as a measure (it's the most common in the industry). It's the area of a building measured to the internal face of each perimeter wall for each floor level. It includes areas occupied by internal walls and partitions. **H**



Expect a building plot to cost between a third and a half of the end value of the finished house

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Uncovering the true cost of your project



MARCUS JEFFORD
is managing
director at Build
Aviator, supporting
self-builders and
renovators ([www.
buildaviator.co.uk](http://www.buildaviator.co.uk))

The self-build landscape in the UK has been fraught with uncertainty following recent political events, leaving many self-builders and renovators feeling out of control when it comes to budgeting for materials.

There are so many variables to consider, and with fluctuating prices, labour costs and tool hire to factor in, you may be feeling apprehensive about starting a new project and the strain it could have on your finances. However, recent advances in technology and support offer simpler routes to accurate and efficient cost estimation, meaning self-builders and renovators can enter into a project with a firm idea of what to expect financially.

There are two options when estimating costs: 'DIY' or using a service. Naturally, working out the costs yourself with specific software saves time as product types, tool options and even labour rates are included in the

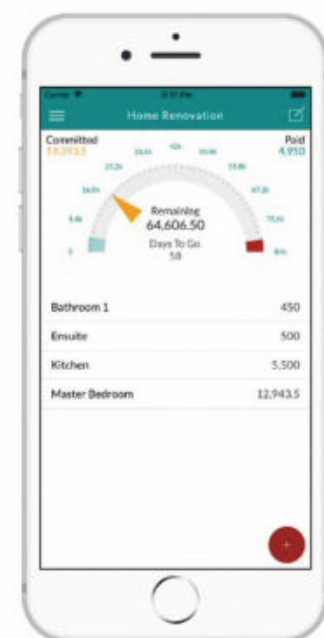
estimations of even the most basic programmes. Some premium software options are also linked to merchant databases to give you accurate costs of products that are available locally.

By using a service, the estimate will be done for you by trained professionals utilising specialist software. Outsourcing estimation gives you time to focus on the more fun aspects of your project, such as choosing fixtures and furnishings. However, when you're looking at your options, make sure the service uses experienced estimators. Go with a company that has employees with hands-on industry experience – such as ex-builders or ex-tradespeople – so you can have confidence that they'll be costing it up in the best possible way to meet your requirements.

This way, you'll have peace of mind from an accurate quote on costs, which is invaluable in this unpredictable environment. **H**

**£50,000
to
£59,000***

...the average household
income of
self-builders



BUDGET MANAGEMENT

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Imported plywood 7.8

Pipes and fittings (rigid) 5.8

GREATEST PRICE DECREASES

Concrete reinforcing bars -1.7

Ceramic tiles -0.1

Ready-mixed concrete (excluding levy) -0.1

*TAKEN FROM A MEDIUM AVERAGE OF PEOPLE SURVEYED. HOMEBUILDING & RENOVATING SELF AND CUSTOM BUILD MARKET REPORT 2017.
**IN THE 12 MONTHS TO JANUARY 2019, UK ACCORDING TO BEIS MONTHLY STATISTICS OF BUILDING MATERIALS AND COMPONENTS, FEBRUARY 2019.



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The AP Infinium adds to Alpine's vast range of bespoke products, including aluminium doors, windows and roof systems available in a wide choice of styles, which are installed to the highest standards.

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CHARLIE LUXTON is an experienced architectural designer and TV broadcaster. Charlie is currently building his own home in the Cotswolds

Our cladding materials will get better with age

Charlie has worked hard to incorporate materials that reflect the surrounding Cotswolds landscape in his self-build

For the last couple of weeks we have been fixing the metal (Cor-ten) panels to the building.

There has been a lot of design work to reduce the number of elements on the exterior of the building to keep the 'language' of the building really simple. The idea is to make sure the green roof and the landscape are the most important features.

Getting exterior details right

After we attached the panels on the horizontal walls, we welded the parapet cladding; this is a very fine metal capping over the tops of the walls. I'm really pleased with the way it looks. Normal parapet cappings can be a little too deep and fussy, or the materials are not quite right, in my opinion, so I was really conscious of getting that little detail right. Some people might not think about it — but, for me, seeing how crisp the junction between the roof and the walls now are, it has been worth making the effort. What we've managed to do is weld these cappings into place so they are seamed, which creates a continuous steel section that runs right around the head of the building.

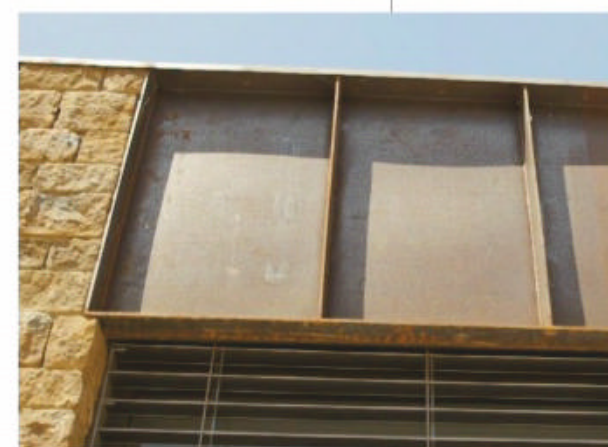
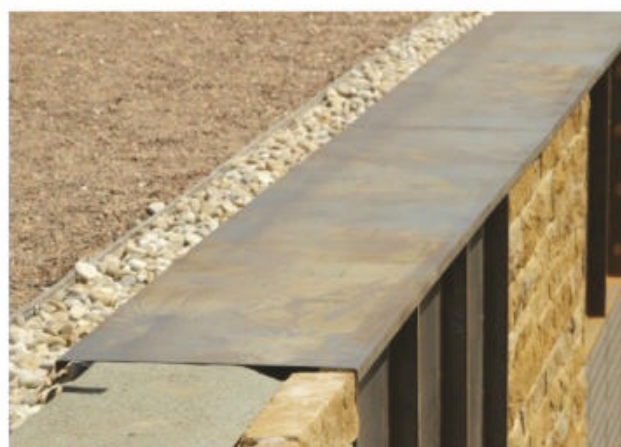
Using organic materials

The Cor-ten alloy we have installed will rust, and that rust will create a protective layer over the alloy rather than flaking off. Right now, despite being completely finished, the panels do not have the typical rusted aesthetic — as we've had no rain for a while so nothing is really rusting. I'm contemplating potentially stopping the rusting process with a specialist product at some point, but at the moment I'm open to the slow organic nature of this process.

I think what's lovely about using high-quality organic materials like the Cotswolds Ironstone that clads other elements of the building, the green roof with the planting and the metal panelling described, is that they change over time and accept weathering and ageing as a beneficial part of the

design process, almost like a fine wine. Often, it seems, the logic with a lot of architecture and the use of some materials such as render is to prevent the ageing process, because it can make a building look a little grubby or old, as if they're failing in some way over time. What I really like to try and do in our architecture in the practice is to use materials that want to age and as they age, get more interesting. That's very much what this steelwork is about and although it has been hard welding and fixing it, I'm so pleased with the way it looks. **H**

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SOLID FOUNDATIONS TO PROTECT YOUR INVESTMENT

The entire stability of a building depends on its foundations, whether you're building a garden room, extension or house.

Every year in the UK, millions of pounds are spent repairing damage to buildings caused by foundation failures. Preventing these problems is far less expensive than rectifying them afterwards. The most common factors to consider are rapid changes in soil moisture, soft ground, drainage or lack of design consideration:

Clay shrinkage: Fluctuations in moisture content don't cause significant variations in the volume of sandy soils. Clay soils, however, expand when they are wet and shrink when they are dry. If a structure is supported on clay that is moving in this way, the building will move with it causing damage. Trees can cause clay shrinkage down to 4m.

Clay heave: As tree roots pull moisture out of the clay, the soil shrinks and ground level drops. If a tree stops extracting moisture then the clay rehydrates and swells. The forces generated by swelling clay are large enough to lift up a three-storey house. A common cause is when trees are removed from a site. Ground heave can

start immediately, and continue for many years.

Soft ground: Some soil types are not strong enough to support building structures. These include river alluvial deposits, peat & man-made soils. When foundations are dug into these soils, the building's weight can cause movement in the soil's structure.

So what steps can be put in place to prevent foundation problems occurring? Firstly, choose the right type of foundation for your building and ask for advice if needed. Below are three practical steps to consider:

- Don't accept a 'one size fits all' foundation
- Take reasonable precautions to mitigate against the effects of nearby trees and soft soils
- Consider access requirements and restrictions.

The foundations are one of the most important parts of your building

investment. Often more time is spent considering floor tiles than the foundation type. Foundations are often specified as a standard design 'to be confirmed on site'. This can lead to inappropriate foundations being constructed and it is essential that adequate thought is given to the foundation type and depth before work starts on site.

At Shire, we design foundation systems for a wide range of project types. We have developed patented systems like QuickBase giving deep piled foundations that can be taken down to depths below the zone of influence of any tree roots or down to 20m in soft soils onto 'good ground'. QuickBase can be installed in areas where parking and access is restricted. Foundations are installed quickly, often leading to time and cost savings. Where there are unknown ground conditions, our geotechnical team can investigate and give advice on the appropriate solution.

www.shire-uk.com



PAUL TESTA is the director of Paul Testa Architecture and has a special interest in sustainable design

Making a 1960s home airtight is not for the faint-hearted

Paul soldiers on as his team work to make his semi-detached home reach the high energy-efficiency standards of EnerPHit

Getting our building airtightness to the level required for the EnerPHit standard (the Passivhaus equivalent for existing homes) was always going to be a huge challenge. We don't have the benefit of a simple airtight line that you might have on a new build; the existing house is relatively complex when you take into account the number of walls that abut the external envelope.

Ensuring airtightness

Taken individually, the main elements of the house have been relatively easy to make airtight: the airtight layer of any internal wall insulation is the internal face of the insulation board, the concrete floor is airtight, the extension walls and roof have vapour and airtight board, and the existing roof has a layer of Pro-Clima vapour control membrane. However, the care we've needed to take and the amount of taping of joints and fixings has been time-consuming and expensive. Existing joists penetrate the airtight layer and have needed their ends carefully taping. At £15-£20 + VAT per roll of tape, plus the time taken to install it, means it's not for the faint-hearted; I think our spend on tape alone has been over £2,000!

The existing internal walls penetrate the walls and floor, so they have all become part of the airtight construction of the house, even when they're in the middle of the house. What's more, every bit of exposed existing masonry has been parged with plaster to avoid air leakage.

Lessons learned

One detail that has caused more issues than it should is the abutment of the concrete floor to existing internal walls. To minimise the coldbridge here, but with limited thermal benefit, we have a 50mm-thick insulation upstand. This means at floor level we have a sequence of concrete floor, damp proof membrane, insulation edge and then existing wall with plaster. Each one of these layers is



inevitably imperfect, so there are air gaps that need sealing. This doesn't matter on the external walls, as the internal wall insulation has overlapped all of this. This means that we just have to tape the corner between the wall board and the concrete.

To seal this on the internal walls, we initially painted on two to three coats of a liquid membrane called Blowerproof liquid. While this was very effective at making each layer airtight in itself, the voids were too big for it to effectively cover. We've therefore had to go back and tape these junctions, so it has been doubly slow and fiddly. Furthermore, it means the wall has to be built out with a dry-lining to ensure it covers this edge (as we will be keeping the concrete as our floor finish), making even more work and losing valuable floor space.

It has been a great learning process for me as I've physically done more airtightness work than any other element of the build, so I really understand what it's like on site making these connections and using the products. **H**

AIRTIGHT PRINCIPLES
Paul's team have worked hard to get to grips with the complex energy-efficiency strategy, ensuring that junctions between storeys (as above) are airtight.



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IAN ROCK is a chartered surveyor, director of www.rightsurvey.co.uk. He is currently extending his family home by 100m²

We rush to complete the second fix electrics stage

As a weekend with visiting friends fast approaches, Ian and his team work to complete the second fix on his new extension

Anyone familiar with the long-running saga of our extension will know that project managing this build has been greatly simplified by an absence of pressing deadlines. Unlike TV property shows where bogus time limits are routinely employed to inject nail-biting excitement, so far we've enjoyed considerable freedom from the tyranny of the clock, focusing instead on build quality and budget.

At least that was the case until a couple of weeks ago when I decided it would be a good idea to invite a bunch of old mates up from London for a reunion, scheduled to coincide with a local air display. However, in truth our extension was nowhere near habitable, so the pressure was now on.

To bring it up to even a basic visitation standard was going to require some serious work — plumbing in the sanitary fittings, connecting up the power and installing the staircase. On the plus side, we had a functioning heating system and the wood floors upstairs only needed some TLC. Downstairs, the anhydrite floor screed with the new underfloor heating system felt suitably warm and homely even before tiling. Luxuries such as interior decoration, skirting boards, window ledges and the en suite bathroom could wait until the party was over.

Second fix electrics

As our electrician surveyed the vast expanse of plasterwork concealing his first fix cabling he quipped: "Dry-liners are our enemy." But second fix electrics shouldn't be a particularly taxing operation. It mostly involves installing the light fittings and connecting the wall sockets and switches onto back-boxes, with the cabling already in situ.

As the clients, we'd opted to take responsibility for purchasing the light fittings (rather than leaving it up to the contractor) since it affords a degree of wriggle room with scope for dithering and mind-changing without driving long-suffering electricians doolally. But there's more to buying lighting than

simply creating the right ambience. You also need to consider technical issues, for example lighting in bathrooms must be IP65 or IP44-rated (depending on the zone), and recessed lights in intermediate floors need to be fire-rated. In our case, we had to buy special 'short can' 80mm deep recessed lights for some of the suspended ceilings with limited space.

Once Alex (the electrician) had got the new consumer unit wired in, the whole ground floor came alive with light and power. Sheer magic! But the brief moment of elation soon passed.

A number of snagging issues that had been overlooked the first time round now needed rectifying. Unfortunately, Alex was about to jet off on holiday, so these issues together with the second fix work upstairs would have to be undertaken by a different technician parachuted in by the electrical contractor. This is never an ideal situation because without continuity between the first and second fix there's a greater risk of mistakes. So when a short circuit duly materialised in the upstairs lighting circuits it required laborious tracing. At this juncture the owner of the electrical contractor firm decided to drop by. He knew that it was a matter of some



SNAGGING ISSUES
Some issues that had been overlooked during first fix had to be remedied before second fix could be completed. They included a missing smoke alarm and the main metre box that needed repositioning. Sanitaryware was also fitted at this stage.



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The Build

urgency to get the lights and power working and it swiftly became apparent that he was fishing for ‘extras’, declaring, to my astonishment, that there would be an additional charge for the time it would take to knock off protruding lips of plaster around the edges of the dozen or so pattress back-boxes in the walls.

Actions speak louder than words, so I grabbed a Stanley knife and performed this simple task myself in less than five minutes. After a moment’s silence, the electricians got on with the job while I had a frank discussion with the contractor. I felt it was worth pointing out that since his company’s vans are emblazoned with the accolade ‘Which? Trusted Trader Approved’ it was reasonable to expect contractual obligations to be fulfilled professionally without quibbling. We got the job done, but this left a sour taste.

The staircase goes in

Ordering our L-shaped quarter-turn staircase from Stairbox had been a fairly straightforward process, with good communication and punctual delivery. With large, heavy items such as these it’s common for lorries to be restricted to ‘kerbside only’ delivery, so it’s advisable to arrange a second pair of hands. Chatting to the driver, it turned out that a customer had tried to physically assault him when he refused to cart the heavy staircase across a muddy site!

Once our delivery was safely stashed indoors I eventually figured out which bits go where from the giant wooden construction kit, despite a lack of written guidance. With the aid of local handyman Terry, the monster 820mm-wide main flight was then slowly eased into place with a slender 5mm of leeway either side. Before ordering I must have re-measured everything at least half a dozen times, but a lingering element of anxiety still remained until the thing was 100 per cent physically in place. Probably the most important dimension to check is the height. Get this wrong and you’ve got a major headache (almost literally) remembering to duck every time you go up or down the stairs, or alternatively having to rebuild the floor structure. To my great relief, by mid-afternoon, all the components fitted where they were supposed to, with just a spot of sanding required here and there.

Finishing touches

With only three days to go until our guests were scheduled to descend, our newly acquired plumber,



Tony, arrived to install the sanitary fittings. It took him just half a day to fit the WC and the (reassuringly robust) shower tray. However, as he was unpacking the vanity top basin he shouted: “You’ve got a bit of a problem here.” The basin was split cleanly in two, having been damaged in transit. So without delay I phoned the supplier who, to their great credit, immediately arranged for a priority 24-hour replacement.

The one remaining item on my checklist was to test our new woodburning stove. I recalled that the installer had advised us to expect a slight initial smell of burning paint, saying that he gets called back quite a lot with new stoves because people think it’s fumes escaping. But the stove burned sweetly with only a faint smell, although I cheated using a ready-made ‘fire-log’ to produce an instant flurry of flames, rather than coaxing smouldering offcuts of timber into life.

The big weekend

Come Saturday, with our guests due to arrive early that evening, the balustrade around the landing stairwell still hadn’t been erected. Cutting it rather fine, I was relieved that our chippie Jason had it all securely fixed in place by lunchtime. Now I could relax knowing that, even after a few drinks, my friends couldn’t plunge to their doom.

Happily, only two minor issues came to light over the weekend: a strangely warm WC cistern (having been mistakenly connected to the hot pipe) and an over-powerful deluge from the basin ‘waterfall’ tap resulting in a slightly embarrassing case of late-night wet trousers. On reflection, combining socialising with snagging probably isn’t the best way to christen a new building. **H**

GOING UP

The new prefabricated staircase has been fitted in the extension. Thankfully, Ian’s checking and rechecking of the measurements paid off as the timber structure fitted perfectly.

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KATIE THOMASSON has renovated four period properties, taking on much of the work on a DIY basis

Buying our windows was a frustrating, stressful experience

Sourcing their windows through an unknown independent contractor puts Katie and Andy through some tough times

As everyone knows, first impressions count, especially when it comes to the exterior of your home. We've always been fans of traditional timber windows, and as we have only ever bought period properties, we believe that when replacing old materials, it is better to opt for like for like.

With this in mind, we sourced an independent carpenter who was advertising very reasonably priced, bespoke wooden windows on ebay. Several emails and a few phone calls later, with an estimated cost and a timescale that we were happy with, we decided it would be best to go and visit the carpenter in his workshop. Unfortunately it was 80 miles away from our home, but as his prices were so reasonable, we thought that a trip there would be worth the time and effort.

Once we had seen and were pleased with his work, we verbally agreed for him to produce all 23 windows for our project.

On returning home, he messaged us to ask for a 50% deposit. This seemed quite high to us, but he explained it was his usual method when producing such large quantities, as the wood would be quite expensive for him to purchase in order to start. We saw his point of view and arranged a bank transfer.

To cut a very long story short, this ended up being one of the most stressful and frustrating experiences we've ever encountered in almost a decade of renovating properties. And yes, you would think that we'd have known better.

However, when dealing with an individual, whom you have met and built a working relationship with over several months, there is a natural level of trust. It appeared that this individual had a difficult time sticking to deadlines and, for personal reasons, was in rather desperate need of money. We came very close to never seeing that hefty 50% deposit ever again, and almost didn't receive the windows at all, which would've pushed us back several months (we were already a couple of months delayed due to the carpenter's postponed schedule).

Learning from mistakes

With all this now behind us, I can reflect on where we went wrong and what we could have done differently. The deposit: my advice would be to try not to give one at all; it's not always necessary. But if it's unavoidable, negotiate paying a small deposit. If, like us, you're paying for more than just a few items, consider whether it's worth receiving a few at a time, and paying as you receive them in batches.

Also, make sure you draw up a contract. This can be a simple one-page document that you produce yourself – although if it's for a large amount of money, you may feel more comfortable having a solicitor draw something up – and include estimated costs (if they can't commit to a fixed quote), timescale, their name and address, your details and any deposit that was given. Then both sign and date it, each keeping a copy to refer to.

If opting for a small company, I would advise trying to use someone locally, who has been recommended to you, or who you have seen advertising locally for a number of years (using someone who has been established a while is obviously going to provide you with confidence). Otherwise, check up on any references they may be able to provide. Do some research online: do they have any rated reviews? Websites such as www.Checkatrade.com should flag up any grievances customers may have had with them in the past. Learn from our mistakes! 



TRADITIONAL WINDOWS Katie and husband Andy are extending a pair of semi-detached cottages, using traditional timber windows (left) to finish the look. They plan to live in one and sell the other on completion.



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Barn renovation and extension

WORDS Heather Dixon PHOTOGRAPHY Dave Burton

NATURAL ADDITION

The 18th-century barn retains all its original character outside but features a modern open-plan living space. Linking the barn to the farmhouse by knocking out the dividing walls allows the spaces to interact with each other and create a beautiful family home.



A new lease of life

Natalie Davies and Mark Hills transformed a dilapidated barn on their property, linking it to their 18th-century farmhouse and providing the space with a fresh purpose



PROJECT NOTES

HOMEOWNERS Natalie Davies and Mark Hills

PROJECT Conversion and extension

LOCATION North Yorkshire

SIZE 350m²

BUILD TIME Eight months

BUILD COST £130,000

CURRENT VALUE £1million+

When Natalie and Mark bought their 18th-century farmhouse in a quiet North Yorkshire village, it came with an adjoining barn. The cold, empty space was ideal for storage and they soon filled it with garden equipment and unused furniture, but there was always that nagging feeling that it could be put to much better use.

“We knew it was wasted space but we had three very young children and didn’t really have the time or inclination to start knocking the barn about,” begins Natalie. “However, the longer we lived here, the more we realised it had huge potential as extra living space. The main house is very linear but, with the barn, it could become L-shaped with a light, open family living area that would link the house to the walled garden.”

A project undertaken in stages

The idea took roots when, four years after moving in, Natalie and Mark decided to transform the kitchen. “The kitchen was large but it had been divided into two parts by a huge brick chimney breast right in the middle of the room, that hid the flue for the Aga,” says Natalie. “It was quite an eyesore and completely split the kitchen in half, as well as blocking quite a lot of natural light.”

Natalie and Mark employed a local builder to remove the entire chimney, which extended through their daughter’s bedroom and into the loft. As soon

as it was dismantled, the kitchen and bedroom ‘opened up’ and they were able to create a new, open-plan family kitchen, complete with farmhouse table and shaker cupboards, chosen by Natalie, who runs an interior design company. “We realised how radically it changed the way we lived and it gave us the incentive to do more,” she explains.

However, it was another two years before they got back in touch with the builder who had undertaken the kitchen transformation to ask whether he would take on the barn. “We got quotes from several companies but we knew Stuart Hayes would do a good job and we liked the way he worked. There are not many builders who would take into account the disruption this kind of work causes to family life, or who would sweep up after themselves at the end of each day. He wasn’t the cheapest, but we knew he would do a fantastic job.”

They also contacted the local council to check whether they would need planning permission to convert the barn into a high, open-plan living space, complete with a mezzanine and walkway linking it to the upper floor of the main house.

Fortunately, the work fell under Permitted Development, but to be certain that a proposed development was lawful and did not require an application for planning permission, the couple applied for a Lawful Development Certificate from their local authority.



We realised how radically the kitchen changed the way we lived and it gave us the incentive to do more



THE BARN

Natalie and Mark considered installing a woodburner but the barn is so well insulated it maintains a steady temperature all year round. At the time of the conversion, they also had a new boiler fitted which has zoned controls – including one specifically for the barn. Bifold doors fill the original barn openings while glazed sections above maintain the sense of height and light.



“We chatted with the planning department and they gave us the all clear,” explains Natalie. “The council confirmed that we could enlarge some of the openings but we preferred the look of the agricultural building.”

The conversion

To begin with, Natalie and Mark drew up a rough sketch and wishlist, which included a sitting room at one end of the barn and a spacious dining area at the other. The original barn opening at the back would be glazed, with doors leading straight into the garden (shown right). Natalie originally wanted to block up the opposite opening at the front and fit the original barn doors over the top to create the illusion that it was still a working barn but, ultimately, they went with the more contemporary approach (for more see page 197).

The first job on site was to knock down the barn wall separating it from the main house. The builders took the old beams and roof trusses to the bottom of the garden, where they were later cut up and used for firewood, while the rubble was disposed of in skips. They then supported the new opening, before creating a false wall out of boards to keep dirt and noise to the main house to a minimum.

The entire roof was then removed and rebuilt, with new timber trusses, insulation and tiles. “There had been a fire in the barn around 40 years ago and the timbers were badly charred,” Natalie says. “When the roof started to leak quite badly, we looked at the option of repairing it and sandblasting the beams but it would have been very costly, so we decided to replace the whole roof.”

One of the biggest challenges of the project was access. There is no vehicular access to the property so everything – including the huge trusses – had to be carried onto the site through the garden gate and then winched manually into position. “We couldn’t

REIMAGINED SPACES

The new exposed green oak trusses replace original roof timbers that were damaged in a fire many years ago. Natalie and Mark included a mezzanine to create an area that could be used as a snug or study in the future, linked to the main house on the upper level by a walkway. The staircase was crafted by a local joiner.





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LIVING AREAS

The sitting room was fitted with a new stone fireplace surround when Natalie and Mark bought the house, but this room is now used more as a music/reading room since the barn was converted.

THE KITCHEN

The Egyptian limestone flagstones and Shaker units (from Chapel Kitchens) in the kitchen seamlessly blend farmhouse charm with modern living.



“

It has totally changed the emphasis of the whole house

get a crane in so everything was done the old-fashioned way!”

With the roof reinstated, the sturdiest exterior walls were then repointed and half of one wall was taken down and rebuilt. “The walls are quite wonky so rather than rebuild the whole lot, the builders effectively created a ‘room within a room’, filling the cavity between old and new with masses of insulation,” says Natalie.

The floor of the barn was originally a foot lower than the farmhouse, so the builders raised it to the same level with layers of screed, a wet underfloor heating system, insulation and limestone tiles.

The barn also used to have a storage platform

with steps rising to it from the centre of the building. Two new steels were inserted to create the mezzanine and a local joiner built the oak staircase.

When the false wall between the barn and farmhouse finally came down, Natalie and Mark couldn’t believe the transformation. “It has totally changed the emphasis of the whole house,” concludes Natalie. “Now we spend most of our family time in here. It’s light and open in the summer yet cosy and warm in the winter. In hindsight it would have been cheaper to knock it down and start again, but then we would have lost its lovely character. As it is, we only wish we had done it sooner.” **H**



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FARMHOUSE CHARM
The original character of the 18th-century farmhouse inspired the principles of the barn conversion — which were to keep its integrity, character and open spaces.



PROJECT PROGRESSION
The en suite bathroom was one of the first jobs the couple did when they moved in — the room was stripped back to bare brick and completely refitted with Portuguese limestone tiles from Lapidica.



THE GLAZING

One of the biggest challenges of the conversion project was getting modern windows to fit with the irregular openings of the barn. Although the builders offered to measure the openings, the supplier of the glazed units chose to do it themselves, but this resulted in an entire section needing to be replaced. “It took them two attempts to get the glass correct and even then the seals leaked,” explains Natalie.

The original barn openings were replaced with glazing, meaning the entire space is flooded with light, despite some apprehension from Natalie, who initially preferred a more sympathetic approach, reusing the original doors to create the illusion of a functioning barn.

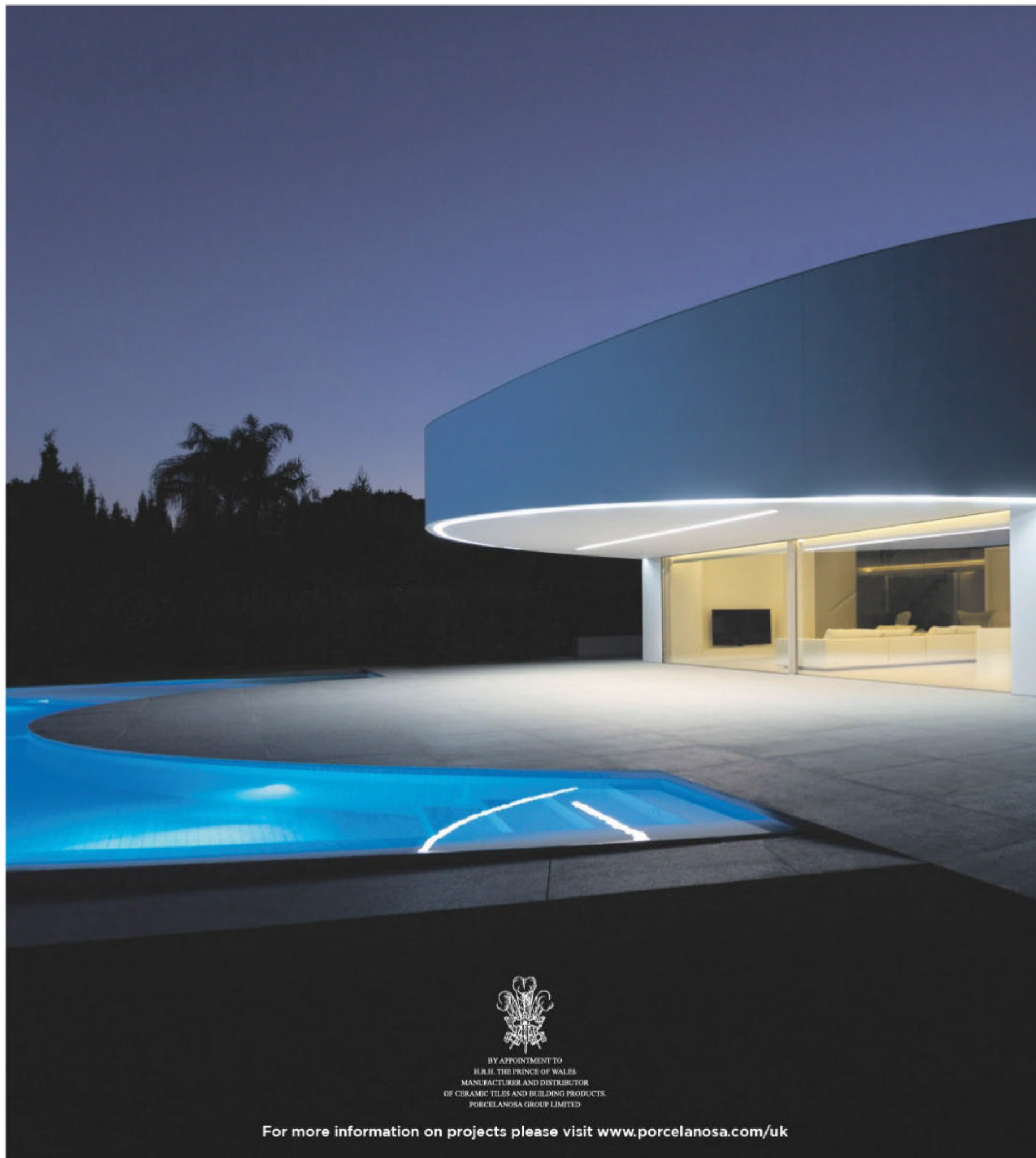
“This was the one area where Mark and I didn’t agree,” says Natalie. “Mark was absolutely adamant that we should have the second opening glazed as well and I have to admit he was right. It cost an extra £5,000 to do but the light it draws through the room is incredible and it feels so much more open than it would have done with one wall bricked up. The barn doors are now propped up outside until we decide what to do with them!”

The result complements Natalie’s modern interior design and the couple are planning to replace a dated conservatory at the back of the house with a modern glass box extension in due course. **H**

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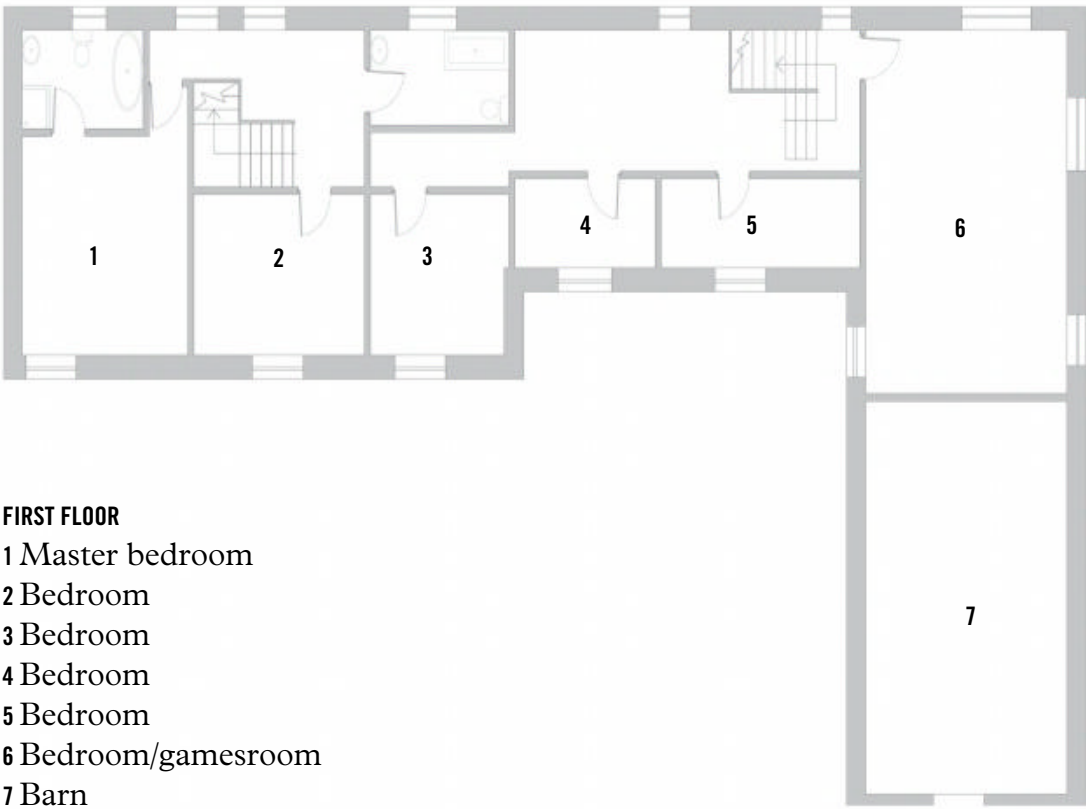
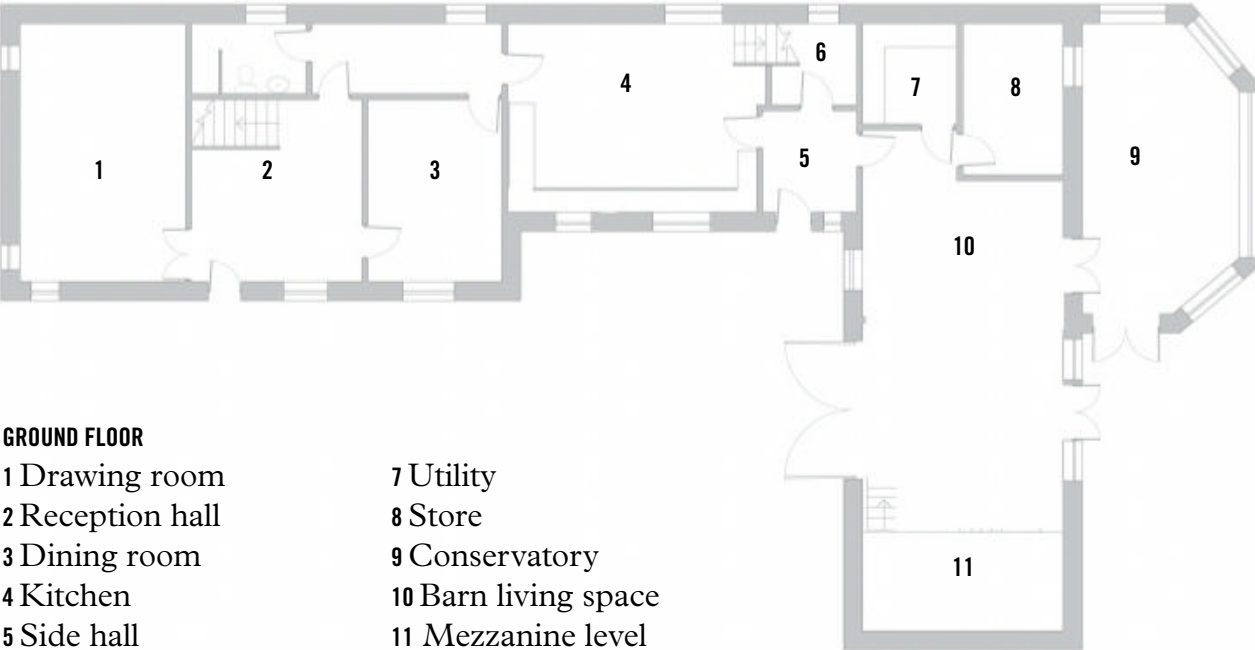
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THE FLOORPLAN

The six-bed house retains much of the original layout, including separate reception, drawing and dining rooms on the ground floor. A new walkway links the newly converted barn to the main farmhouse on the first floor. The barn itself features a mezzanine level to be used as a snug or study area, as well as open living and dining spaces, creating a more interactive area for the family of five.



SELECTED COSTS

TIMBER AND TILE ROOF STRUCTURE	£43,500
GROUND FLOOR BUILDING WORKS	£9,800
MEZZANINE AND STAIRCASE	£12,000
NEW OPENINGS, CEILING, WALLS	£16,500
DOORS AND WINDOWS	£10,000
KITCHEN (INCLUDING REMOVAL OF CHIMNEY BREAST AND FLOORING)	£40,000
TOTAL	£131,300

SUPPLIERS

INTERIOR DESIGN Natalie Davies
Interior Design: 01423 324179;
www.nataliedaviesinteriors.co.uk
MAIN CONTRACTOR Stuart Hayes of
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Futureproofing your new home with triple-glazed windows and doors is the way to go, say specialist partners ecoHaus and Internorm

Triple glazing is becoming more popular because of new build standards such as Passivhaus but there is no reason why it should not be considered across all project types. Not all window companies have designed their windows to be triple glazed, and as such it can be expensive and troublesome when trying to specify triple glazing in lesser spec windows and doors. However, Internorm has designed its range of windows and doors around the optimum triple-glazing specification.

UK standard double glazing has a Ug value of 1.1W/m²k, whereas Internorm 48mm triple-glazed units have a Ug value of 0.5W/m²k. What does this mean to the self-builder and renovator? The Ug value is the measurement of heat loss through the glass in watts per m². A standard double-glazed unit loses 1.1 Watts per m², compared to a triple-glazed unit which loses less than half at 0.5W/m²k. When you consider buildings are being designed with more and more glass, it makes sense to consider how well the glazing performs.

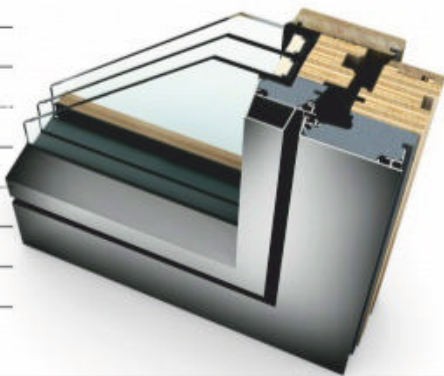
Glass also makes a huge difference to how comfortable the building feels throughout the year. In the summer you don't want to overheat, but in the winter you want to keep as much heat in as possible. With triple glazing you can control the heat loss much better and also control the amount of solar gain by specifying different coatings, so you ensure you get the best of both worlds.

WORKING TOGETHER

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UK. The company believes that triple glazing is the only option you should consider when looking at windows and doors for your new project. Based in Austria, Internorm has been manufacturing triple-glazed windows since 1979. Officially the number one window brand in Europe, Internorm produces a range of timber composite products and a unique PVCu/aluminium composite range. All products are triple glazed as standard and provide clients with optimum performance for any type of project.

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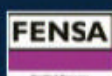
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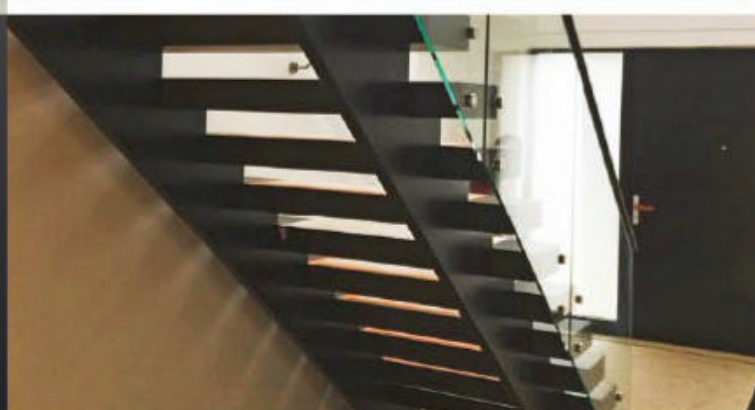
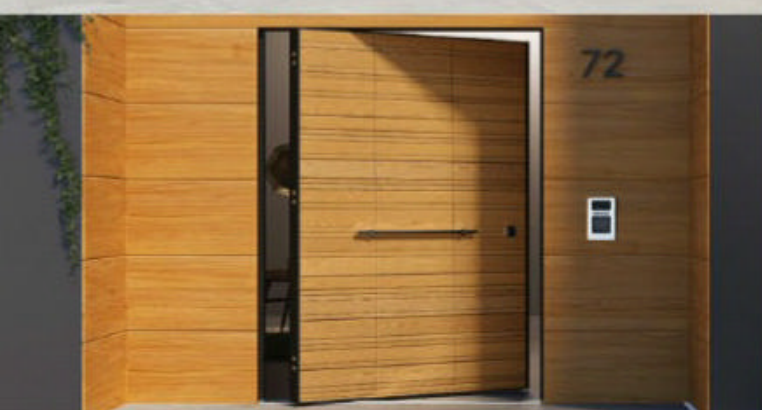
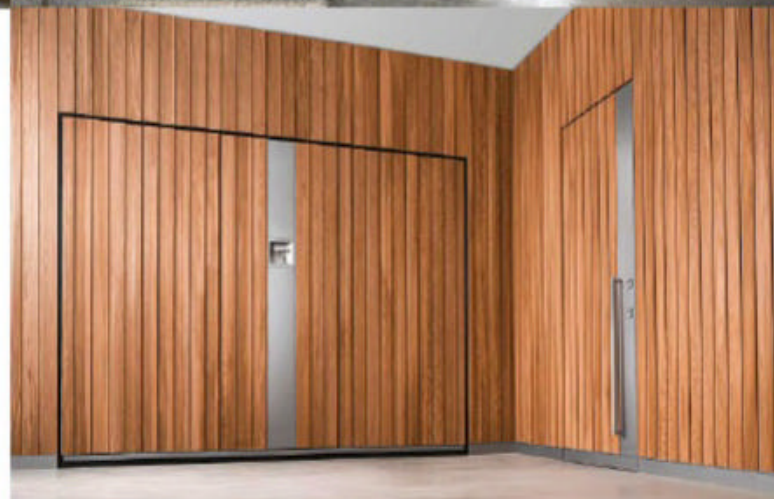
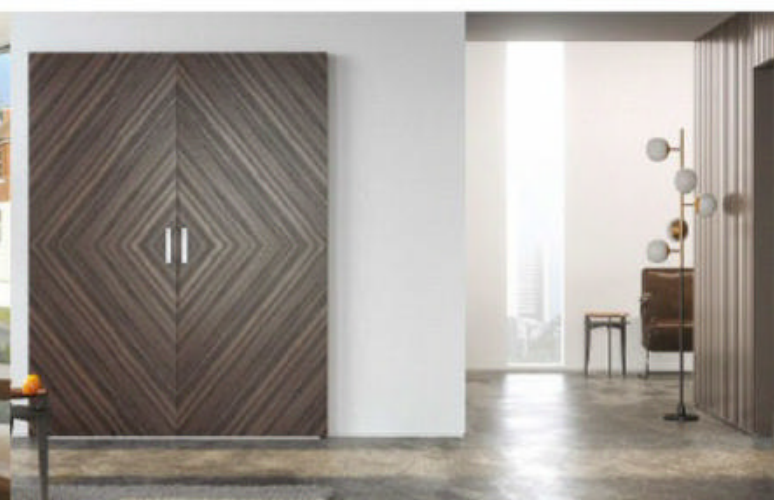
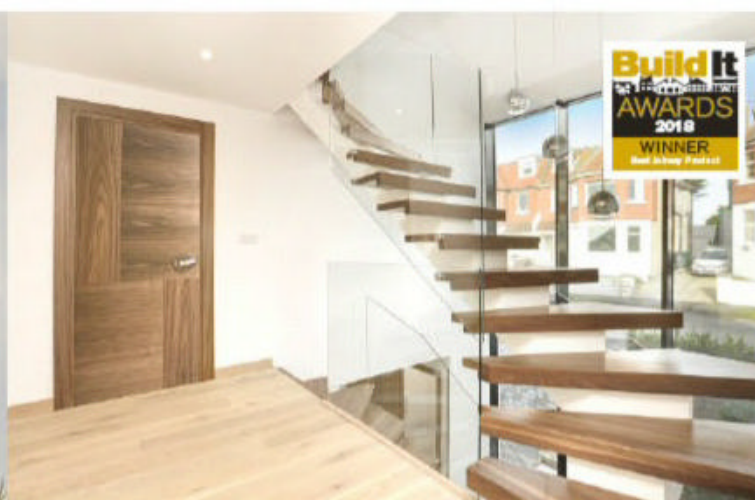
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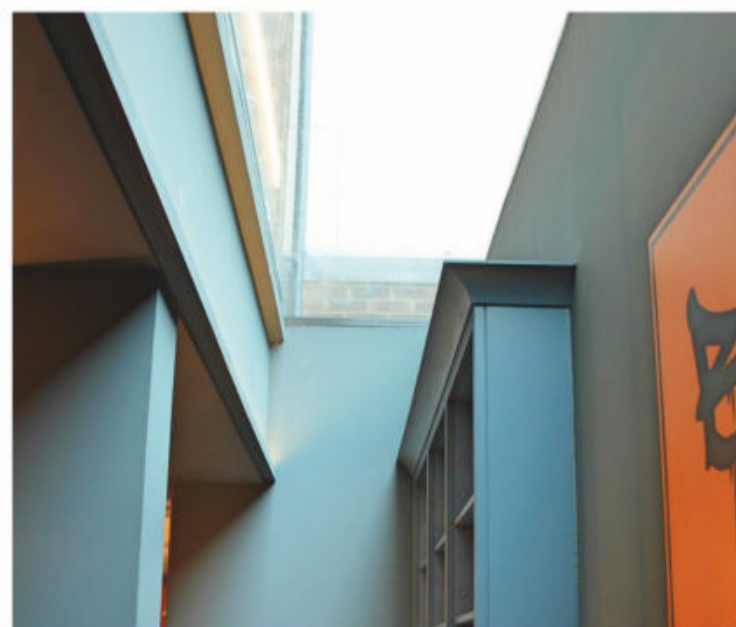
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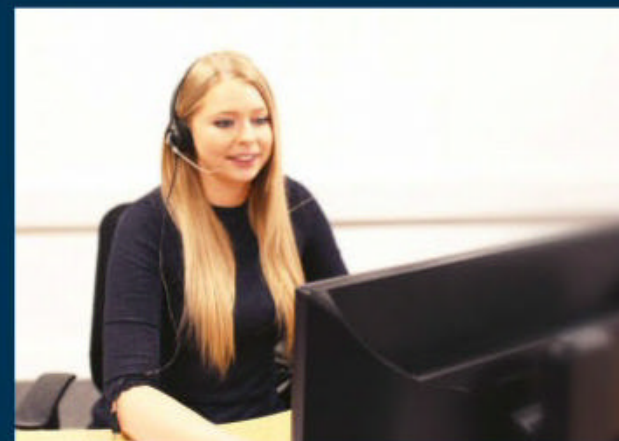
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ABOUT THE SELF BUILD LOAN FUND



The Self Build Loan Fund (SBLF) was established by the Scottish Government to support and encourage the self build market at a time where securing mainstream finance can be difficult. The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust administer the fund.

Now available across Scotland, self builders can borrow up to £175,000 to help them during their construction period.

@SelfBuildFund

KEY FACTS

- Borrow up to £175,000
- Must be able to demonstrate that you have been unable to secure mainstream self build finance
- Used to financially support the construction of your home and then repay your loan with a traditional mortgage on completion
- Fees and interest apply
- Must own a house plot, with planning consent in place

For more information visit our website:

www.hscht.co.uk/scotland-self-build-loan-fund

Or get in touch:

selfbuild@hscht.co.uk 01463 572030



Scottish Government
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We have also recently launched a new website dedicated to providing self and custom build news and information. You can view it here: www.selfandcustombuild.co.uk.



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The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust is a Company Limited by Guarantee (SC182062) and a Scottish Charity (SC027546).



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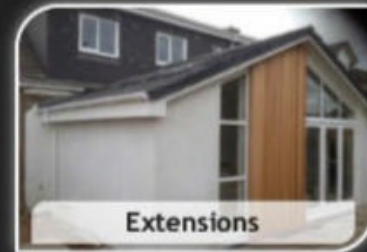
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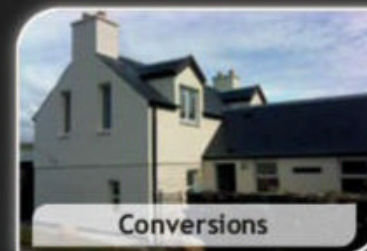
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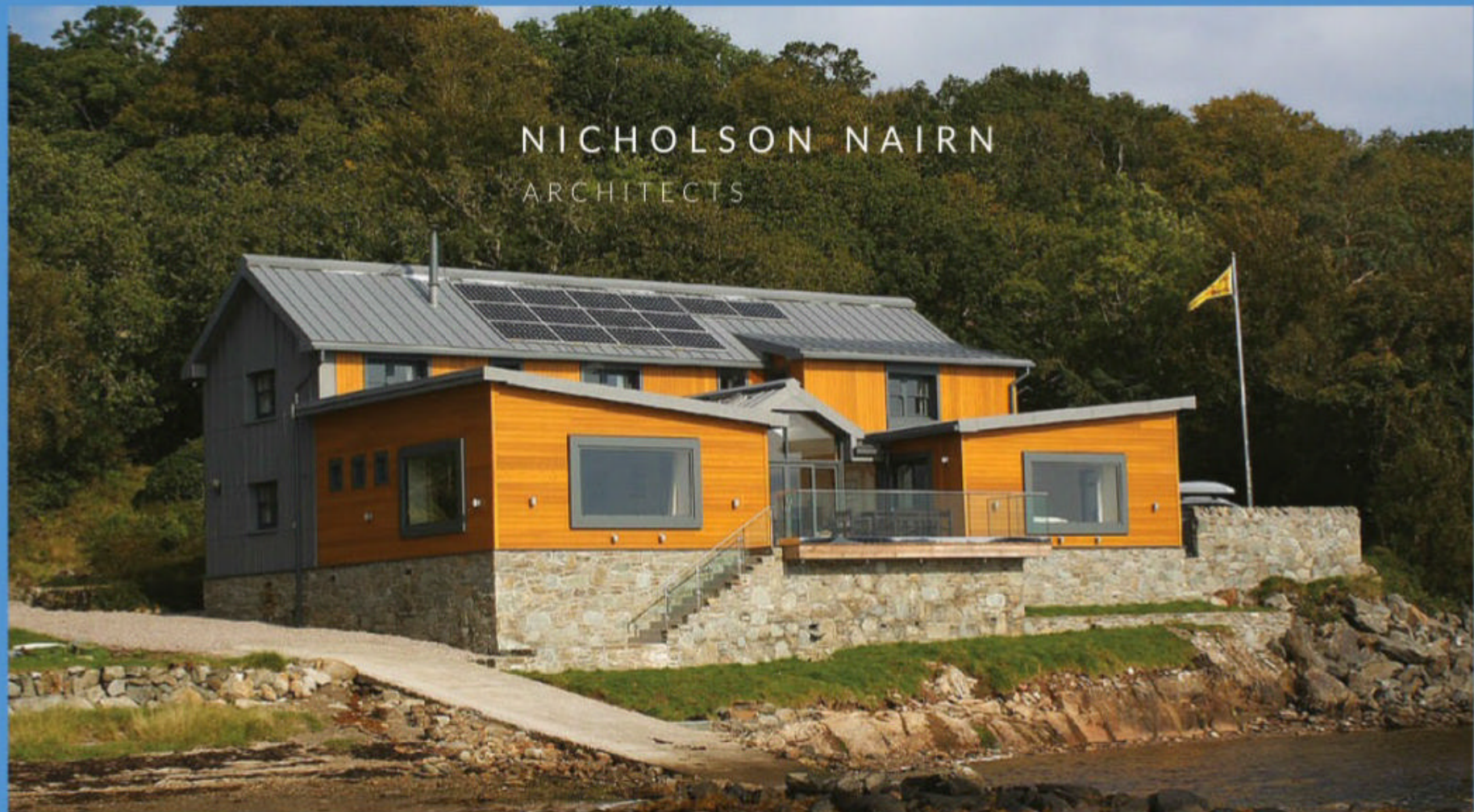
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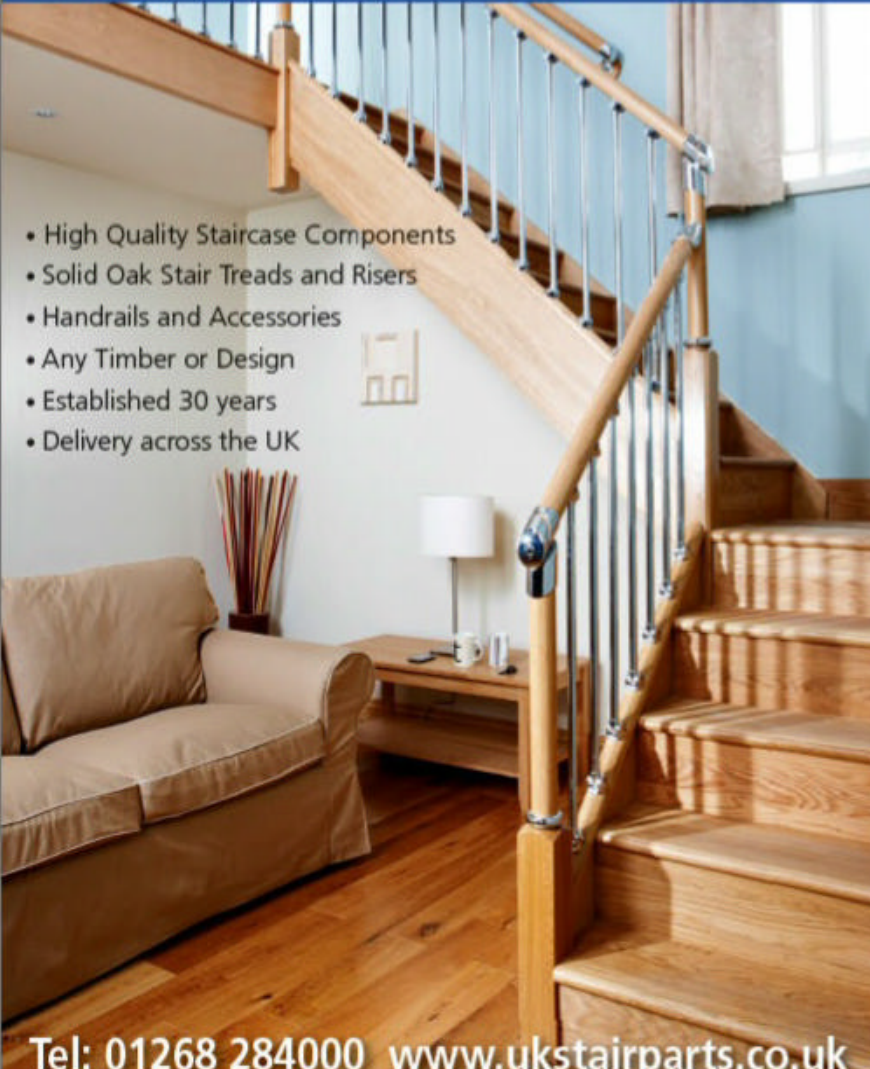
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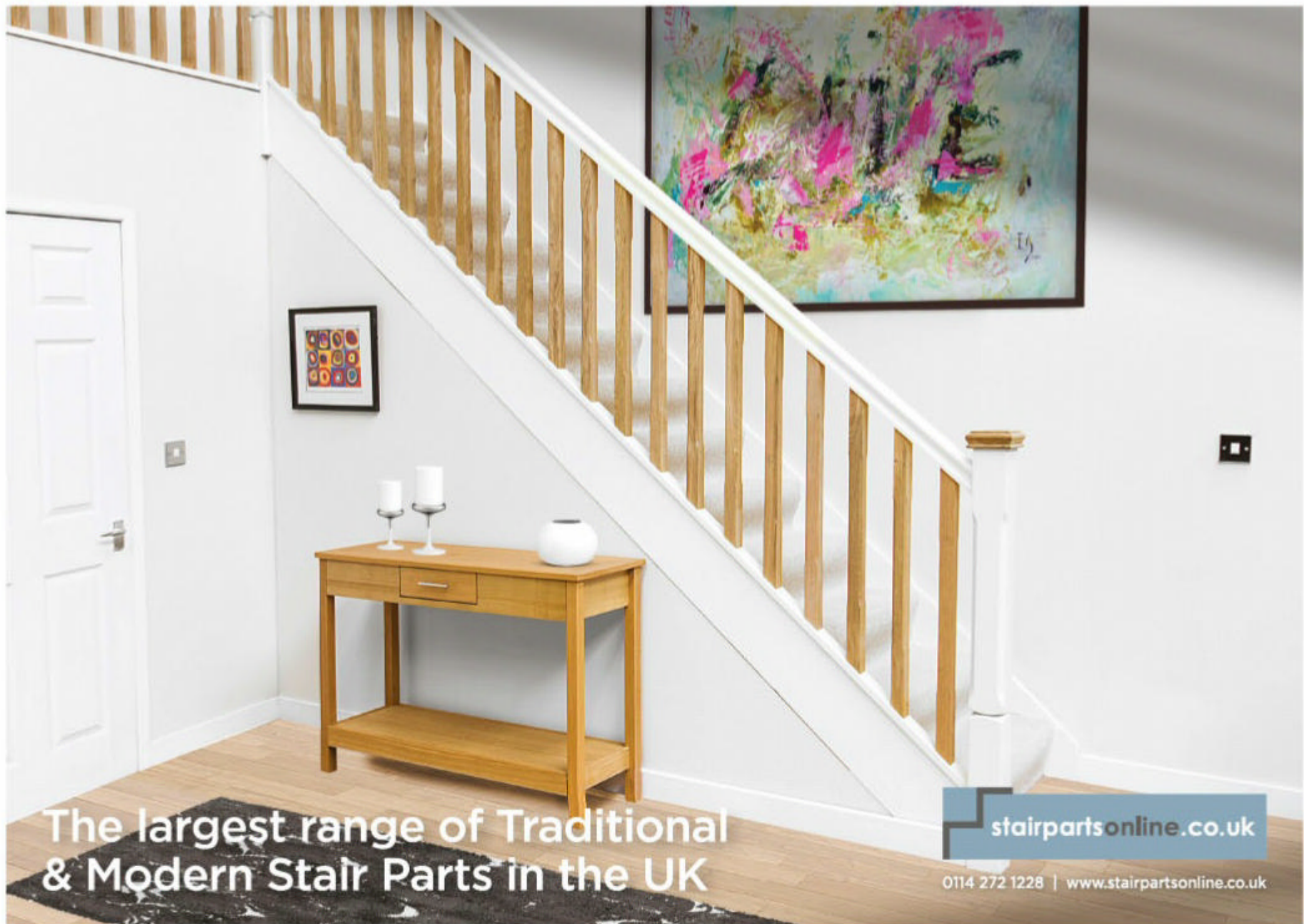
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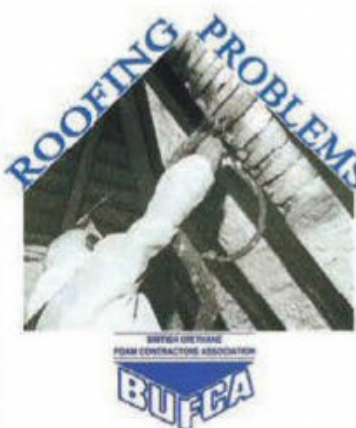
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PLANNING Q&A

Craig Alexander, chartered architect at Oakwrights, answers some common planning questions that arise when considering a self-build

CONSERVATION AREA

The replacement dwelling above was located in a conservation area and green belt. It also had a large oak tree which had a root protection zone covering almost half of the plot. Before meeting Oakwrights' regional designer Pete Tonks, the clients had two failed applications and a dismissed appeal behind them. It was clear that a much more detailed analysis was required, together with an appropriate design response.

Q WHY IS PLANNING PERMISSION REQUIRED?

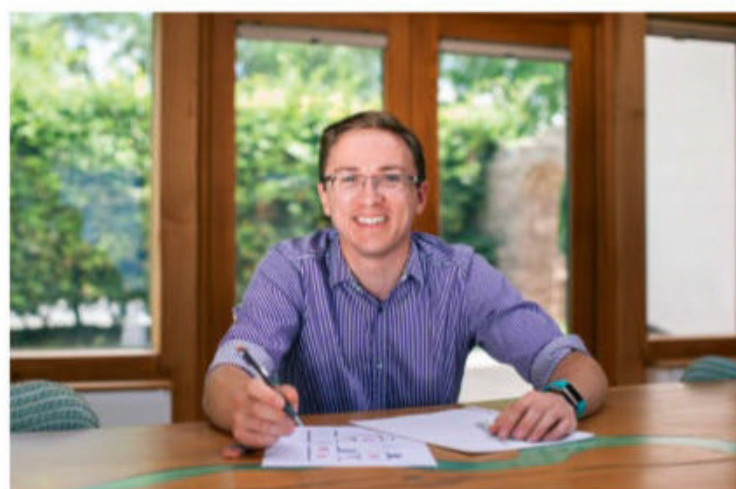
A Planning ensures that the appropriateness and potential impact of a development is given due consideration before being built. In the context of a self-build, this includes the relationship to settlement boundaries, impact on neighbouring properties, appearance, external materials, as well as issues such as overlooking, parking and impacts on protected species or trees. It is a separate process to Building Regulations, which covers a wide range of safety and structural issues.

Q HOW LONG DOES A PLANNING APPLICATION TAKE TO BE DECIDED?

A An application for one house is expected to take around eight weeks, depending on the local council's workload. However, it is always good to be prepared that your planning application may take longer in some cases.

Q DOES PLANNING PERMISSION EXPIRE?

A Planning permission typically expires three years from the date of approval. It isn't possible to apply to extend the time period; a full application would be required. It is often better to make a



meaningful start on site (subject to pre-commencement conditions) to secure a planning permission. Once started, there is typically no time limit on completing the project.

Q CAN PLANNING PERMISSION BE REVOKED OR APPEALED?

A While technically planning approval can be revoked, it is exceptionally rare. It is more important to build your project in accordance with the approved drawings.

This means, firstly being sure that you are happy with the design before it is submitted to planning and secondly, that technical compliance issues such as head heights and first floor window escape sizes are considered early, to avoid the delay of going back for planning amendments.

If your application is refused, it is possible to take the case to appeal with the planning inspectorate. This can, however, be a lengthy process, so it's often worth taking specialist planning advice if an application is refused.

For more information regarding planning consent, scan the QR code left or call 01432 353353. 



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**Amazing self-build,
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IMAGE: DAVID BARBOUR

Final Word

Signing off...

What we've seen, recommend and love this month

WORTH A READ

If you've not embarked on a major build project before, using a cost estimating service can be a really good way of finding out what materials and labour will cost you at each stage of your build. This will then become an invaluable document when comparing builders' quotes. David Snell's piece on page 164 illustrates how such a service can also really help you to keep an eye on costs as a project progresses. **Michelle Guy, Assistant Editor**

KITCHEN DESIGN: MONEY-SAVING TIP

After writing the feature on designing a low-cost kitchen (page 58) I was really impressed with how much you could save by buying an ex-display kitchen. For some reason, we didn't look into this option when renovating our house, but now I wish I had! Providing you are willing to try your hand at kitchen fitting, you could bag yourself a real bargain — plus, by buying second hand, you are doing your bit for the environment too.

Natasha Brinsmead, Associate Editor

DESIGN INSPO

One of my favourite elements of Lucy Cook's home (featured on page 99) is that the inspiration for the house directly correlates to the surrounding area and the locality has influenced the form and materials of the building. It's proof that design inspiration is all around us; just wandering around your neighbourhood can fill you with creativity for a project.

As we're ramping up to the summer months, there are more and more open house days and build events being announced around the UK, so I would encourage any reader inspired by Lucy's story to put their boots on and go exploring.

Amy Reeves, Editorial Assistant

BUYING AT AUCTION: SOUND ADVICE

As someone who has (somewhat nervously) bought land at auction, I can really relate to the advice in our 'Five things to do before buying at auction' article (page 123) — especially the top tips on going along to a few practice runs at local auctions and setting a budget and sticking to it. In the excitement, it's all too easy to get carried away — which is great for the auction house but less so for the vendor who may be paying thousands over the odds to pursue their dream. **Alison Wall, Chief Sub Editor**

A LITTLE SECRET...

As I write, our biggest event of the year has come to a close: The National Homebuilding & Renovating Show at the NEC, Birmingham. The Advice Centre is a key highlight for many show visitors, and this year it was brimming with experts — many of whom write for this magazine — on hand to offer independent advice. It's always fascinating to hear the questions you need answers to — and I'll let you into a secret, many of those queries become the basis for the articles contained within these pages.

Claire Lloyd, Editor 



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