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Welcome

Wannabe selfbuilders have long been frustrated by the lack of opportunity. So the Local Government Association's finding that there is huge discrepancy between the number of house applications approved by planners and the number of homes built by developers will only add to that frustration.

As our News page reports, the LGA has called on the government to give councils the power to compulsory purchase land that has been approved for development, but hasn't been built on. This follows its release of figures showing that more than a million homes haven't been built over the past 10 years, despite having planning approval.

The LGA cites this as a major reason for the shortage of new homes in the UK, rather than any inadequacies of the planning system itself, as stretched as that may be. Perhaps freeing up this land could create some much-needed opportunities for selfbuilders desperate to realise their dream home.

One reason for inactivity on the housebuilding front is the profit motive for developers. It often pays to wait to maximise the financial return on plots in desirable locations. Any action to reduce this profiteering is to be encouraged. After all, there are plenty of people who are ready to seize the opportunity.

This month, we feature selfbuilders who have done just that, including our cover story about a father who built a new house next to his farm for his daughter. We also have a striking contemporary house designed and built to suit a tight infill site, a holiday let perched on a cliff in Cornwall, and the complete rebuild of a coastal cottage in a private gated community.

And our Readers' Home this month belongs to a couple who traded their self-built log cabin in Scotland for a SIPs new home just down the road. As their 'forever' home, they are delighted with the result. The fact that the build cost more than the value of the finished house is not an issue. They don't intend to move.

Which prompts the question, how do we make our houses suitable for long-term living? Gerald Cole has been giving some thought to this question and you can read his findings in his regular Topping Out feature on page 112.

Ross Stokes

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Building contracts rise by 18.5 per cent

The value of all construction contracts awarded in January 2020 was £5.5bn based on a three-month rolling average, according to the Barbour Index.

This is an increase of 18.5 per cent on December 2019 and is also 2.1 per cent ahead of January 2019.

In the three-month period ending January 2020, total construction contract awards were valued at £15.6bn which is 7.1 per cent higher than the previous quarter and is also 5.1 per cent higher than the comparable quarter ending January 2019.

In January the number of construction contract awards was 893, an increase of 95.4 per cent on December 2019.

The largest sector this month was infrastructure with attributable share of 42.7 per cent of awards, with the residential sector in second place attracting 25.5 per cent..

Ombudsman for new homebuyers

A New Homes Ombudsman will soon protect homebuyers from 'shoddy building work'. New-build homebuyers currently don't have recourse to challenging poor service or workmanship by developers.

Housing secretary Robert Jenrick has confirmed that the government wants the ombudsman to be established in law "as soon as possible" to address this.

It would assist homebuyers with a number of issues, such as poor brickwork or faulty wiring, and would have statutory powers to award compensation, to ban 'rogue' developers from building, and order developers to fix inadequate work.

Where there is a dispute with developers, the ombudsman would act "swiftly and independently" to resolve it.

The government said it doesn't want people to face long waits and costly court cases trying to sort out problems with their new homes.

Developers would be subject to the disciplinary authority of the ombudsman by law.

Jenrick said: "It's completely unacceptable that so many people struggle to get answers when they find issues with their dream new home.

"That's why the ombudsman will stop rogue developers getting away with shoddy building work and raise the game of housebuilders across the sector.

"Homebuyers will be able to access help when they need it, so disputes can be resolved faster and people can get the compensation they deserve."

In June 2019, the government launched a consultation on redress for purchasers of new-build homes, and on the New Homes Ombudsman. The consultation sought views on the detail of the proposed legislation and how it could be delivered. Jenrick's confirmation of a New Homes Ombudsman comes in response to that consultation.

Call for low-carbon designs

Housing minister Christopher Pincher has invited small businesses, designers and manufacturers to come forward with ideas for low-carbon, elder-friendly homes, as part of its Home of 2030 design competition created to drive innovation in the provision of affordable, efficient and healthy green homes.

Home of 2030 is a cross-departmental initiative funded by the government. The brief says homes must meet the highest standards of design, together with the needs of the country's growing elderly population with technology and the "latest innovations" used to improve quality of life.

Pincher said: "This competition will harness all that technology has to offer to bring in a housing revolution: new low-carbon homes that deliver low energy bills and independent living for older generations.

Gold standard

"The new gold standard of building will have the future in mind – not just in the UK, but worldwide."

The minister added that the three finalists would have the opportunity to partner with developers to deliver their designs on a site owned by Homes England.

It wants to see applications that:

- Are age-friendly and inclusive – appealing to a variety of age groups and adaptable to how needs will change as people become older.
- Have a low environmental impact – applying technology and construction techniques to deliver net zero-carbon emissions.
- Encourage healthy living – by promoting better health and wellbeing, such as through access to green spaces and communal areas.
- Are deliverable and scalable – homes that can be rolled out across the country.

LGA blames undeveloped sites for one million shortfall in house builds

The Local Government Association is calling on the government to give councils the power to take action on undeveloped land with planning permission. This follows the release of figures showing that more than a million new homes have been approved in the past decade but have not yet been built.

The LGA says the backlog of unbuilt homes shows the planning system is not a barrier to house building. It wants to make it easier to compulsory purchase land where homes remain unbuilt, and to be able to charge developers full council tax for every unbuilt development from the point that the original planning permission expires.

LGA figures show that 2,564,600 units have been granted planning permission by councils since 2009/10 while only 1,530,680 have been completed.

The number of new home approvals has almost doubled since 2012/13 with councils giving the green light to nine in 10 applications. New build completions have only increased by half as much in that time.

LGA housing spokesman David Renard said: "The planning system is not a barrier to house building. The number of homes granted planning permission has far outpaced the number of homes being built.

"Councils need powers to tackle our housing backlog and step in where a site with planning permission lies dormant and house building has stalled."

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/2012	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Total
Planning Permissions (units)	176,900	173,900	192,400	198,800	240,000	261,900	264,700	313,700	380,500	361,800	2,564,600
Completions	124,200	117,700	128,160	118,540	130,340	155,080	163,940	183,570	195,290	213,860	1,530,680

Book reviews

PICTURE: JACK HOBHOUSE

Raging against 'less is more'

Postmodern Architecture: Less Is A Bore by Owen Hopkins
Phaidon: £29.95

A House for Essex, artist Grayson Perry's uncompromising fantasy designed in conjunction with FAT Architect's Charles Holland, is one of the most recognisable houses in this collection of postmodern buildings from around the world.

Postmodernism began in the 1970s as a reaction to the Modernist movement. It reached a fever pitch of eclectic non-conformity in the 80s and 90s and is now, 40 years later, enjoying newfound popularity. Even so, the vivid colours and quirky forms tend to trigger Marmite responses.

This book consists largely of single images of projects ranging from offices to home interiors, and is testament to its wide-ranging applications.

PICTURE: NORMAN MCGRATH

PICTURE: SANTI CALECA, COURTESY OF SOTTSASS ASSOCIATES

Apart from his introduction, and appendices, author Owen Hopkins, a historian and curator at the Sir John Soames Museum in London, lets the pictures speak for themselves, accompanied only by brief descriptions and pull-out quotes from the likes of Andy Warhol, David Bowie and Martin Amis, as well as leading architects in the field.

Top: A House for Essex (2015).
Above: Residence Pool (1982).
Left: Casa Wolf (1989).

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ON TREND

Space for green fingers

The Evesham wooden greenhouse is constructed from ethically sourced interlocking 12mm tongue and groove timber, built to last and supplied with a 10-year anti-rot guarantee. It measures 8ft x 6ft, boasting nearly 7ft of headroom and a spacious interior, with ample room for potting benches and staging. Benefits include glazed UV-resistant shatterproof styrene windows and an opening roof vent, making it the ideal space to keep taller vine plants. Price: £479.99. (waltons.co.uk)

Multi choice

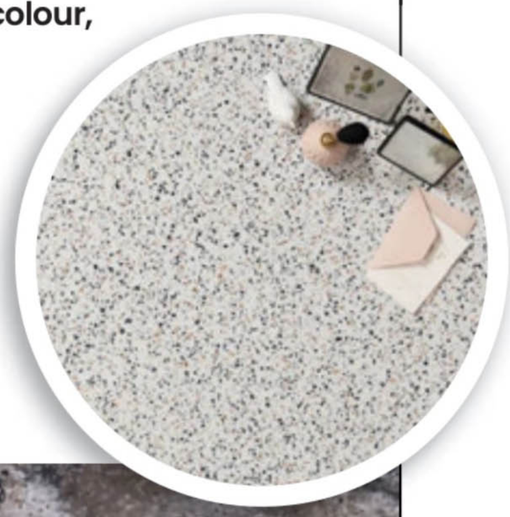
The Stockton 8 wood-burning and multi-fuel stove comes with a choice of one or two doors, the latter of which is available with a cast iron catch that rotates, opening or closing the doors. Giving a nominal heat output of 8kW, it is also offered as an integral boiler model or cook stove version. Prices start from £1,129. (stovax.com)

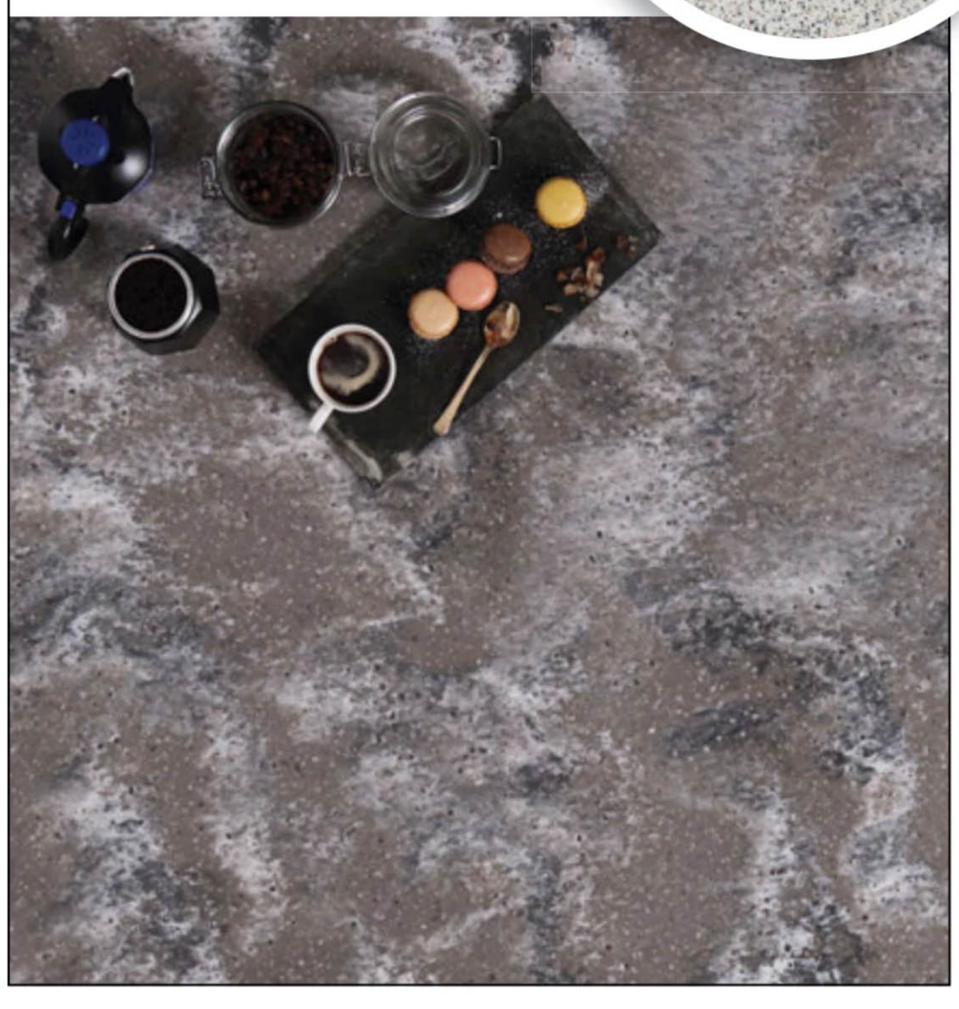
In the shadows

Responding to predictions that dark kitchens will be a key trend for this year, Fisher & Paykel has introduced a range of sleek, black kitchen appliances, designed to match and blend seamlessly into the background of an open-plan kitchen. The built-in oven features a black glazed front and anodised aluminium dial, handle and trim, with 11 impressive functions, while the integrated column fridge and freezer can be paired to create a grand yet discreet design with customisable doors and sophisticated variable temperature zones. The dishwasher has a waist-height sliding drawer, which means no more bending over to load and unload. Each drawer holds a half load for small, quick washing that doesn't waste water, with compartments running independently from one another as required. (fisherpaykel.com)

On the surface

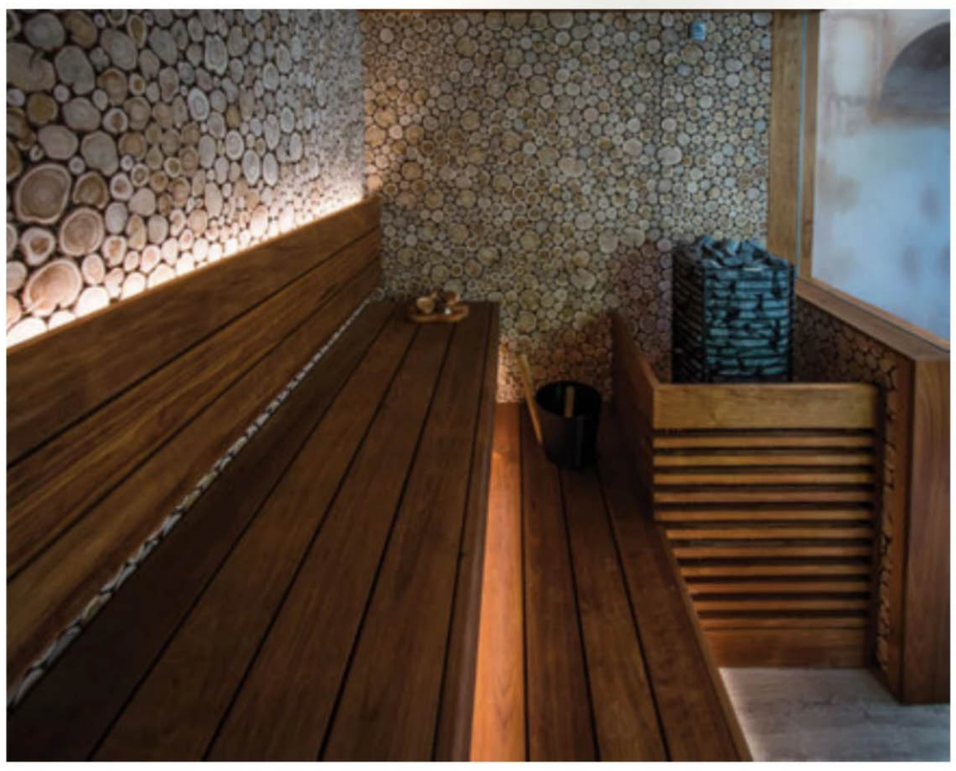
Staron has introduced seven new colours to its solid surface collection, which can be used in any kitchen or bathroom space. Each eye-catching design features intricate detail. Displayed here, Terrazzo Venezia is white with contrasting flecks of colour, while Supreme Concerto boasts wash-effect shades of brown, ash and white. Staron surfaces contain a blend of natural minerals and thermosetting acrylic polymers, resulting in a durable, hygienic structure. Price: from £350 per sqm. (staron.com)





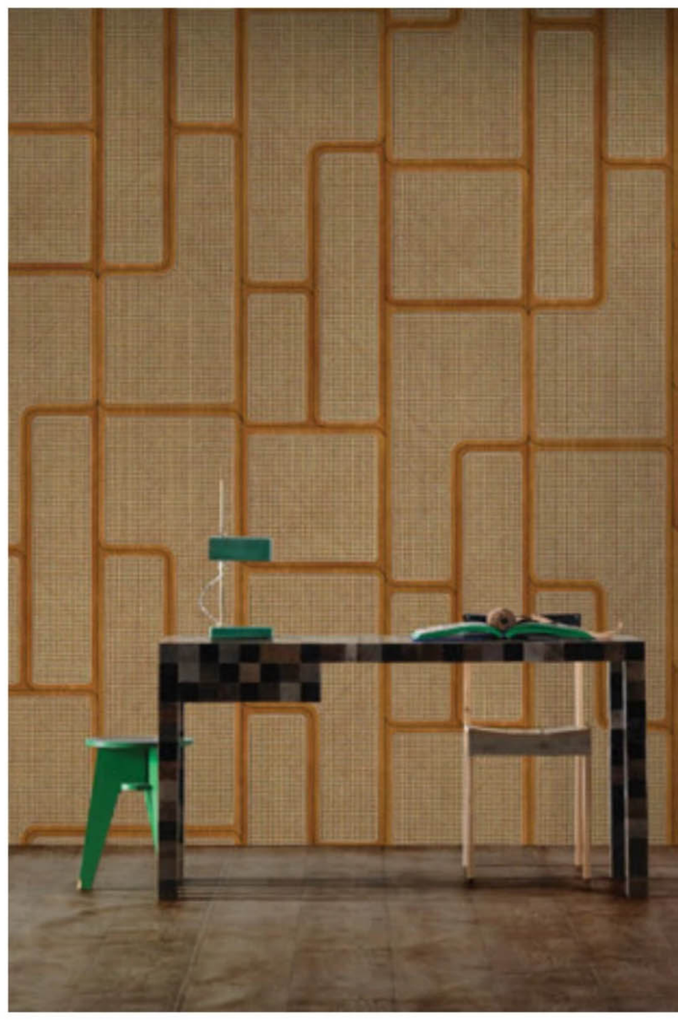
Accessible fittings

The Gosfield collection provides a range of accessible bathroom accessories, available in 30 different finishes with bespoke options. Products include the single arm hinged support rail, the flangeless back rest rail and the grab rail, which enables users to manoeuvre safely from a wheelchair to the WC or basin. The accessible fittings in the collection can be removed and replaced with blanking caps if no longer required. Finishes include polished charcoal and brushed gold. Price on application. (fitzroyoflondon.com)



Authentic experience

Finnmark specialises in bespoke sauna installations designed to give a genuine Finnish experience by combining traditional construction techniques, such as stressing the importance of the right layout and correct ventilation, with modern design practices like using CAD. Shown here is an installation in Selside, near Kendal in the Lake District National Park. Striking juniper log stack effect cladding is on all vertical surfaces with a half-height glass front. The ceiling and two-tiered L-shaped bench are made from richly coloured thermo-aspen timber, providing ample space for up to seven people and accommodating a 9kW heater. Finnmark follows Finnish Building Regulations and offers prefabricated cabin builds or bespoke extensions from £12,000, or Finnish log cabins from £18,000. (finnmarksauna.com)



Woven wonder

The trend for rattan and natural woven textures is no longer just for furniture, establishing itself in more permanent places around the home. Inspired by architectural wallpaper from the past decade, this NLXL Framed Webbing wallpaper (above left) by Mr and Mrs Vintage, and the NLXL Angle Webbing wallpaper (above right)by Studio Roderick Vos, celebrate the natural beauty of rattan in a pared-back neutral palette. The collection combines woven features with geometric pattern and wood-effect textures. Rolls measure 100cm x 48.7cm and costs £175. (rockettstgeorge.co.uk)

Future-proof design

Smart Shaker-style, midnight blue and cup handles... what's not to love about the Artemisia? This style and colourway make it trend-defying and timeless. The saturated matt finish means the blue will look the same in any light, so you're guaranteed a uniformity. Pair it with marble-effect surfaces for a fresh combination. And if blue isn't your thing, it's also available in a moody, graphite grey. Artemisia in Midnight Blue, from £1,298 for eight units. (diy.com)

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RIBA reports a surge in confidence in housebuilding

The RIBA Future Trends Workload Index surged into positive territory for the first month of 2020 with a balance figure of +17 – up 19 points. Small practices led the way, up 20 points, with medium- and large-sized practices up by nine points.

All regions expected architects' workloads to increase over the next three months with the Midlands and East Anglia the most positive, rising to 24 from -13; London up to two (from -18); the South of England to 15 (from 0); Wales and the West 25 (from 14); and the North of England to 26 (also from 14).

The private housing sector rose significantly by 16 points to 18.

The RIBA Future Trends Staffing Index also rose slightly, with a balance figure of five – up from two.

While almost a third of practices expect workloads to grow, only 11 per cent predict an increase in full-time staff.

RIBA's head of economic research and analysis, Adrian Malleson, said: "While January saw the largest confidence rise since Future Trends monitoring began, and the highest balance score since June 2018, for architects, this has not yet translated into real workload growth.

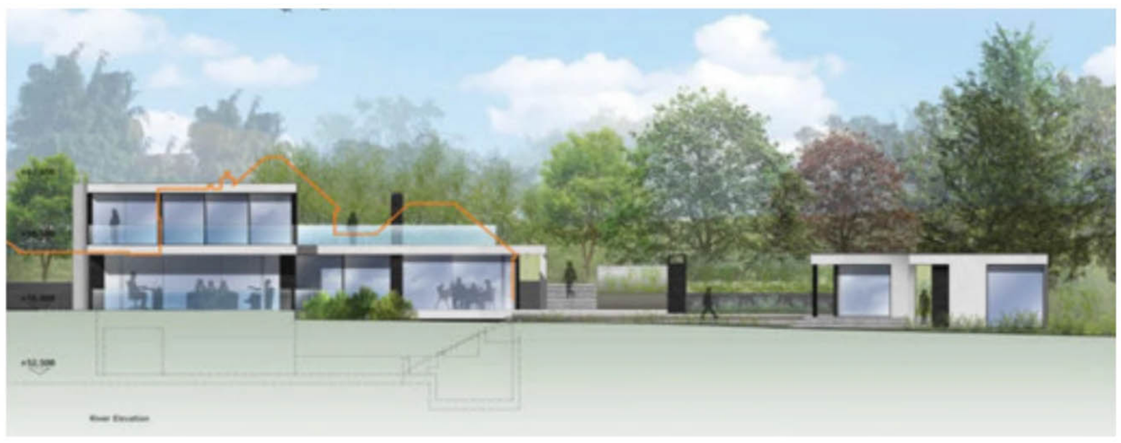
"Workloads remain on average five per cent lower than they were a year ago, and one fifth of respondents told us they were personally under-employed due to a lack of work.

"While some practices pointed to an active housing market and felt political stability brought by the election result could have a positive impact on workloads, long-standing concerns over Brexit remained.

"Until trade agreements with the EU have been crystallised and government spending plans have been made clear, we can continue to expect reports of a competitive market and hesitation on the part of clients.

"Nevertheless, this month's results are good news; growth in confidence can be a good indicator of real growth to come," Mr Malleson said.

Bond-style home for Green Belt



Planning permission has been granted by Chiltern & South Bucks District Council for this luxurious £10m self build on Green Belt on the outskirts of London, near Gerrards Cross.

Skyfall, an expansive and futuristic five-bedroom house, is designed to be less intrusive in its countryside setting than the detached house it will replace, with the lower ground floor embedded in the hillside to conceal much of the 12,775-sq ft internal space.

The lower ground floor accommodates underground parking for four cars, a sauna, steam room, gym, lap pool, spa pool, bar, wine cellar and staff living quarters.

Upstairs, the property incorporates an outdoor pool, indoor spa pool, light wells and sliding walls enhancing spacious open-plan living. There are five en suite bedrooms, including the master bedroom which has separate 'his' and 'her' bathrooms and dressing rooms.

Designed for developer Southern Grove by WaM Architecture, the house will be set within existing trees and embedded in the natural topography.

The facades visible above ground are wrapped with floor-to-ceiling windows, located to maximise views of the open countryside, bounded by white rendered ribbons which form the striking, folding structural frame of the house.

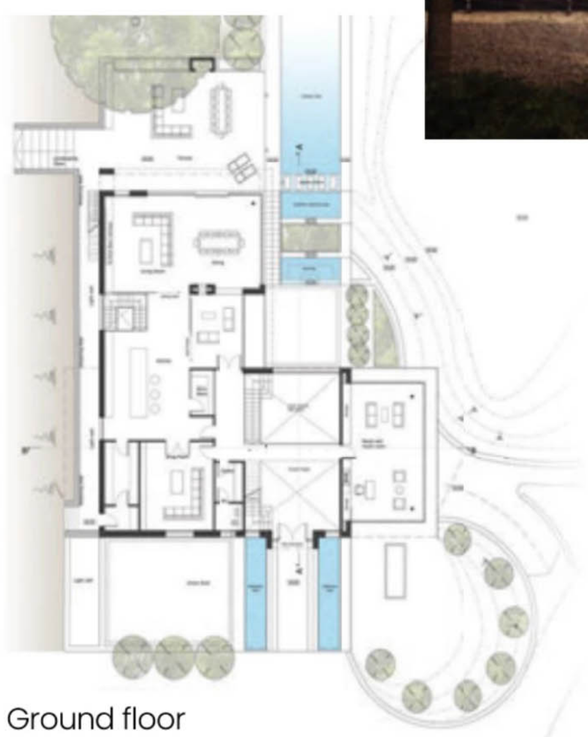
To the west the grounds slope dramatically down towards the river, giving the impression of a two-storey property from the west but a single-storey property from the east. Visitors will be greeted by a dramatic two-storey entrance flanked by reflection pools.

The luxury new home has been designed to fit discreetly into its rural setting, despite its 12,775-sq ft floorplan.

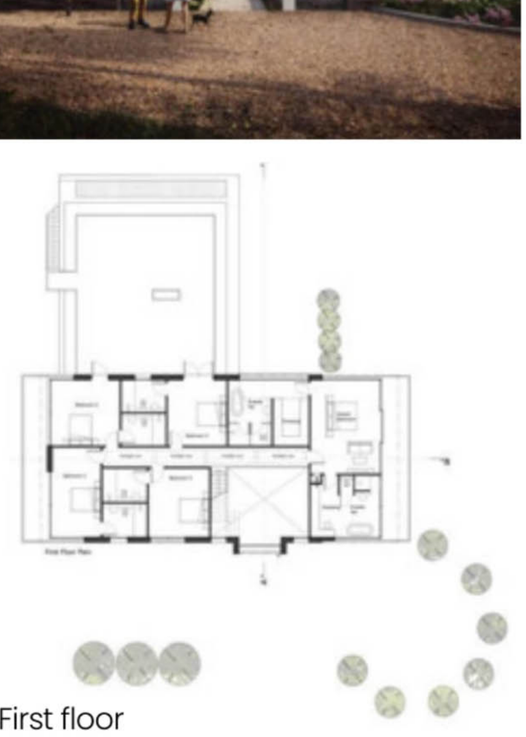
Southern Grove took just five months to take the project from the drawing board to planning approval, which chair Andrew Southern attributes to the design's sympathetic approach to its location.

WaM Architecture's Ben Willcox adds: "This is a true example of what is possible even when a site is constrained by the importance of preserving our Green Belt."

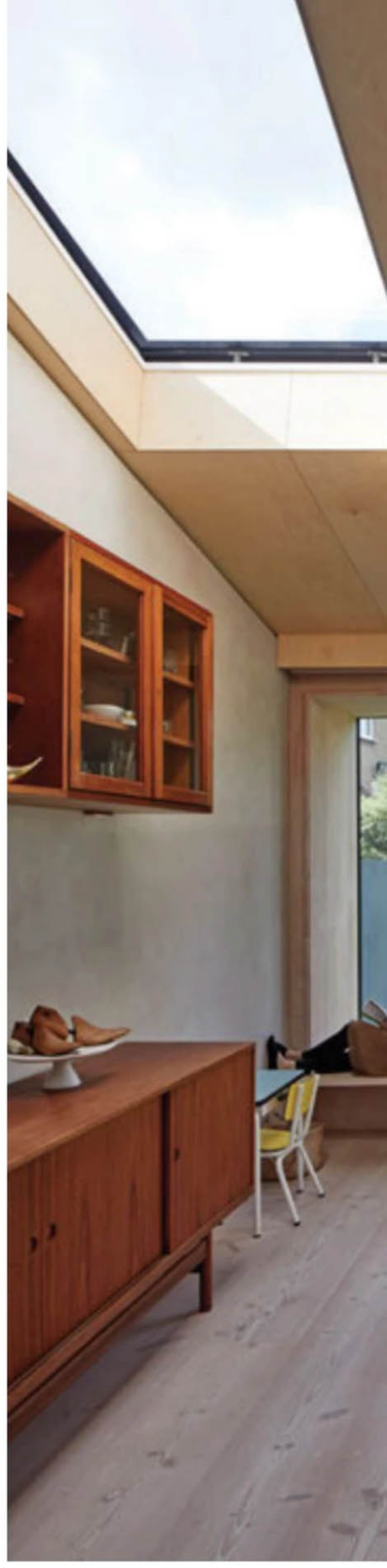
Lower ground floor

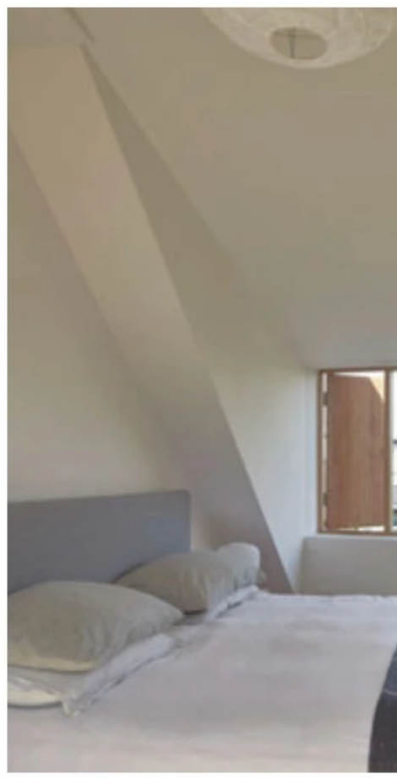


Ground floor

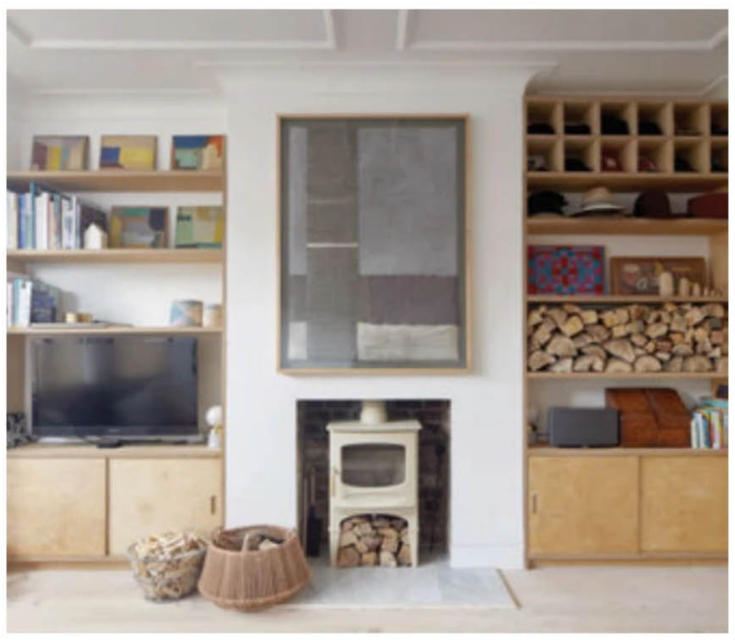


First floor





This renovation and extension of a terrace in Kensal Rise in London illustrates how good design can produce rooms that are both attractive and comfortable spaces to live in. The brief for RISE Architects was to transform a dark interior into a contemporary and welcoming living space for its owners. The resulting design verges on the radical, with distinctive protruding windows, timber walls that fold back to access the garden, and grey slate tiles that cover the rear facade like the scales of a dragon. At night, the warmth of the interior lights up the windows, oriented like the eyes of a chameleon. From the inside, the space feels warm, inviting and intimate. The floors, clad in Danish timber, smooth the frontiers between floors, walls and ceiling, while the windows, large and bright with northern light, focus the views away from the neighbours to the garden. The impulse to kick off your shoes and quietly contemplate the world from one of the window sills is almost irresistible. The project was designed in many ways from the inside out: pushing the limits of permitted development to maximise the ground and second floors, re-shaping what would have been standard rooms to create the spaces demanded by the client's brief, as well as to orientate the views from sliding doors, dormer windows and oriel windows towards a backland copse, evoking the feeling of not being in London at all.

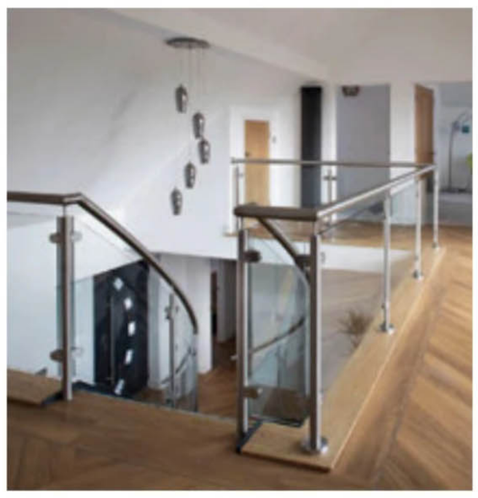


IN DETAIL

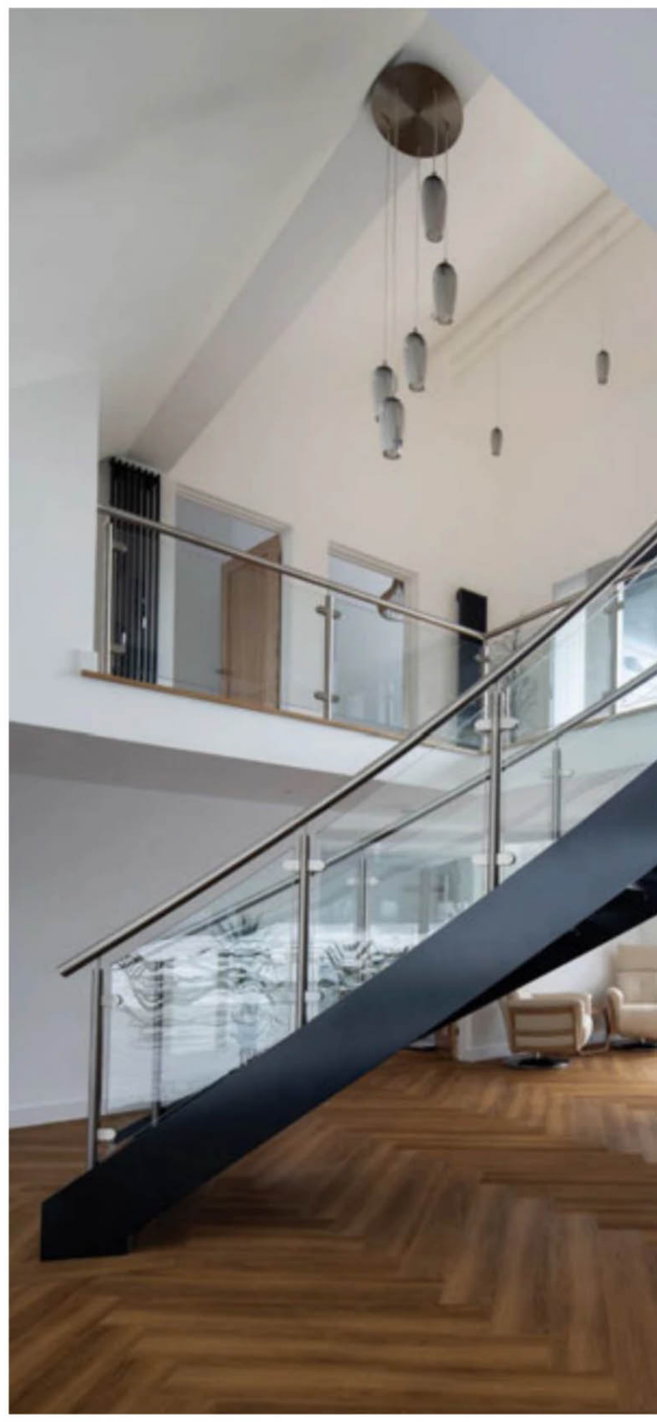
Size 180 sqm
Site size 232 sqm
Budget £450,000
Architect
RISE Design Studio
Structural engineer
CAR Ltd

THE SPEC

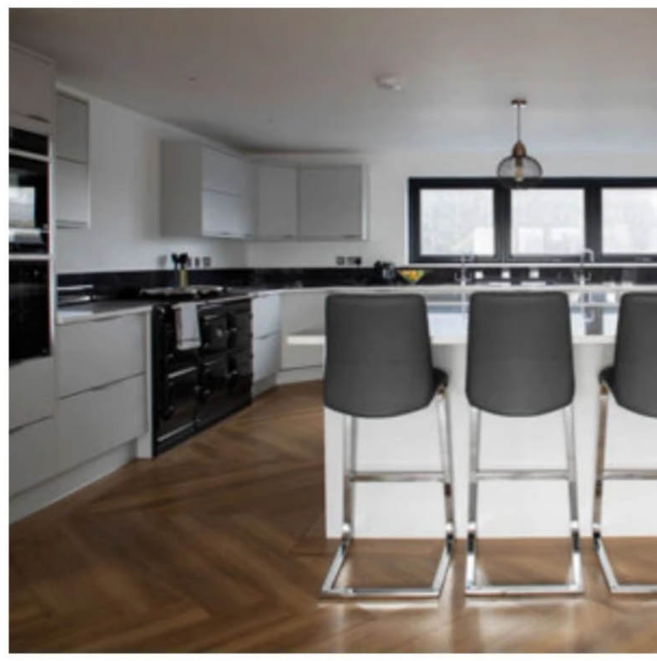
- PV solar on roof
- Airtightness $7.9 m^3 hr m^2$
- MVHR
- Rainwater harvesting
- Nest smart thermostats
- Clay plaster walls
- Birch plywood kitchen ceiling, joinery and furniture
- Douglas fir flooring
- Cedar-clad folding doors
- Minimal frame sliding doors

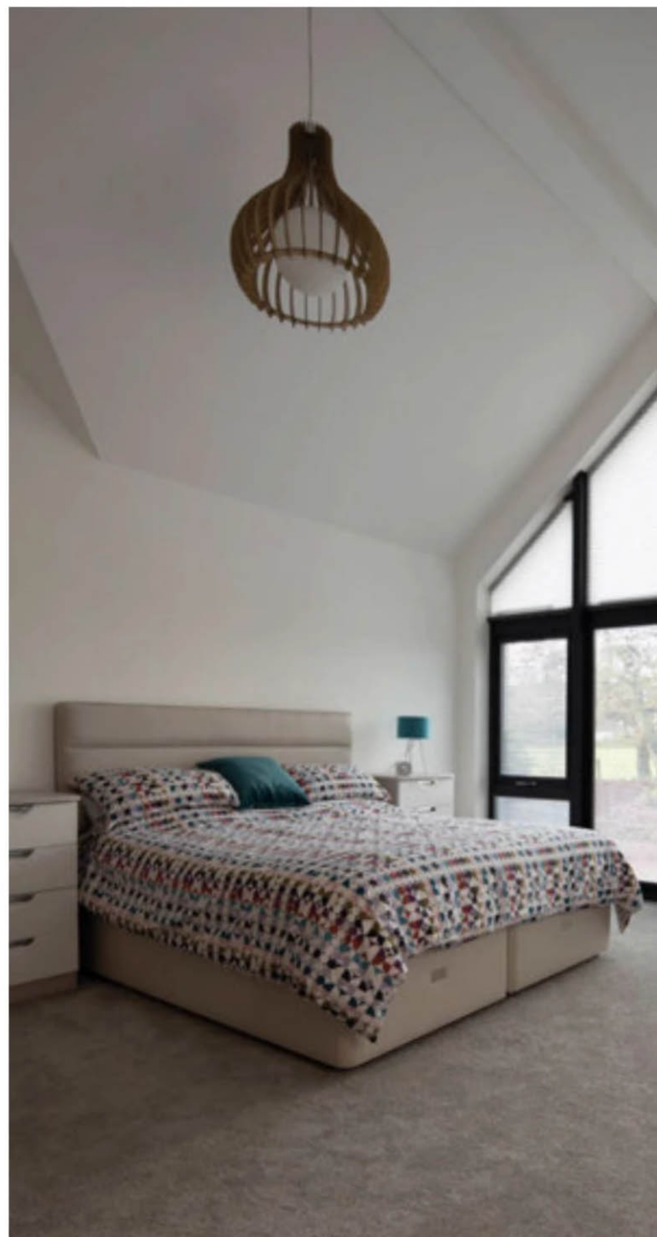


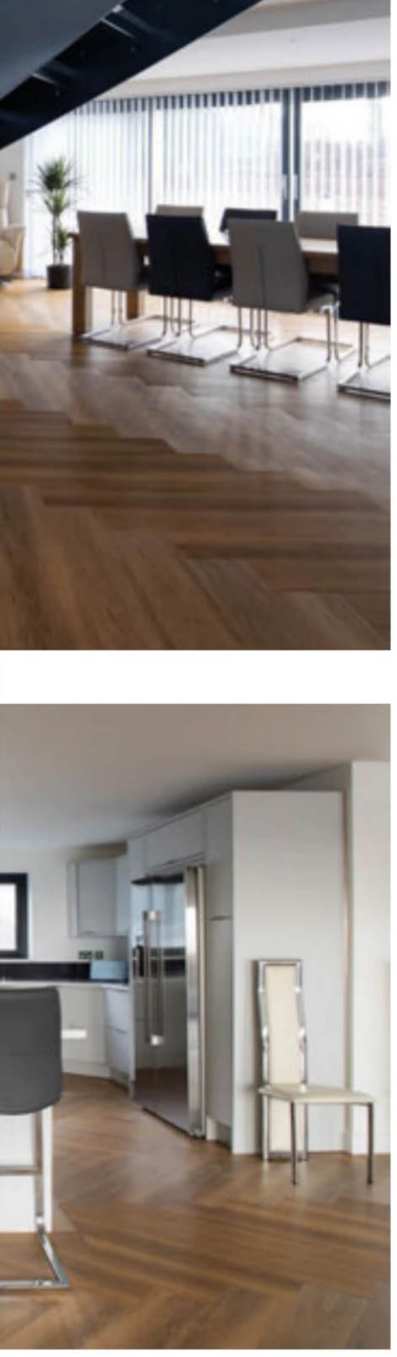
SPECTACULAR STAIRCASE CENTREPIECE



The staircase dominates the ground-floor living space, while upstairs the two bedroom wings are linked by a walkway.







"From the outset, I saw the project as a grand design. This was an opportunity to build a completely bespoke, top-of-the-range home. I wanted to create a house that was contemporary yet classic, with clean fresh lines and making the most of its glorious outlook over Cornish countryside," explains Ian Burley.

Burley, who runs Burley Construction, was given a free hand to create a home that blended in with its rural surroundings at St Stephen. Owners Frank and Wendy Bradshaw had realised a long-held ambition to return to the village near St Austell where they have friends and family.

The couple turned to Burley who had built St Martins Hotel in the Isles of Scilly and has a passion for creating buildings that blend harmoniously within their natural environment.

The Bradshaws had previously run a Cornish pasty factory in the area and although the couple had moved away, they were excited to return to St Stephen.

"As soon as I saw the building plot, I immediately had a clear design concept in mind and I conveyed this to the architects, RA Design in St Ives," explains Burley. "They grasped the concept immediately and the whole process of drawing up and signing off the plans was completed with only two meetings – far fewer than would normally be expected."

The planning process was also straightforward as there was already an existing bungalow on the site. This was demolished and a disused mine shaft on the site was capped. Pilings were required for the foundations and once the groundworks had been completed, work started on the build in the spring of 2019.

Timber frame

The timber frame was supplied by Frame UK. Normally, a frame takes only a matter of days to erect but this one took five weeks because of its size. It included no fewer than 48 pieces of steel for the vaulted ceilings.

The house has underfloor heating downstairs with radiators upstairs, all powered by an air source heat pump.

The dramatic centrepiece for the house is a staircase. "We wanted to create a sensational feature, rather than just a functional staircase, " says Burley who turned to Spiral UK, based in Helston, to supply it.

The helical (curved) fabricated steel staircase has painted treads and stringers in anthracite grey. The treads have an Amtico vinyl finish which matches the flooring throughout the house, while the balustrade is made from toughened glass with a tubular satin polished stainless steel handrail and uprights. Matching balustrade has also been used for the landing.

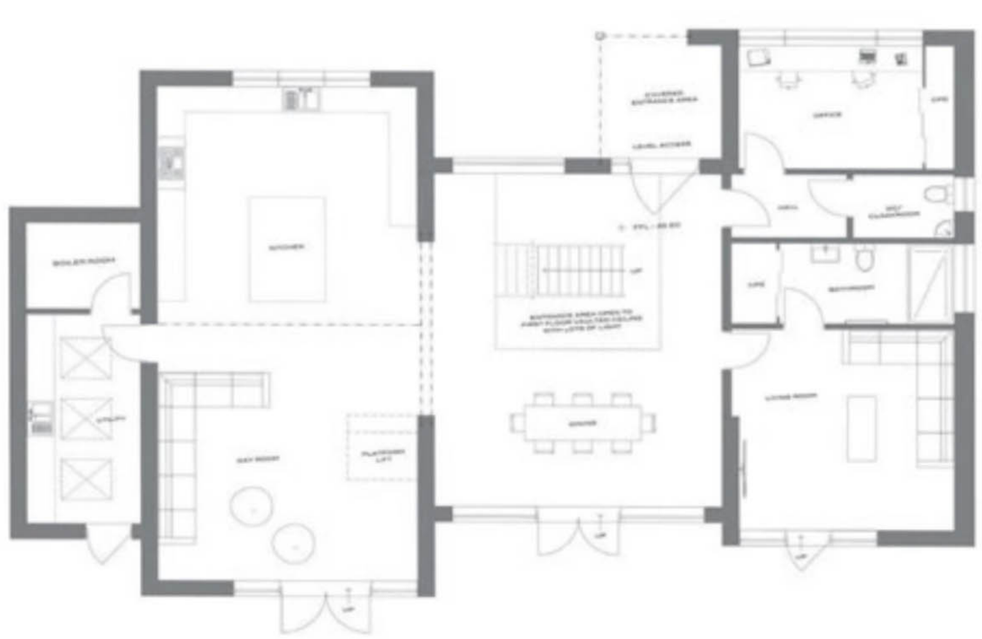
"The stringers really zing as they have such a lovely polished shine," enthuses Ian, "and the matching balustrade to the stairwell and landing area means everything flows seamlessly, creating a sense of airiness and space."

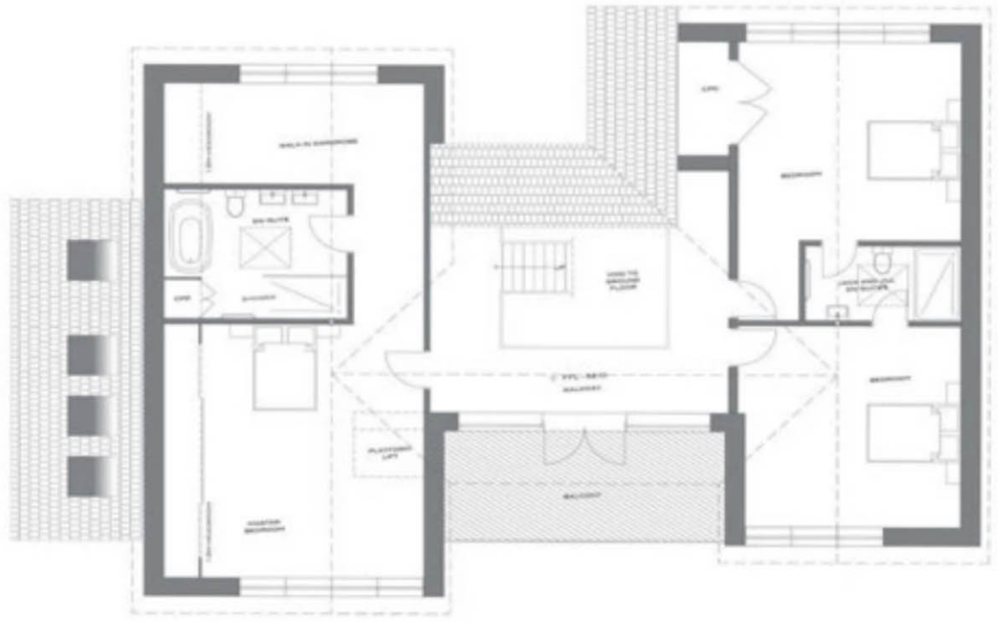
This streamlined approach continues throughout the house and is typified in the way the TV screen in the main living area is flush with the walls and is exactly the same width as the fireplace below it.

Even the outside gutters are seamless with no joints, reducing the likelihood of leaks as well as having a clean appearance.

The kitchen was designed and fitted by Varcurn Marble, with top-of-the-range units and an impressive island. This area has turned out to be the heart of the home.

Upstairs there are dramatic double-height windows, with a frameless glass balcony, accessed from the landing between the two bedrooms, providing a stunning vantage point from which to admire the views of the rolling fields.





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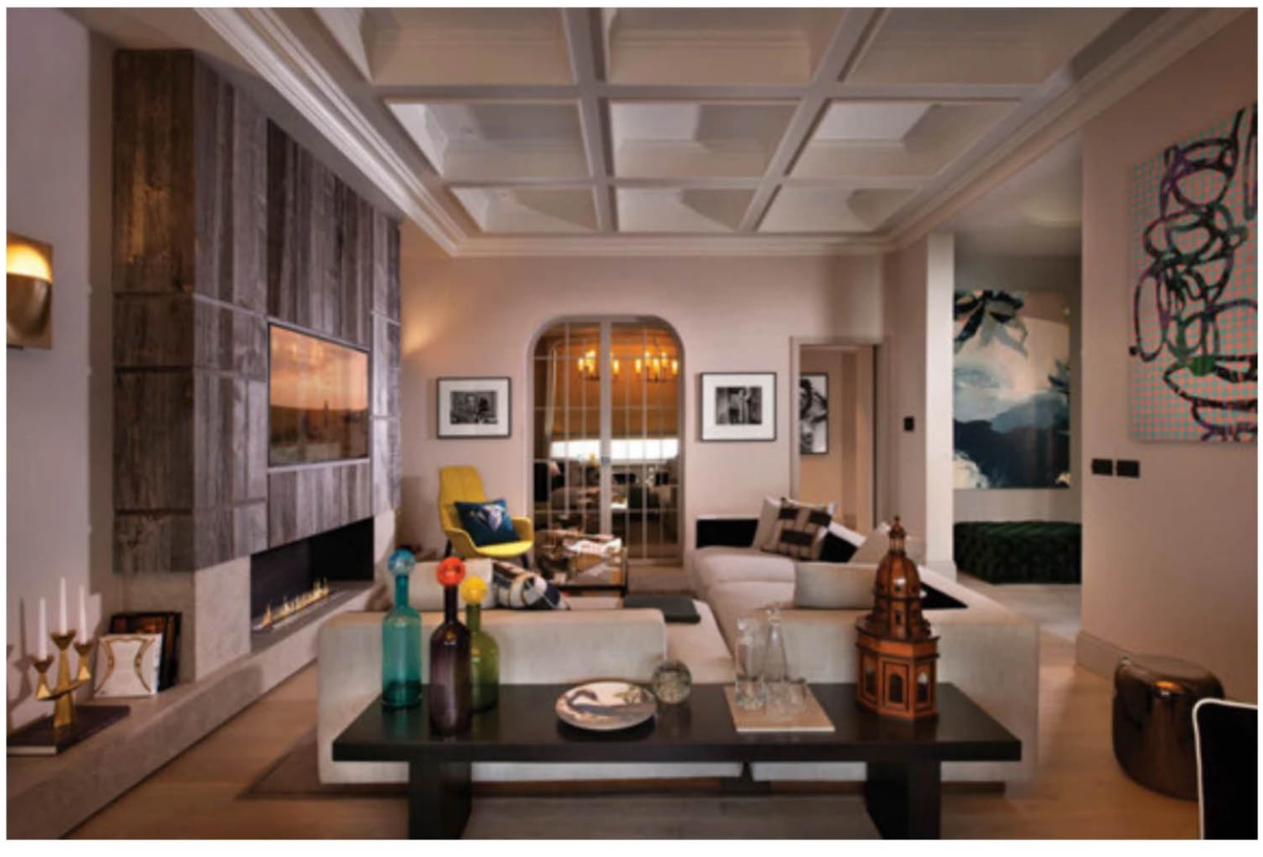
LIVING ROOM
The spacious living room connects all areas of the upper ground floor together, and has a coffered ceiling.

EXTERIOR
The two-storey Kensington apartment has a separate entrance off a pedestrian cobbled mews, in addition to the main entrance.



GOING UP

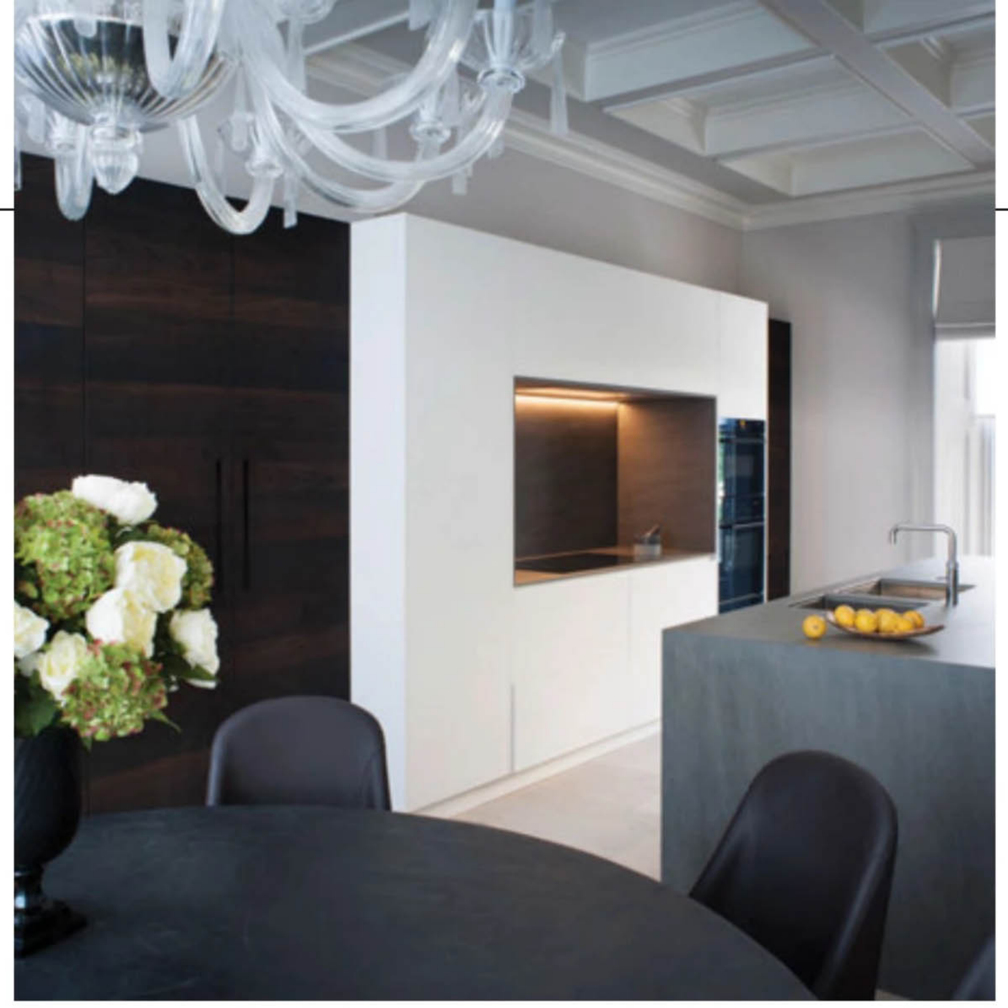
Two Kensington apartments have been joined together to create a spacious, stylish home with double the living space and filled with high-end fabrics, fittings and furnishings.

Rhys Cole had lived in the basement flat of this grand Kensington house for several years when he purchased the ground-floor apartment, with the intention of joining the two properties to make a more comfortable, spacious home.

The ground-floor apartment has its own entrance via a pedestrian cobbled mews, as well as its main access. Requiring permission from the planning authority, the conservation officer and also the residents' association of the block, Rhys also needed a clever design to introduce a staircase between the units and create the grandeur this much bigger apartment deserved. Thomas Griem and his team at TG-Studio have created a design that splits the two floors – an entertaining floor is approached by a double-height entrance hall with an accommodation floor below connected to the floor above by a private staircase.

A double-height entrance lobby has six steps to the upper-ground floor, with woven silk wallpaper and an oak portal framing the stairs incorporating low-level lighting, while a circular ceiling recess features an elegant chandelier.

Feature sliding doors lead to the study and to a hallway with storage space, a guest WC and access to the living areas, while a statement fireplace has a beige limestone base called Guido Blue, with storage units above clad with wood reclaimed from a barn in Transylvania. This supports a recessed TV, which sits flush with the wall.



Parts of the kitchen already had a coffered ceiling, a detail which has been introduced into the living room, kitchen and dining room. "The coffered effect shows off the high ceilings and connects the interior to the age of the building," explains Thomas, who also selected Bertrand Balas Balance wall lamps from the 1970s, sourced from a gallery in Amsterdam.

The kitchen, manufactured in Spain by DOCA, was designed by Gemini Design in London. It consists of a long tall run of units in matt white and sawn walnut. The cooking niche, cut out of the white units, is framed in a basalt stone. A 3.5m island unit is designed to replicate a block of basalt and accommodates two sinks and the dishwasher. Units running into the dining area accommodate a bespoke bar that can be hidden when required, and includes a wine fridge and wine glasses.

A thick structural wall opposite the dining table is covered with a cork and metal leaf wallpaper by Elitis. The circular table is in a cast resin finish created by Desalto to mimic the appearance of concrete, with chairs upholstered in leather.

Boldly patterned wallpaper is used throughout the home creating texture and depth, with sumptuous fabrics, decorative mirrors, and striking art work and photography, blending together to create a harmonious and elegant home.

KITCHEN
Matt white and sawn walnut are used for the kitchen wall units, which conceal a bar area. A basalt stone island contains sinks and a dishwasher. A circular table has a cast resin finish designed to look like concrete. Sculpture is by Carol Peace, and the photography is by Angus McDonald.

IN DETAIL

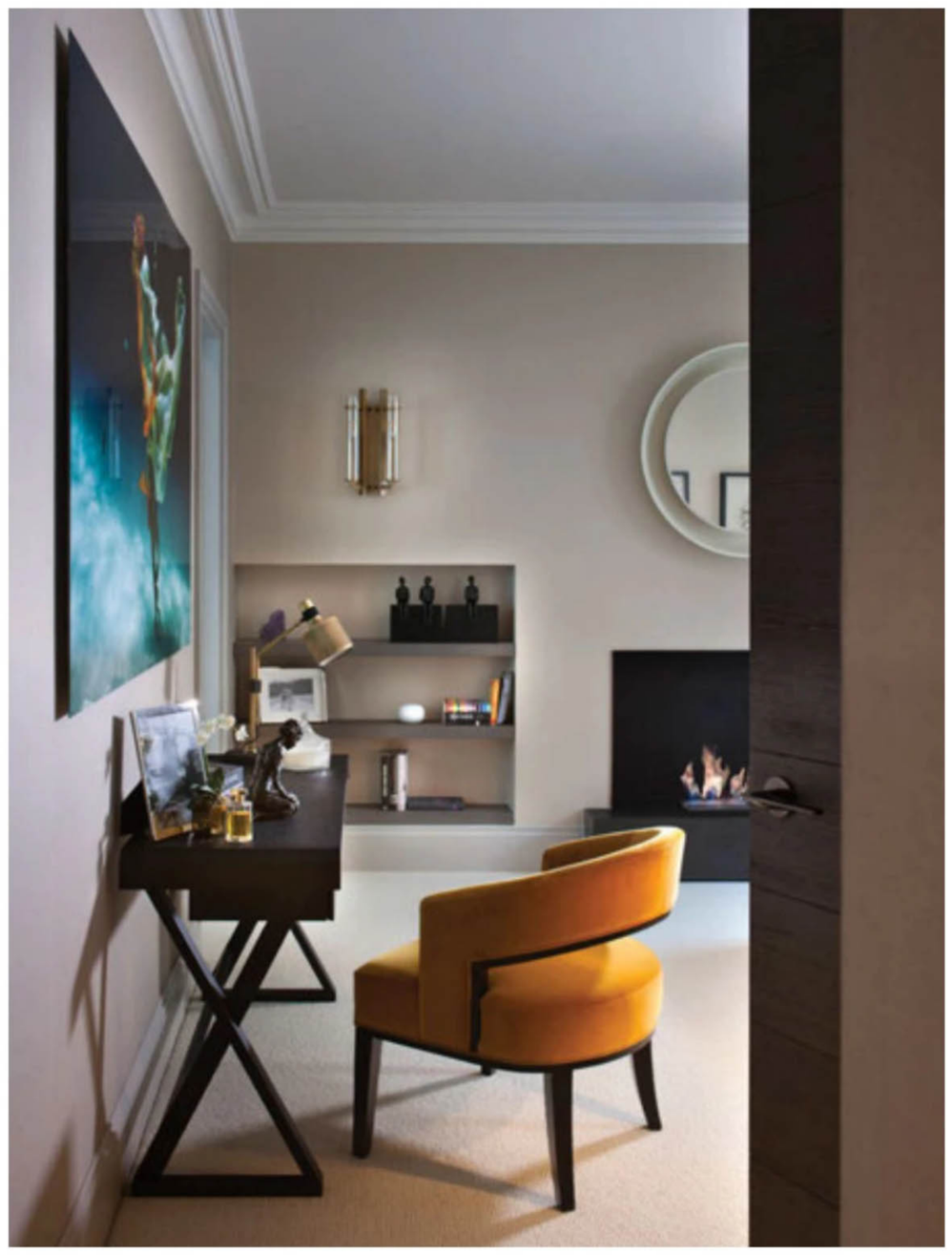
KITCHEN
Monmouth bar stools
Alter London: alterlondon.co.uk
Bar stool fabric, Genova
Azul Claro, Gaston y Daniela:
gastonydaniela.com
Kitchen manufacture DOCA: doca.es
Kitchen supply Gemini
Design: 020 3603 8835
Circular table Desalto: desalto.it
Cork and metal leaf
wallpaper Elitis: elitis.fr
Leather chairs SMA
Mobili: smamobili.it
Venetian chandelier RV
Astley: rvastley.co.uk
Antarctic photography Angus
McDonald: angusmcdonald.net

HALLWAY
Silk wallpaper Stereo:
stereointeriors.co.uk
Chandelier RV Astley: rvastley.co.uk
Sculpture Carol Peace:
carolpeace.com
Mirror, Origami, designed by
Thomas Griem: tg-studio.co.uk

LIVING ROOM
Armchair Poliform: poliformuk.com
Nest sofa, designed by Thomas
Griem: tg-studio.co.uk
Fireplace stone Natural Stone
Projects: stone-projects.com
Bookcases Bo Concept:
boconcept.com
Chrysler Sand rug Jacaranda:
jacarandacarpets.com
Rug design Thomas Griem

BATHROOM
Basin Agape: agapedesign.it
Bathroom fittings MEM by
Dornbracht: dornbracht.com
Bathroom wallpaper Elitis: elitis.fr

BEDROOM
Bed, Nest range, Alter London:
alterlondon.co.uk
Bed cushion The Rug Company:
therugcompany.com
Elvis bedside table Fimes: fimes.com
Wall lights RV Astley: rvastley.co.uk
Table Camerich: camerich.co.uk
Armchair Alter London:
alterlondon.co.uk
Armchair fabric, Saffron velvet Amy
Somerville: amysomerville.com
Las Vegas carpet Hammer
Carpets: hammercarpets.com



Thomas's design tips:

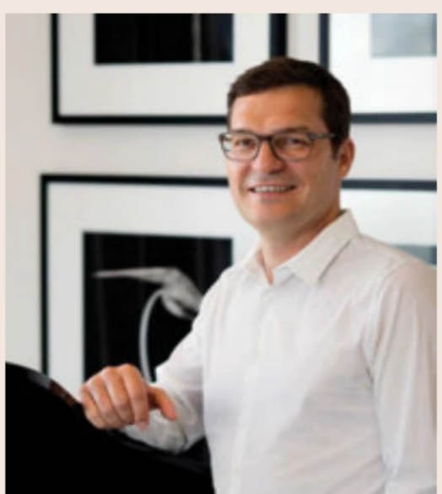
- When working with rooms with high ceilings it is important to get the proportion of the rooms right – don't make them too small. If the rooms are small, it is better to reduce the ceiling height.
- A wide staircase emphasises space, and space equals luxury. Small spaces, such as the guest WC, can be made striking by using strongly coloured wallpaper or bold paint colours with contrasting sanitaryware.
- A timeless bathroom design can be achieved with veined marble tiles. Combined with Victorian floor tiles this bathroom style is quintessentially English, and yet timelessly modern.
- To make a kitchen more striking and sociable, extend cabinetry into a wine bar designed with standard kitchen doors, cabinets and wine fridges.

HALLWAY
The double-height entrance lobby with metal pleated woven silk wallpaper, and stairs leading to the upper-ground floor.

BEDROOMS
Calm colours are set off by smart warm tones, such as the velvet armchair using Amy Somerville fabric.

Meet the designer

Thomas Griem is the founder and director of TG-Studio and has 20 years' experience in the interior design industry, working on residential, retail and office projects in international locations from the UK to Hong Kong and New York. Studying architectural engineering and architecture in Berlin and London, Thomas worked with Phillippe Stark for the global residential developer YOO, before going on to co-found the successful interior design practice Target Living, and launching TG-Studio in 2011. **(tg-studio.co.uk)**



VANITY UNITS

The minimalist Modus vanity unit has a matt black steel frame with a composite stone basin. The internal drawers and exterior of the cabinet are finished in Anthracite Grey. Measuring 900mm x 500mm x 540mm, it costs £995. (lussostone.com)

Supplied with a pair of Milano Longton square countertop basins, the Milano Henley 1,240mm floor-standing vanity unit comprises two open shelves and two soft-closing drawers. Made from engineered wood, it is shown here in Antique White and also comes in Light Grey. Price: £499.99. (bigbathroomshop.co.uk)

Shown in Matt White, the free-standing 43cm corner cloakroom vanity unit is also available in Dark Olive, Sand and Classic Grey. The wooden unit has soft-close doors, chrome-plated handles and an adjustable glass shelf, and comes with the Quattrocast corner basin. Price: £878. (burlingtonbathrooms.com)

The Bayswater basin cabinet has soft-close curved doors and deep storage for toiletries. Available in three Farrow & Ball colours, Stiffkey Blue (pictured), Plummett and Pointing, it is combined here with a single basin and a black marble top, measuring 1,200mm x 463mm x 810mm. Price: £1,800 for the four-door cabinet and £961.93 for the marble top and single bowl. (bayswaterbathrooms.co.uk)

The Griffin Petrol Blue vanity unit comes with four retro-inspired tapered legs, so it can be installed with either two front legs, all four legs, or without, as a wall-hung vanity. Available in widths of 1,000mm, 800mm and 650mm, it has a matt finish and comes with a white marble or sintered stone (pictured) worktop. Price on application. (easybathrooms.com)

Chosen to accompany the Pure series washbasin, this Krion storage area is designed by Yonoh and combines a wall-hung shelf and base unit, both in Linear Oak with additional open storage. Price on application. The Pure mirror measures 820mm x 820mm, with a thickness of 12mm and a polished copper edge. Price: £416.46. (porcelanosa.com)

Part of the RAK-Joy collection, pictured here is the 600mm basin unit in urban grey with countertop basin, priced at £450, and the wall-hung cabinet in urban grey, which measures 300mm x 1,200mm and costs £420. The double door mirror cabinet has a top-mounted T-bar light and costs £598. (rakceramics.com)

MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL

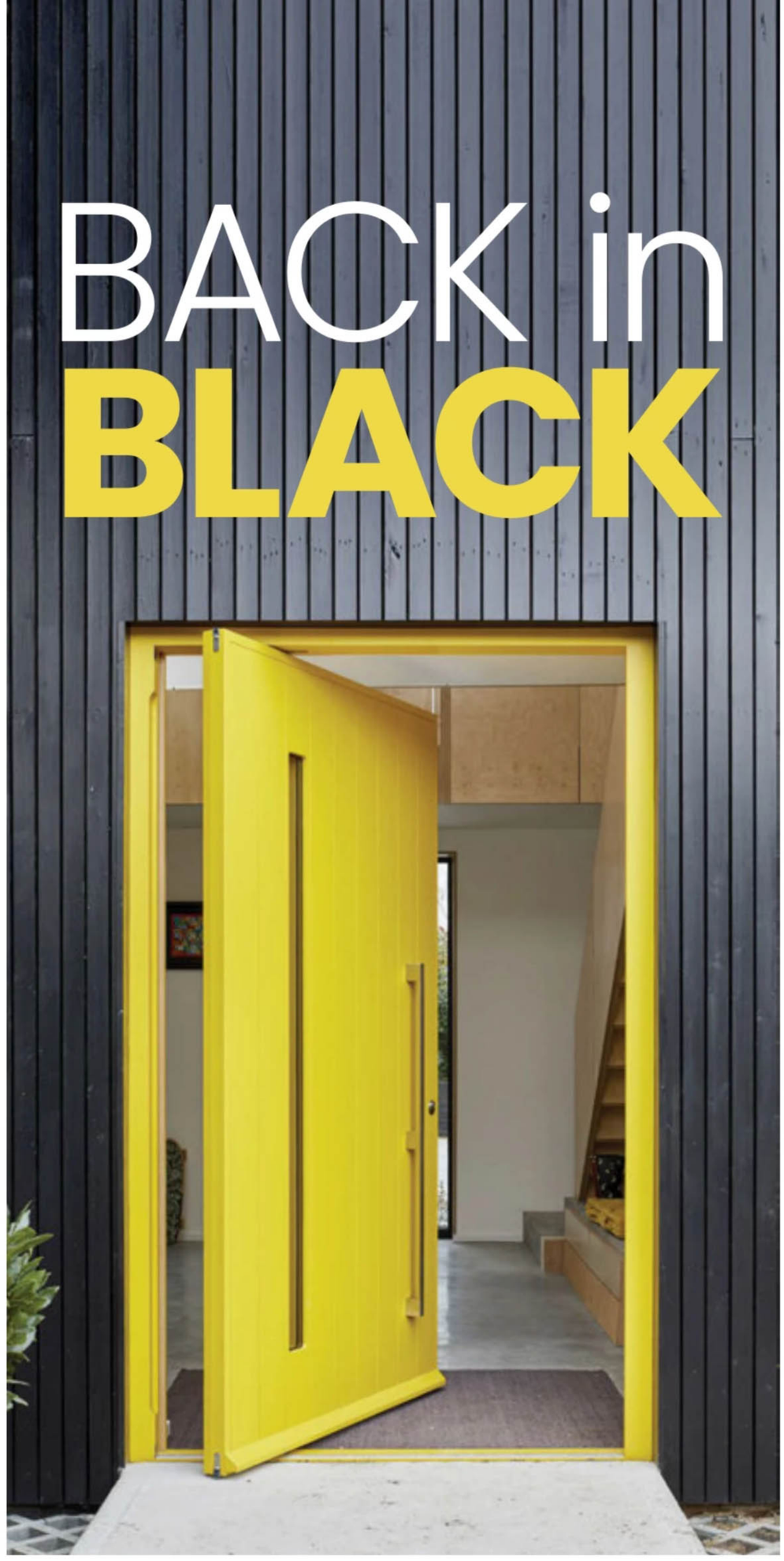
Available in white or anthracite, the Aries radiator comes with an integral full-length mirror, measuring 1,800mm x 500mm x 106mm. The radiator itself has an oval tubed design and a heat output of 3,828 BTUs/hr. Price: £436. (aestus.co.uk)

Made with high-grade aluminium, the Phoenix backlit mirror comes with an infra-red sensor, de-mister function and shaver socket, with additional upgrades including ambient backlighting and Bluetooth speakers. It measures 700mm x 700mm and costs £209.99. (modern-mirror-design.co.uk)

Supplied with black metal brackets and fixings for hanging, this 950mm x 950mm square black grid mirror makes a bold statement in the bathroom or hallway. Made from 4mm toughened mirrored glass, it encapsulates the industrial trend. Price: from £150. (roman-showers.com)

EXTERIOR
North Foreland Estate is a gated community and Flint is set back from the main road. The two-storey blockwork element is clad externally in timber, while the timber-framed single-storey wing is clad in black bricks.

BACK in BLACK



Flint is a striking, new contemporary home with views of North Foreland Lighthouse and designed with privacy in mind.

STORY: **DEBBIE JEFFERY** PICTURES: **THE MODERN HOUSE**

IN BRIEF

PROJECT New build
LOCATION Kent
COST £450,000
SPENT £485,000
WORTH For sale for £1.25m: themodernhouse.com

"Everyone was clamouring over the building plots being sold on the North Foreland Estate but we noticed there was a tiny, run-down gardener's cottage for sale, which had been overlooked," recalls Teresa Ralph. She and her husband, Anthony, realised that the tucked-away cottage could offer a more private setting, away from the road, and negotiated to buy the building.

The couple had previously built their own home and were looking for another project when they spotted the cottage. "I originally come from a retail background, and Anthony was in marketing but we now run a property development business together," Teresa continues. "We started small, with a tiny flat which we sold for a profit, but then moved on to new builds and larger projects. From knowing nothing, we've had to learn everything in quite a short space of time."

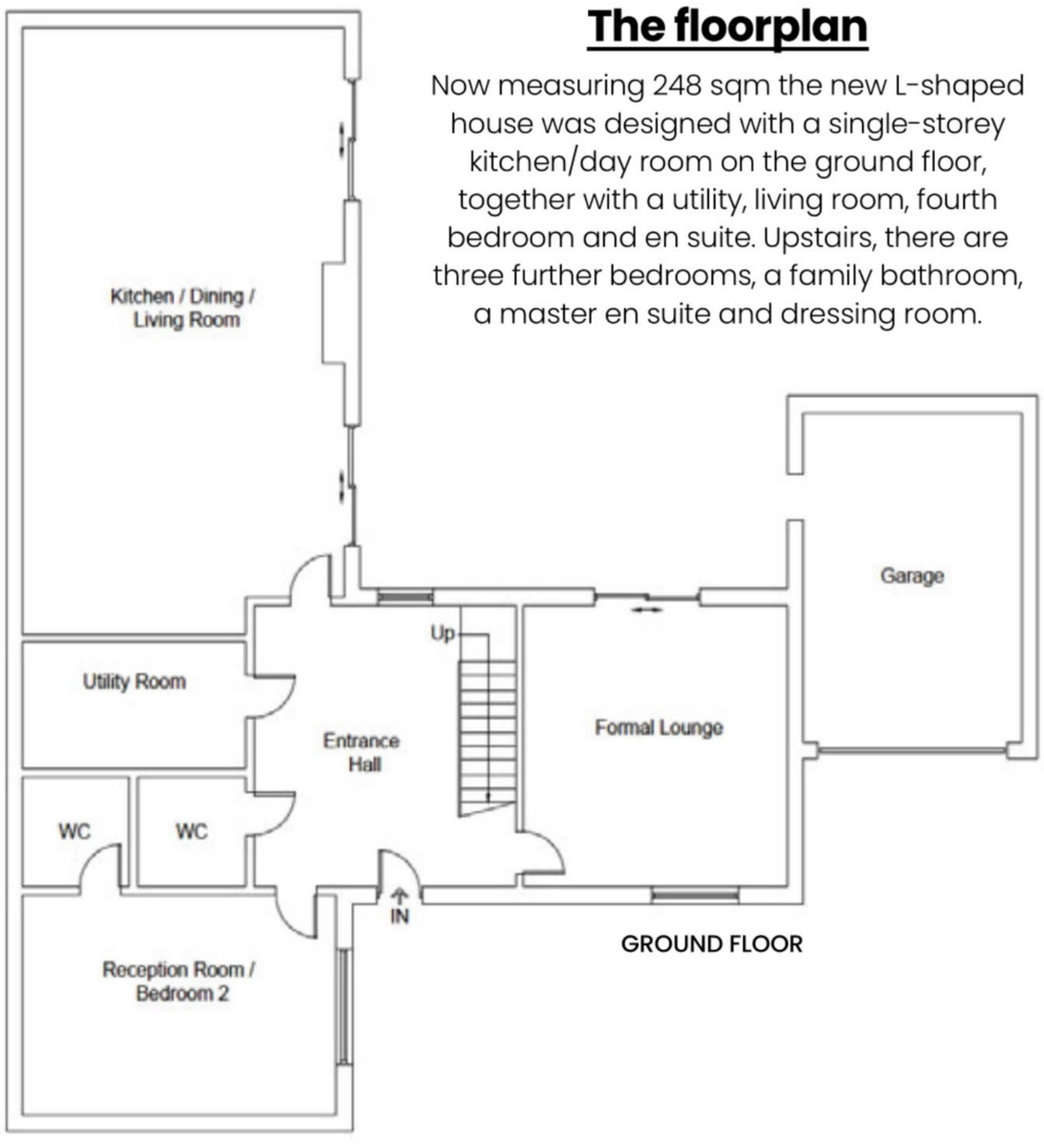
Teresa and Anthony have two children – Zachary, now 14, and Scarlet, 13 – and planned to create a family home for themselves on the renowned North Foreland Estate, which stands in a stunning clifftop location in Broadstairs, a coastal town on the Isle of Thanet in Kent.

THE FORMER COTTAGE

Formerly a gardener's cottage, the building has been extended and remodelled beyond recognition. Existing services to the cottage were able to be used, but only three of the original walls were left standing on the ground floor. These have been insulated and clad.

The floorplan

Now measuring 248 sqm the new L-shaped house was designed with a single-storey kitchen/day room on the ground floor, together with a utility, living room, fourth bedroom and en suite. Upstairs, there are three further bedrooms, a family bathroom, a master en suite and dressing room.



"The estate has resident-only access to a beach and looks out to the lighthouse which is a real talking point."

The relaxed and unspoiled resort, famous for its links with Charles Dickens, retains a nostalgic seaside charm, with picturesque beaches, and many of the self-build plots being sold on the North Foreland Estate boast direct sea views. "Our plot doesn't have those views, but its peace and privacy were very appealing," says Teresa. "The estate also has resident-only access to a beach and looks out to the lighthouse, which is a real talking point."

Built in 1691 on a promontory of the almost perpendicular cliffs of the Isle of Thanet, North Foreland Lighthouse replaced the original octagonal lighthouse after it was destroyed by fire. The white tower makes a striking backdrop to the Ralphs' newly completed four-bedroom property, Flint – the exterior of which has been clad in black materials.

Named after the flint pieces that line the beaches and cliffs along the coastline, the house has been carefully composed in a restricted palette of black brick and vertical stained timber cladding.

A bold yellow door leads inside to a double-height atrium, where birch plywood cabinetry conceals a WC and utility room. At the heart of the house is a bespoke staircase and gallery, designed by architect Carl Trenfield, which is perforated with a series of T-shaped makers' marks. Two sets of sliding doors open onto the garden from an impressive open-plan kitchen/day room, where the custom-made kitchen cabinetry uses the same pale-toned ply as the staircase and extends to a built-in dining area with a large table and bench, which has been christened the B-island.

"It works really well, and we had several meetings there with trades during the project where someone would go to make cups of tea in the kitchen and could still be involved in the conversation," says Teresa.

A wood-burner stands on a floating concrete plinth that echoes the sweeping polished-concrete floors.

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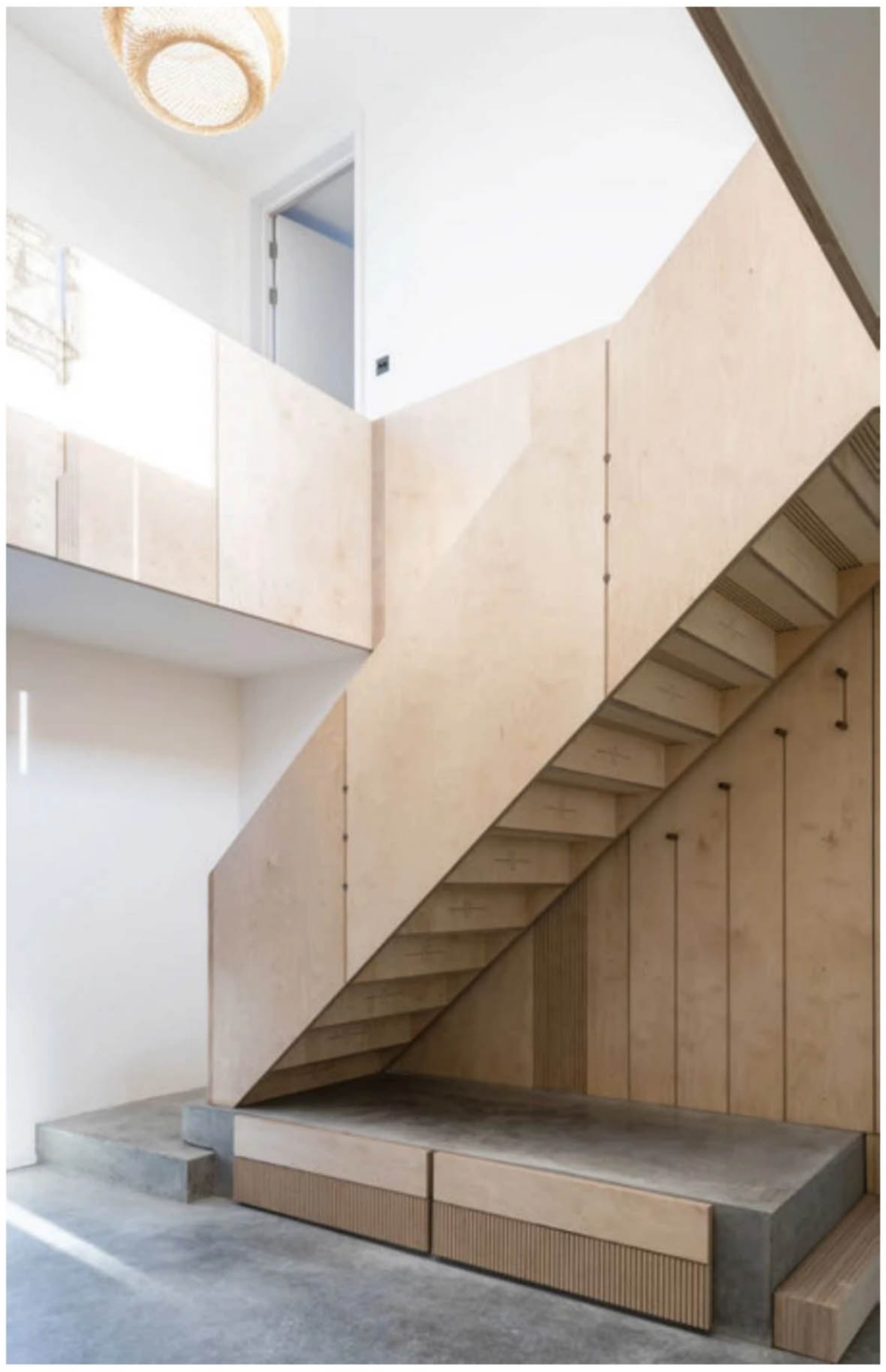

STAIRS
Ribbed ply drawers have been incorporated into the concrete plinth of the plywood staircase and gallery, which arrived like a jigsaw, ready for carpenters to build on site. A void with a roof light above brings additional natural light into the heart of the house.

"The staircase was a huge investment and is like an art installation in its own right."

These have been laid over underfloor heating throughout the ground floor rooms, with parquet upstairs.

On the ground floor is a separate living room/snug and a fourth en suite bedroom, with a pull-down guest bed and concealed desk area hidden behind doors and made from birch plywood. Upstairs there is a family bathroom along with three further bedrooms, the largest of which has a dressing room and en suite.

"We did consider renovating and extending the original gardener's cottage but it was so poorly built that when we started work only three viable walls were left standing," says Teresa. "We knew we were going to change the look quite radically and worked with On Architecture to design the house."

On Architecture is an award-winning practice with extensive experience in architecture, planning and property, operating from two studios located in Kent and London and working on projects across the UK.

They extended the original floorplan to 248 sqm, plus an attached garage, making most of the building two-storey with a single-storey kitchen/dining/living wing. A sedum roof reduces the visual impact for neighbours and allows the house to fit seamlessly within the existing landscape and vegetation.

Various parts of the facade are defined by changes in materials, with the exterior of black brickwork and stained timber cladding accentuating the

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strong geometry - complemented by the bright yellow front door and pop-out window.

"We were building this for ourselves and wanted a flexible layout with bright, spacious rooms and high ceilings," says Teresa. "The black exterior makes it a Marmite house – people either love or hate it – and many are astonished when they walk inside, as they're expecting the interior to be dark as well, whereas we've chosen pale materials and neutral colours."

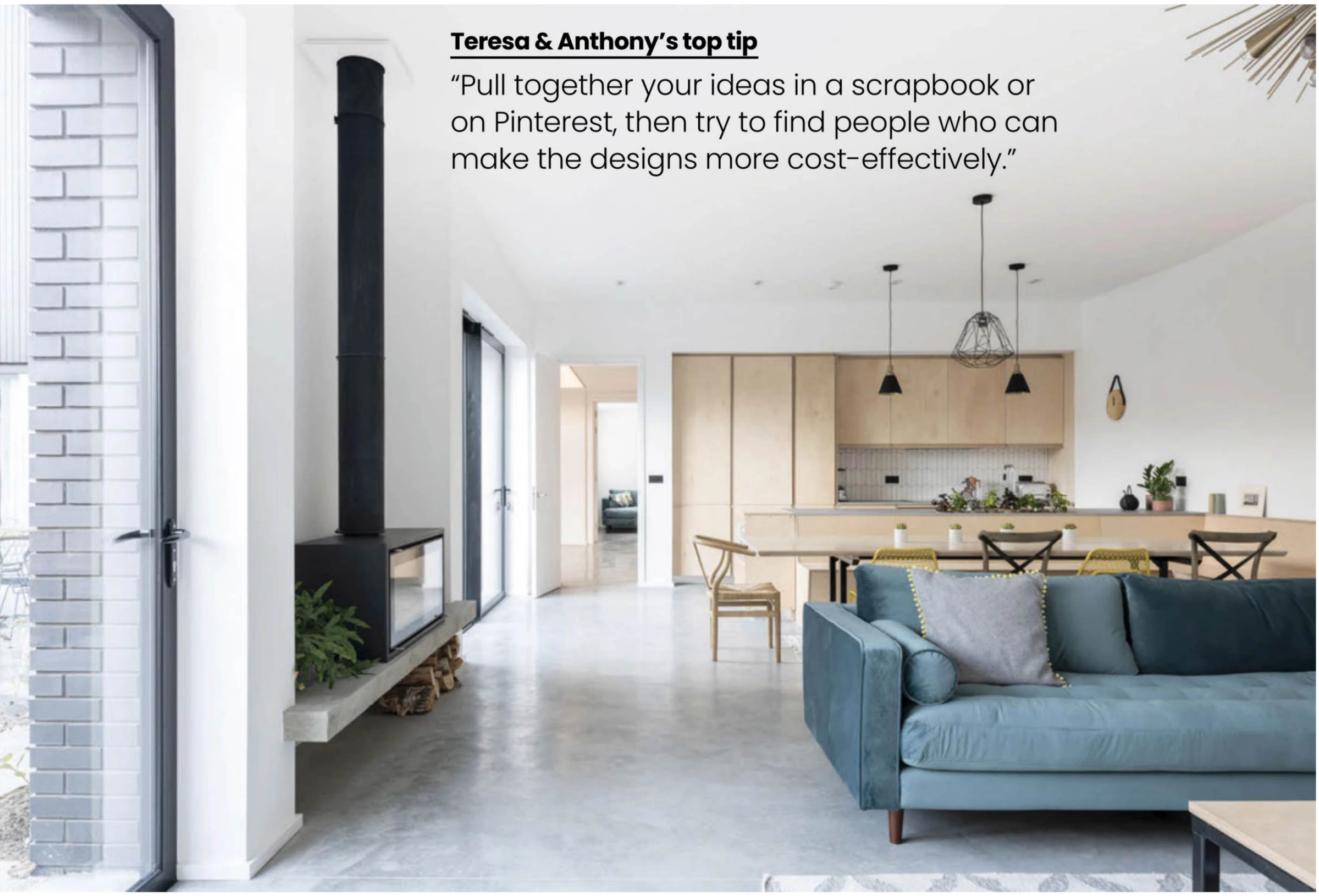
The Ralphs are constantly looking for ways to add texture and interest to their designs, with panels of decorative brickwork, bespoke furniture and fittings. Everything is robust and hard wearing in order to withstand family life, pets and even skateboards on the floors.

"We wanted to create something which would stand the test of time," explains Teresa, who took care of the accounting, interior design and paperwork, while Anthony oversaw the build and project managed various subcontractors.

In addition, a carpentry company was commissioned to stick-build the timber-frame element on site using raw materials – a process which Anthony and Teresa feel works well and is economical for small, one-off projects instead of purchasing factory-made panels. The same company then moved inside to complete the internal carpentry, with bespoke items made by specialist craftspeople.

"The only real restriction imposed by the estate was a duty of care while building, and we had to contribute to the road repair once work was complete," Teresa continues. "It's all coming to an end now, but everyone has been building in the area at the same

KITCHEN
Designed by Teresa and Anthony, the kitchen was made from birch ply along with the space-saving dining table and bench.



Teresa & Anthony's top tip

"Pull together your ideas in a scrapbook or on Pinterest, then try to find people who can make the designs more cost-effectively."

IN DETAIL

PROJECT

Project management and build
TG Designer Homes: tgdesignerhomes.com
Architect
On Architecture: onarchitecture.co.uk
Structural engineer
MLM Engineers: mlmgroup.com

STRUCTURE

Timber-frame single-storey elements
Turners Carpentry: turners-carpentry.co.uk
Bricks MKM Building Supplies: mkmbs.co.uk
Larch cladding supply
Wingham Timber: winghamtimber.com
Cladding finish
SW Solutions Decorators Ltd: swsdecorators.co.uk
Sedum roof supply and installation
Complete Roofing Contractors: completeroofing contractors.com
Aluminium doors and windows
Rhino Aluminium: rhinoaluminium.co.uk
Entrance door Urban Front: urbanfront.com

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Staircase Carl Trenfield: carltrenfieldarchitects.com
Wood-burner Stovax: stovax.com
Sanitaryware Smallbone Interiors, Broadstairs: smallboneinteriors.co.uk
Kitchen, bespoke furniture Creative Carpentry: creativecarpentry.co.uk
Parquet floor Danny Jeffery Interiors: dannyjefferyinteriors.co.uk
Polished concrete floors
Contemporary Concrete Floors: contemporary concretefloors.co.uk
Tiles Rovic Tiles: rovictiles.com
Underfloor heating
NDC Plumbing and Heating: ndcplumbing heating.com

LIVING AREA
The open-plan living space features a contemporary wood-burning stove, mounted on a plinth, with wood storage beneath.

time, which was horrendous for existing residents. The properties have definitely enhanced the estate, though, so everyone will benefit long term."

Planning was granted for the extensive alterations to Flint, which involved building new blockwork walls on concrete strip foundations, with the single-storey element constructed using timber frame. Doors and windows are predominantly black powder-coated aluminium.

In addition, permission was also granted at appeal for the Ralphs to build a single-storey white property, standing back-to-back with their own black house, creating an unusual juxtaposition which does not impact on the private nature of the plot.

"We always intended to live in Flint and sell the white house once it was finished, but changed our minds as work drew to a close," says Teresa. "Now we're marketing Flint too, as it doesn't offer us the space to work from home which we currently enjoy. It will be difficult to part with, as we've become really attached to the house and put so much effort into making it our own. The staircase was a huge investment and is like an art installation in its own right."

Such attention to detail is evident throughout the house and garden, which has been landscaped to create flowing beds, planted with grasses, low-maintenance native shrubs and a mature olive tree. The polished concrete floor inside extends out to form a terrace and there is an outdoor shower and daybed, from which to enjoy superb views of the lighthouse.

"We thoroughly enjoyed the project and are delighted with the outcome. It's a bit different, and that makes us smile."

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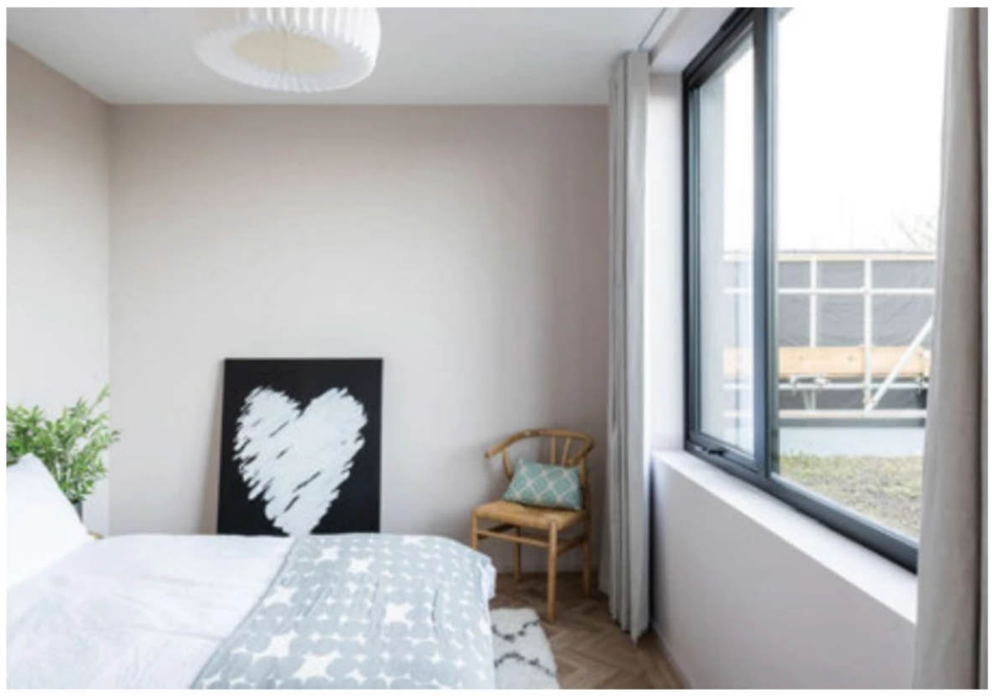
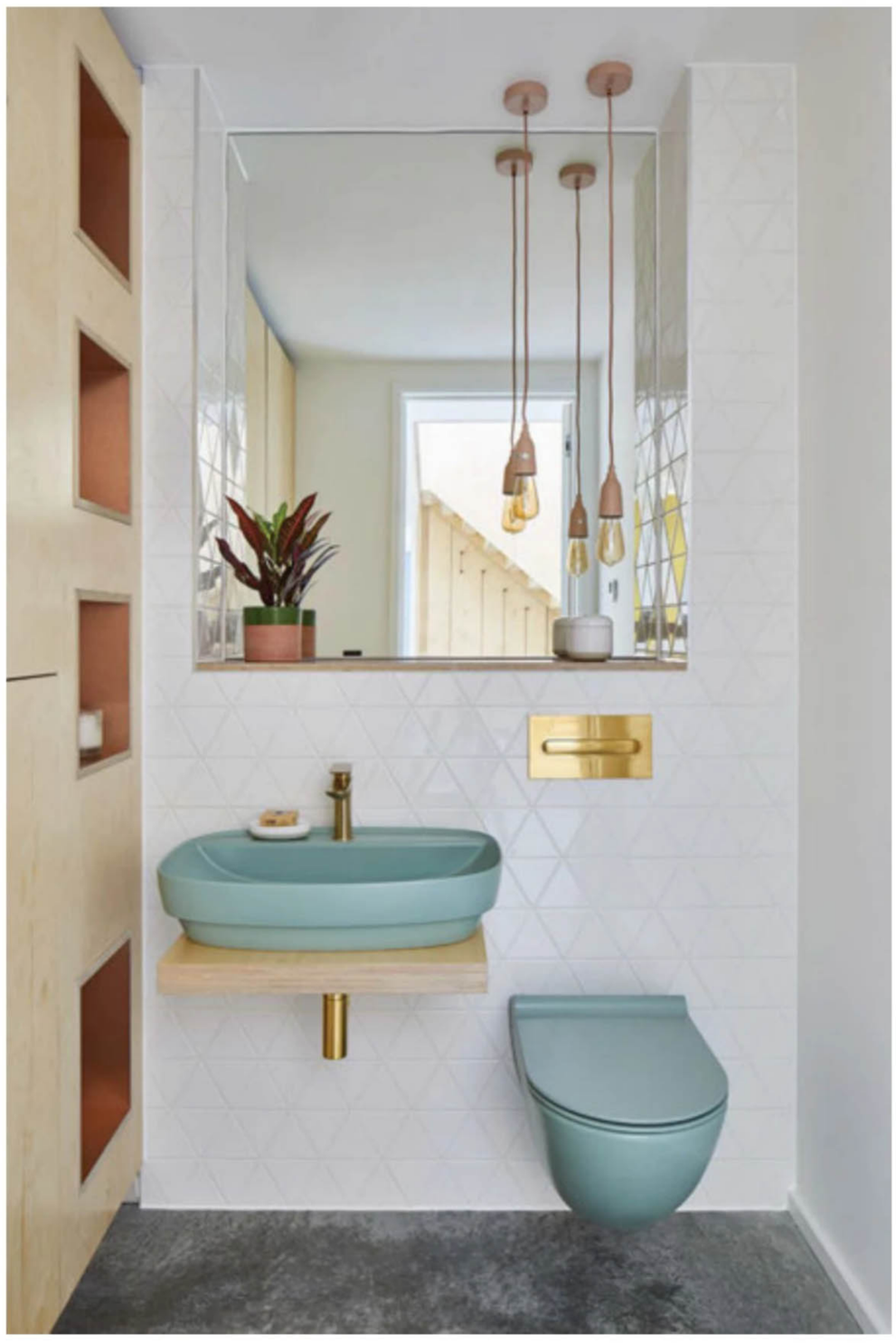
"We generally like the same design ideas, but have no practical skills, so we leave the building work to others," laughs Teresa. "Anthony always works flat out, and sometimes the pace can be very intense as so many decisions need to be made quickly, but we thoroughly enjoyed the project and are delighted with the outcome. It's a bit different, and that makes us smile."





THE SNUG
A separate snug opens onto the courtyard garden though sliding glass doors.

WC
Unusually coloured sanitaryware was chosen for the ground floor WC.

BEDROOM
The bedroom on the ground floor has a polished concrete floor, with a wall bed and quirky concealed desk area making the most of the space.

FINAL WORD

What was the high point of the project?
Enjoying the tranquillity of the site and seeing how windows frame views of the lighthouse, which looks especially beautiful at night.

...and the low points?
Feeling rushed to make decisions as the build took just seven months from start to finish – which is still quite a leisurely timescale compared to some of our other projects. Work started in May 2019, with demolition and taking off the roof, and the house was finished that November.

Your best buy?
Building the bespoke plywood kitchen cost about 10 per cent less than buying something off the shelf. We didn't scrimp, though, and overspent on almost everything else!

Biggest extravagance?
We would never normally spend so much on a bespoke staircase and gallery, which cost around £20,000, but the entrance warranted a major feature.

CRAFT WORK

INTERVIEW: DEBBIE JEFFERY

Carl Trenfield is a multi-disciplinary architect, whose studio was established to create thoughtful and thought-provoking architecture, often working in close collaboration with master craftspeople. After only four years, Carl Trenfield Architects was selected for inclusion in The Architecture Foundation publication, New Architects 3 – its definitive survey of the best British architects to have set up practice in the 10 years since 2005. Carl is a Royal College of Art mentor and has taught widely. He is currently an external visitor to the Welsh School of Architecture Masters unit entitled Craft: Making, Meaning. This year the studio is working with other progressive individuals to address wider societal issues, particularly that of climate change, and how craft is central to this.

Describe your childhood home

My mum worked several jobs to help support us, progressing from cashier to HR manager of a significant international business, and beyond, strategically managing mergers and acquisitions. It was amazing to see that drive. My dad came to run his own estate agency, situated in a former Art Deco funeral parlour – I have a hazy memory of its rich timber panelling and customised lighting – it was a total room. We emerged from the recession and he later began to operate as a developer of sorts, in and around Bexleyheath. We actually lived on Upton Road, which adjoins the lane of the Red House – the Arts and Crafts house designed by Philip Webb and William Morris. When I was 18, we moved to a timber-framed shiplap cottage, with a catslide roof, in a small village in rural Kent – a culture shock, village life, and the polar opposite to our suburban home. You could easily read how the building was put together with its exposed frame and feel the warmth and life that had passed through it.

What inspired you to become an architect?

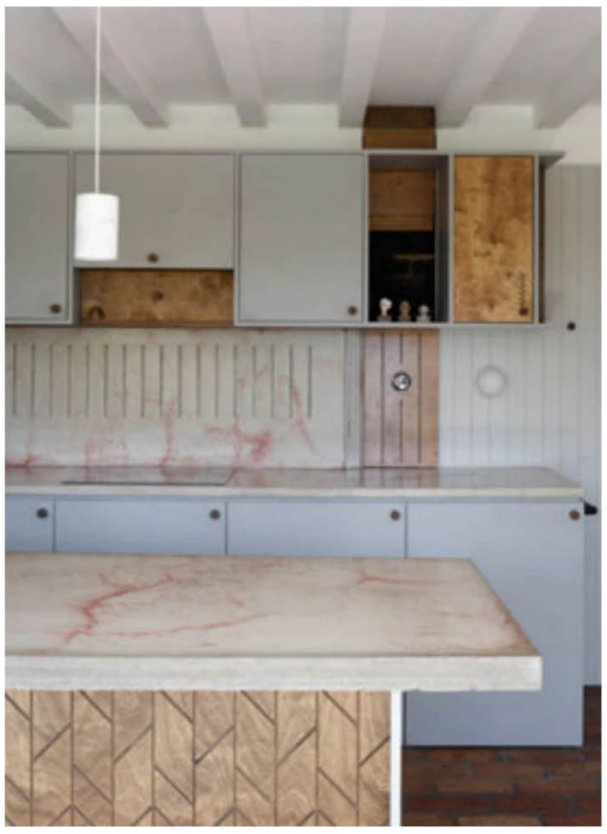
After A-levels I took an art and design foundation course which was an incredible primer for the various arts disciplines and my first experience of greater freedom. We got to go to Boston, USA, making snow sculptures in the park and touring an intact Shaker village, seeing first-hand the beauty and utility of their built environment. This must have been formative in my decision to later study architecture.

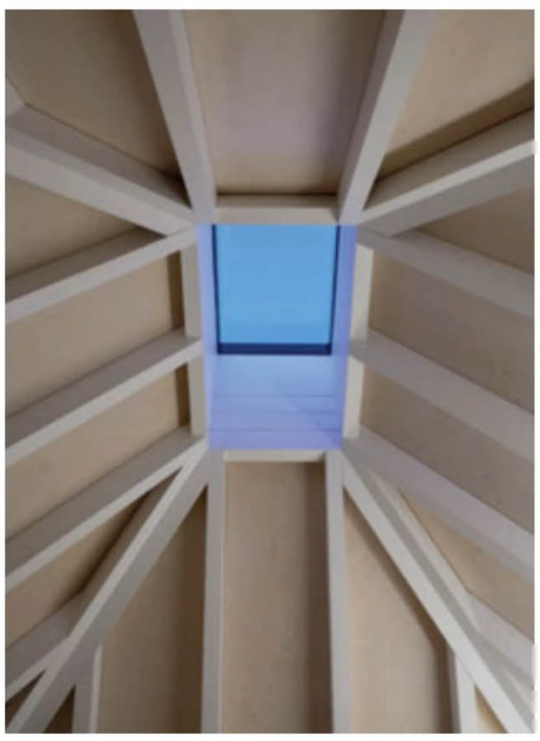
Before this I was never really academic, but I did have an artistic instinct and the Canterbury School of Architecture, which is tied to an arts school, seemed a good fit. It's where I first met my incredible wife, Eleanor, who was also studying architecture. We were fortunate to have an amazing set of tutors virtually rescue the school, and although I wasn't an overly disciplined student, we were suddenly being asked to match their efforts.

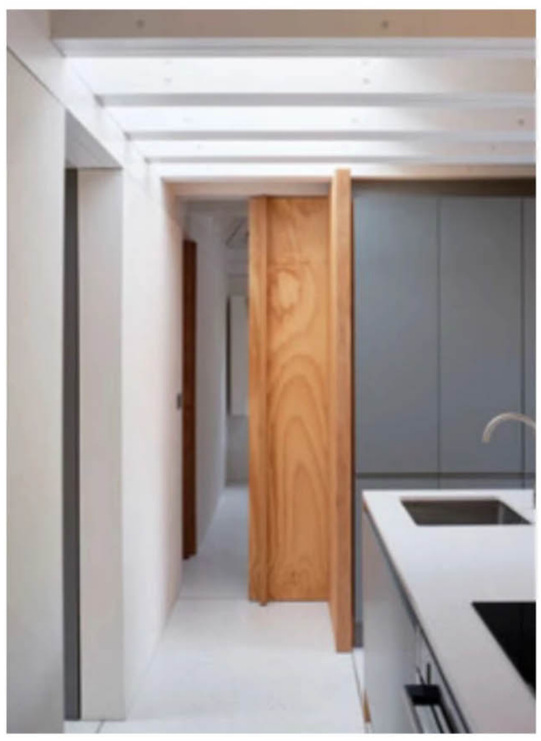
Pre-internet, I used the original New Architects book and doorstepped quite a few of the practices, trying to get a placement for my year out. I was working at the local pub, until my persistence paid off and Keith Williams Architects in London allowed me to spend a couple of months at the practice. Someone higher up the ranks then left the company and I took on their work, which meant I was dropped straight in at the deep end. Working on a small entrance to a theatre felt like a huge responsibility at the time and gave a real sense of achievement.

How has the practice evolved?

In 2012 - following a significant period with Keith Williams Architects, working on and running public arts building - we decided to marry and relocate to Canterbury where we had studied and where Eleanor was then working. I also planned to start my own practice, all while the UK was suffering one of its deepest recessions. One of the early defining projects was in Snaresbrook, London: a Victorian apartment where much of the original detail had been stripped away. Our response was to put back and make







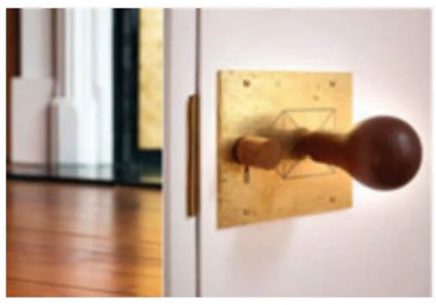
reference to Victorian wainscoting, implementing a timber ribbon that also incorporated the staircase. The stair cost almost derailed the project, so we decided to try and make it ourselves – producing fabrication drawings and then assembling the large jigsaw puzzle with joiner Adam. Since then, we've refined our processes and work in a methodical way to limit mistakes. It is this slow architecture that allows us to think carefully about detail. Previously, I was working in a small studio above a piano maker, but the need for space to make models and prototypes led to sharing a large industrial shed with an artist and a developer. We're there on a five-year lease and although cold in winter, it's an ideal place for thinking and making. We recently undertook a major renovation project for my parents, where they relocated to a thatched cottage in rural Kent. It's been difficult in many ways, as the parent-son relationship can lead to friction, and it's hard to not be emotionally attached after working so closely with a building over a long period of time.

Describe your own home

The Priory was our Span apartment in London, which we renovated and sold through The Modern House, then in its relative infancy. Our current home, within the historic walls of Canterbury, is an ongoing project and I'm not proud that this pursuit for detail has meant living with a damp-proof membrane as a shower surface for the past three years!

Sum up your design philosophy

Artistry, technique and technology. Artistry in the sense that we're pursuing ideas through the making of architecture.



Top pictures
Interiors of an old cottage which has been carefully renovated.
Above
Victorian townhouse where the entire project – from landscape, to furniture and door knobs – was designed and crafted by a team of just three.
Opposite
Every element of this kitchen was 3D modelled, tested and then further drawn for fabrication via CNC cutting.

Technique is really about craftsmanship and the way that you put a building together, with care, to ensure presence. And technology is the focus on the appropriate adoption of emerging technologies, and an ongoing questioning of what craftsmanship is in the digital age. I'm currently lecturing on the topic at the Welsh School of Architecture, further reinforcing and nurturing the relationship between teaching and practice.

Do you have any tips for selfbuilders?

Research well and talk to architects. Don't just look at the fee, but ask about the service, as everyone is different. I'm the kind of architect who needs to have a hand in everything, which can add value further down the line, but some people may just want basic drawings. Architecture is a broad church and it's important to get a good fit. Avoid those with preconceived ideas. Good architecture comes from hearty discussion, testing, and a proper awareness of the complexities of a site.

Any plans for the future?

Architects are increasingly seen as add-ons or nice-to-haves. It's so important for us to become relevant again, perhaps through acquiring quantifiable knowledge in the designing for climate change resilience and reversal, perhaps the championing of traditional crafts and materials in tandem with new technologies, perhaps being at the centre of off- and in-site fabrication, and perhaps being at the front end of acquiring a site. We only want to work with people who have a genuine desire to make the world we live in as good as it can be. I have no doubt that craft – the way we make and with what – will become central to all areas of practice.

carltrenfieldarchitects.com

IN BRIEF

PROJECT New build
LOCATION Hertfordshire
COST Already owned, (worth £250,000+)
SPENT £800,000
WORTH £1.5m+

LEVEL BEST

Built in the garden of a 1960s house and shaded by protected lime trees, this new family home was carefully designed to ensure it fits perfectly into the unique setting.

STORY: **DEBBIE JEFFERY** PHOTOGRAPHY: **SOPHIE MUTEVELIAN/CHARLIE BIRCHMORE**

EXTERIOR
The grey and white rendered exterior to the new house, with its brick detailing, has been echoed in the interior design.

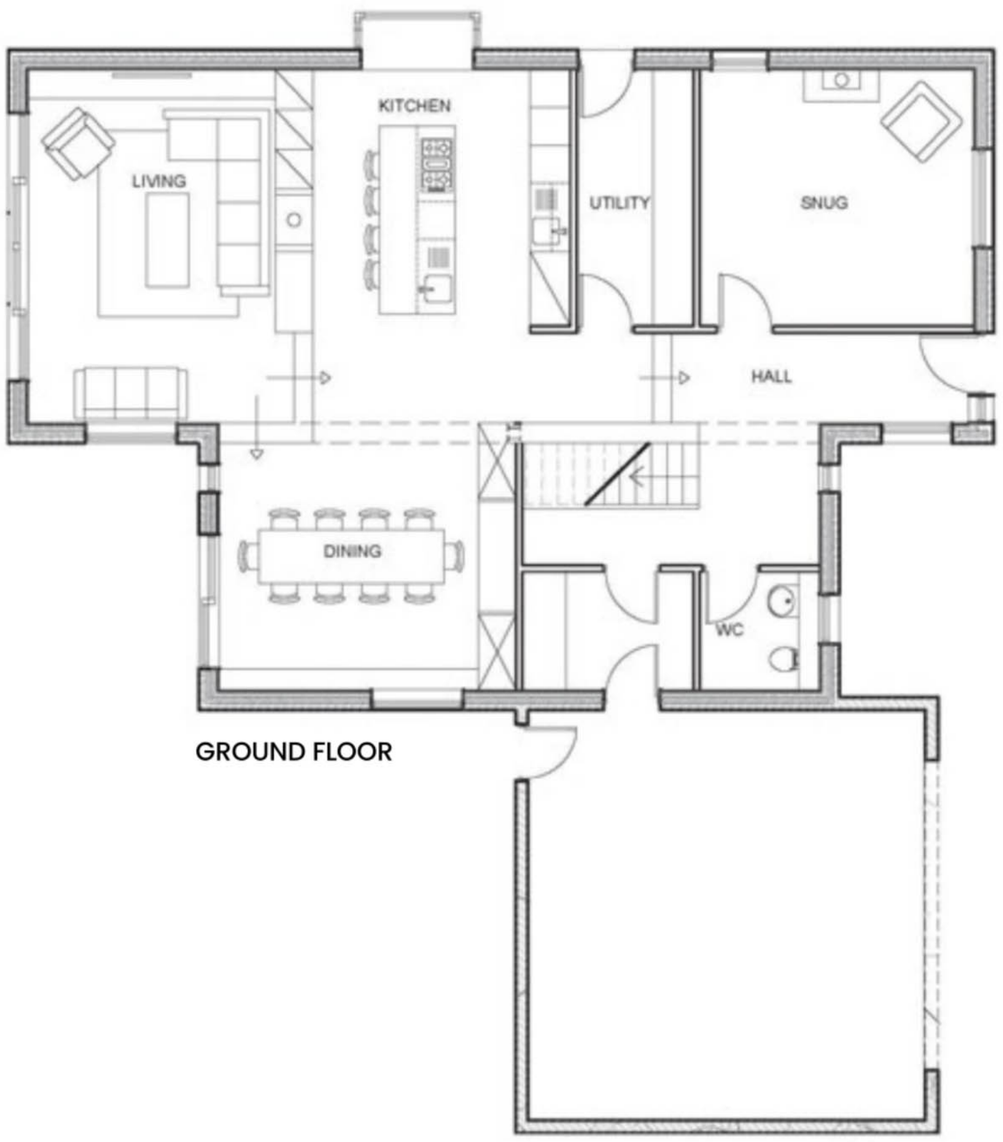
"Our old 1960s house was well built but the rooms were fairly small and dark. There were long corridors and the kitchen was at one end with the sitting room at the other, so it wasn't the best layout," says owner Mike Reevey. "Poor insulation, leaded light windows and an inefficient heating system also made it expensive to run."

Twenty years ago, Mike and his wife, Teri, had bought the five-bedroom house in Hertfordshire, where they brought up their children – Ellen, now 29, Sam, 25, and Luke, 18 – but they were well aware of the building's failings.

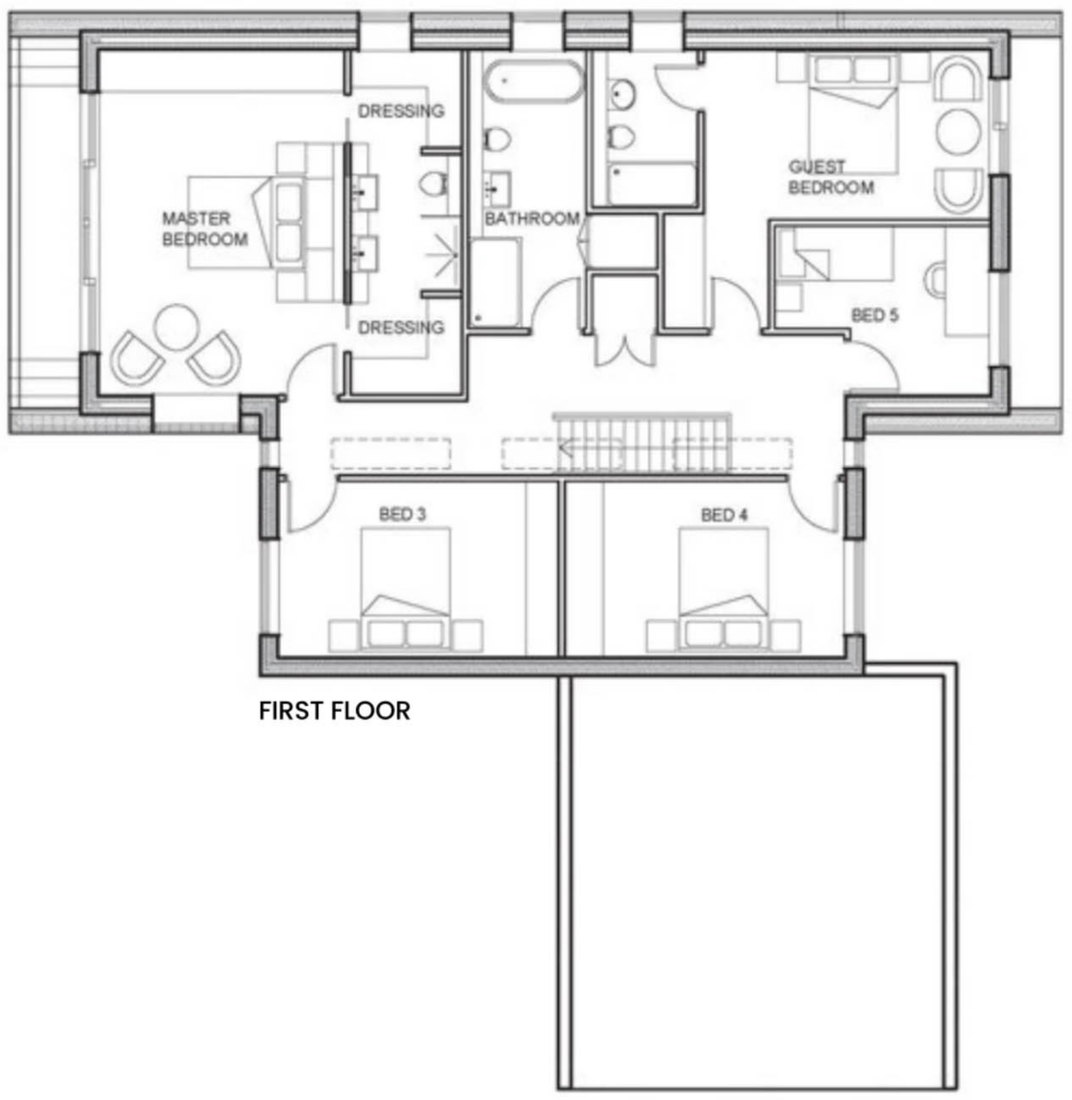
"It's set back on a third of an acre plot, with a huge front garden," Mike, a dentist, continues. "We felt that there was enough space for another house and contacted Christian Pinchin at Unit One Architects, after he was recommended by a local surveyor."

The floorplan

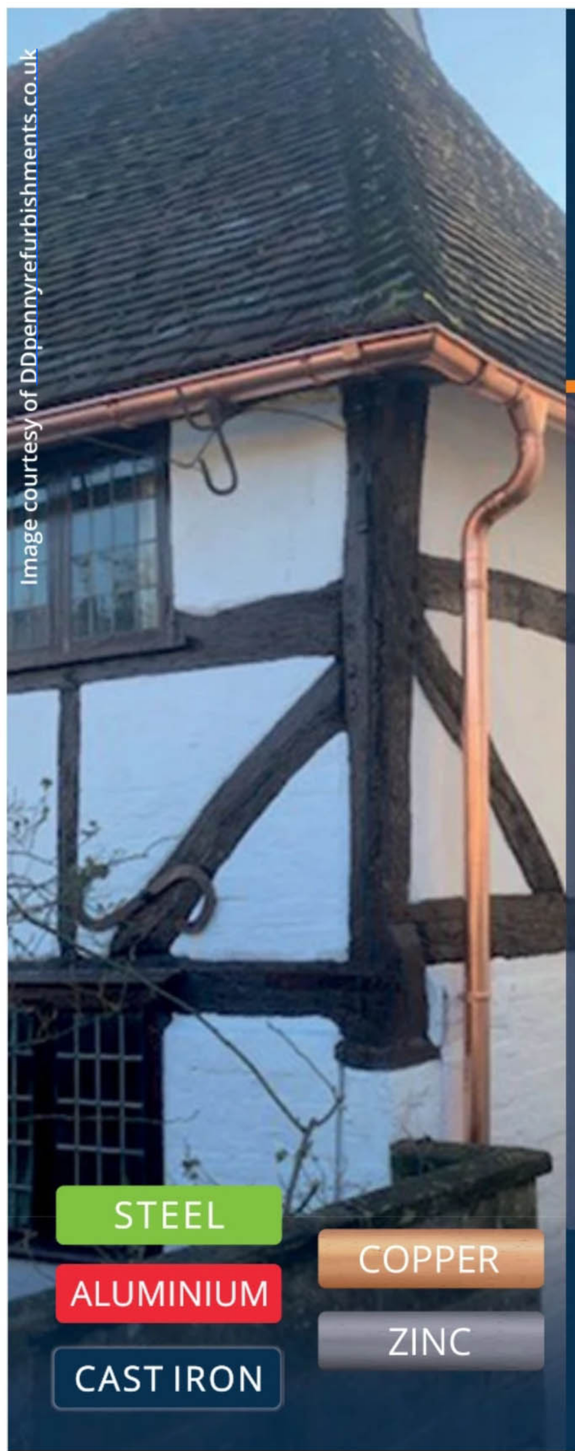
The 250-sqm new house was designed with a split-level ground floor, including a snug, WC, utility and open-plan living/dining/kitchen space. Upstairs, there are five bedrooms, two en suites and a family bathroom, with dressing areas for the master bedroom.



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



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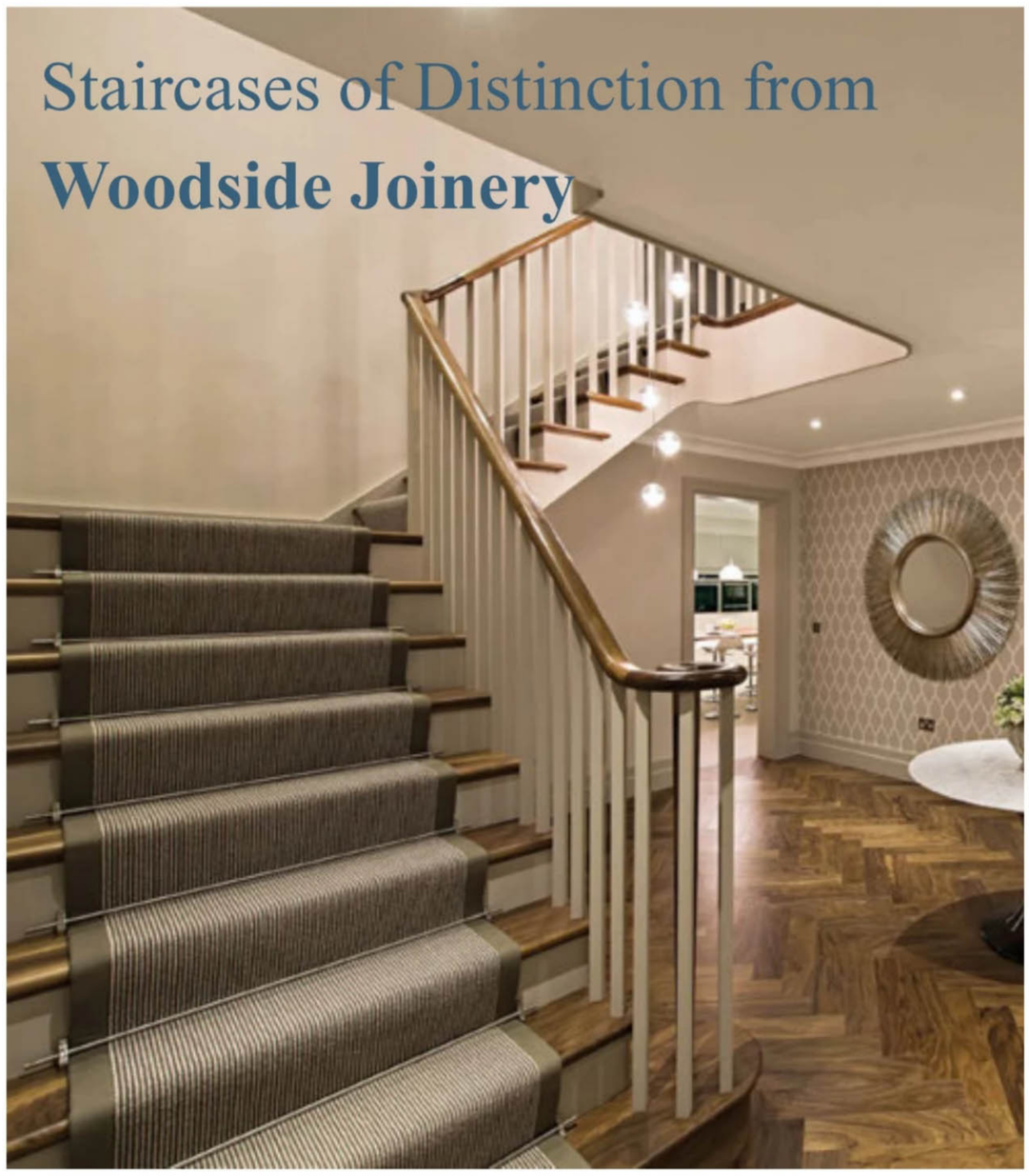

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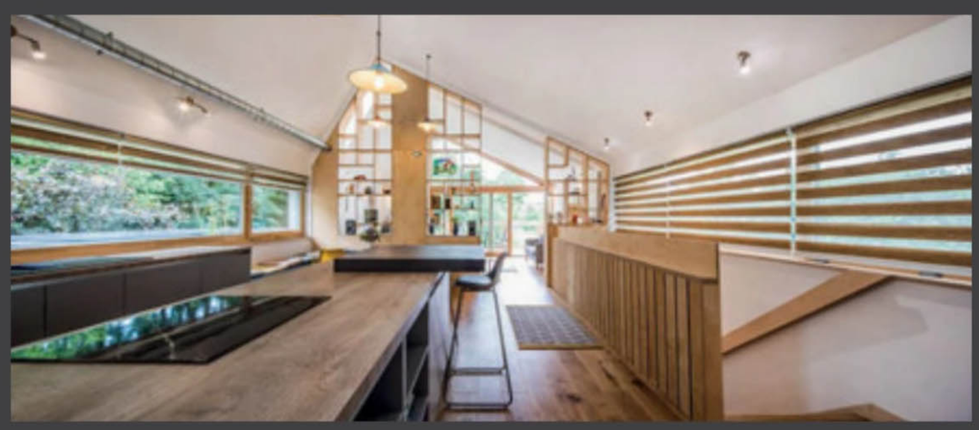

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STA ASSUREGOLD

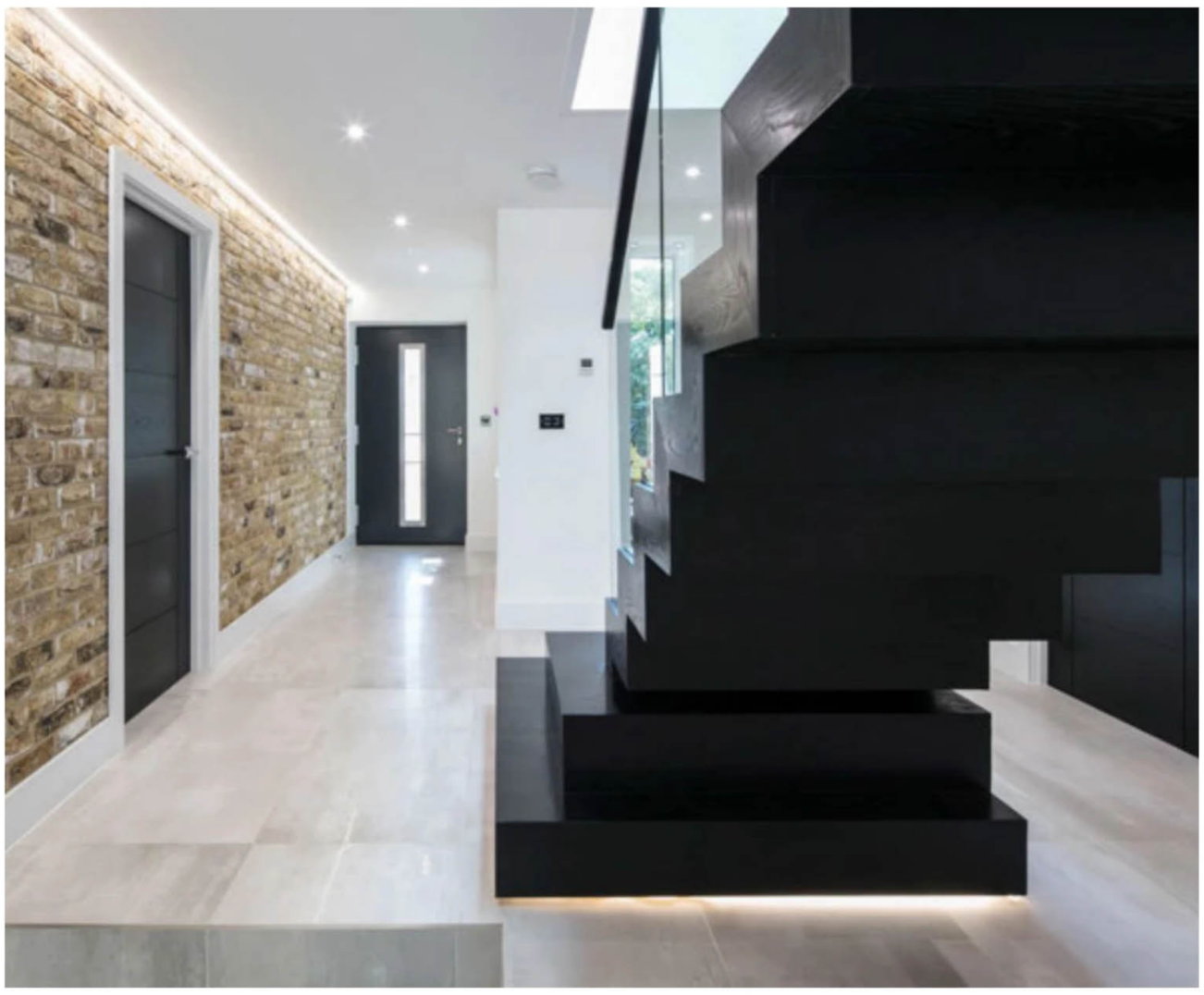
Unit One is a London-based group of architects and designers who value innovation and creativity. The Reeveys' initial brief was to explore refurbishing or replacing the existing house to provide them with a highly insulated, modern family home.

The house overlooked the main site, which is overshadowed by large lime trees to the south, and the practice conducted several feasibility studies before concluding that it would be possible for the land to support an additional dwelling and still adhere to the local planning policies of Dacorum Council.

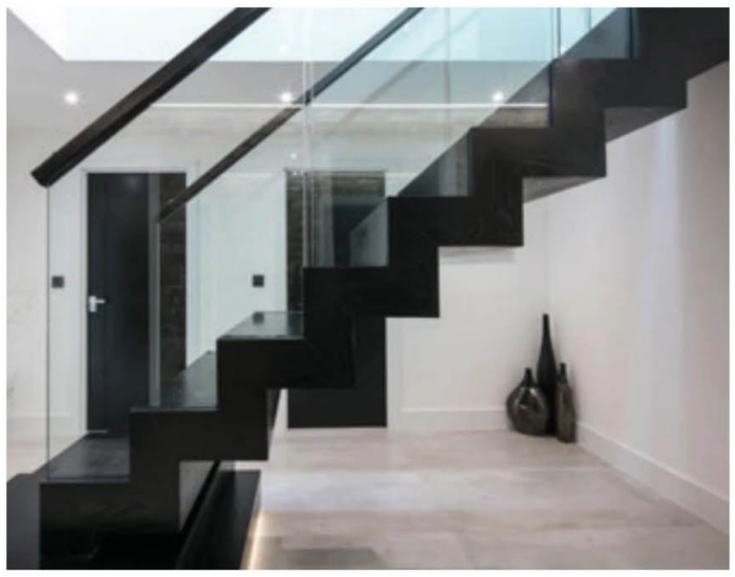
Christian provided several different options for Mike and Teri to consider and in the end the couple chose to retain the existing house and construct a contemporary bespoke home by its side.

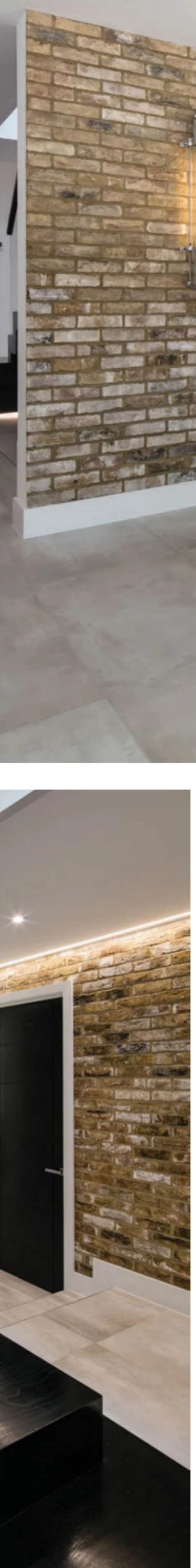
To enable this new dwelling, minor alterations to the old house were necessary, including a small extension and several internal and external changes, which ensure it retains privacy. "A new entrance wing allowed the front door to face onto the driveway and reduced overlooking," Mike explains.

Due to areas of shading by the large lime trees growing on the southern boundary, the proposed



STAIRS AND HALLWAY
Large format mottled grey ceramic tiles in the hallway contrast with the spectacular black staircase and tall internal doors.





new house was positioned for maximum benefit from eastern and western light, allowing living spaces to be bathed in afternoon and evening sun. This orientation also avoided overlooking issues, while respecting both the tree protection areas and the existing house.

"We had no previous building experience but were excited to live in a different space," says Mike. "Our idea was for a modern-looking, five-bedroom house with a large open-plan living area, merging the kitchen and lounge, but really we let Christian have a fairly free hand on the design and what he came up with was absolutely great."

Initially, the contemporary 250-sqm design met with strong opposition from Berkhamsted town council, although it received a favourable response from the planning department.

"This was the green light to push ahead, and as our plot is on a small road there were only a few suggestions from neighbours regarding overlooking," Mike continues. "We made minor changes to the original plan, including taking out a front balcony, and with help from a planning consultant the vote at the planning meeting went overwhelmingly in our favour."

A quantity surveyor costed the project and, once Mike and Teri had agreed that this would be financially feasible, it was put out to tender to four builders. "One didn't bother to reply and from the others we chose reasonably priced local builders Mark Scott Construction, who were brilliant," says Mike.

The Reeveys continued to live next door during the year-long project, with Mike on site every day

IN DETAIL

PROJECT

Architect Unit One Architects: unit1architects.com
Environmental consultants Twenty 16 Design Ltd: t16design.com
Soil surveyors Structural Soils Ltd: soils.co.uk
Planning consultant Aitchison Raffety: argroup.co.uk
Arboricultural consultant Ian Keen Ltd: keenconsultants.co.uk
Structural engineer A E Butler & Partners: aebutler-partners.co.uk
Quantity surveyors ARC Construction Consultants Ltd: arc-cc.co.uk
Building contractor Mark Scott Construction: markscottconstructions.co.uk

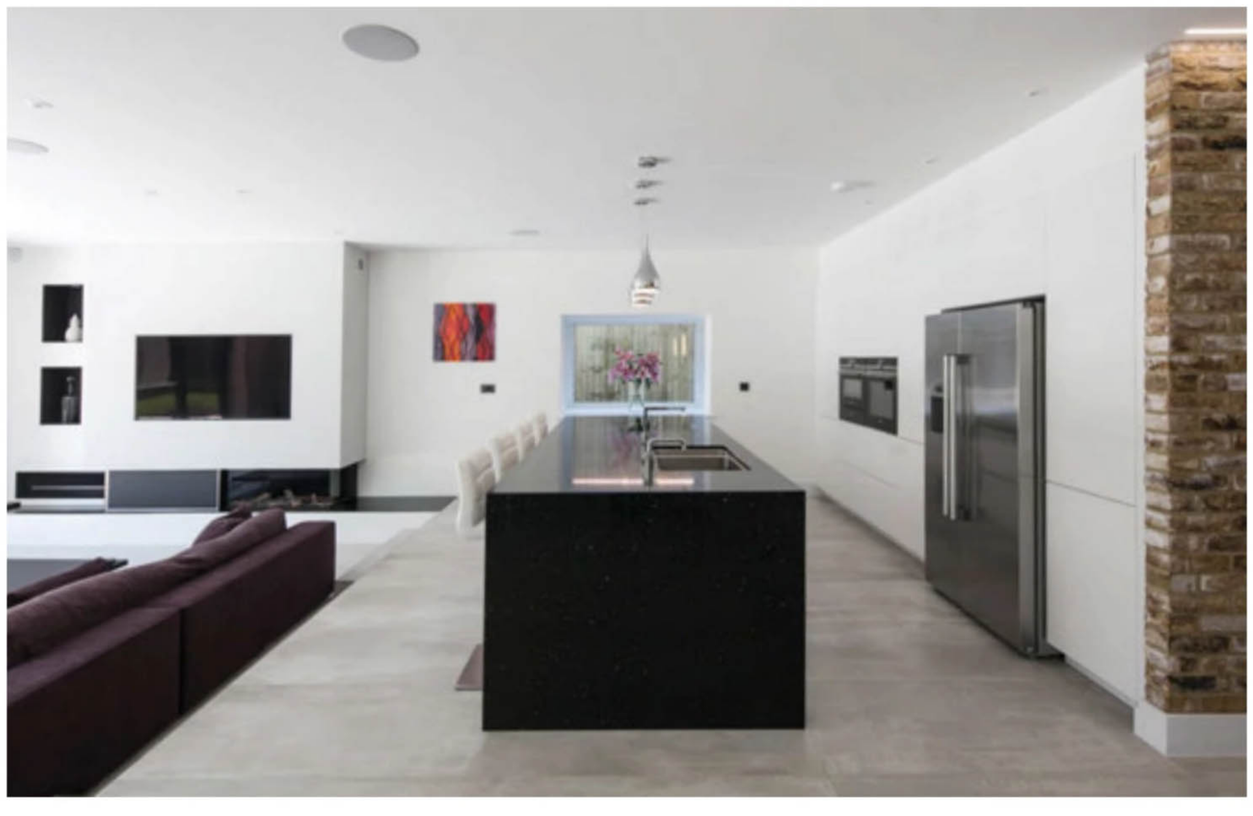
STRUCTURE

Triple-glazed aluminium windows Velfac: velfac.co.uk
Render Fassa Bortolo: fassabortolo.com/it/
Staircase Woodside Joinery: woodsidejoinery.com

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Kitchen Rotpunkt: rotpunktkuechen.de/en/
Music system Sonos: sonos.com
Boiling tap Quooker: quooker.co.uk
Underfloor heating Nu-Heat: nu-heat.co.uk
Dining wall lights Trainspotters Lighting: trainspotters.co.uk
Bespoke railway sleeper dining table Mac and Wood: macandwood.co.uk
Sanitaryware Catalano: catalano.co.uk
Fire Dru: drufire.com
Walk-in wardrobe Kleiderhaus: kleiderhaus.co.uk
Curtains and blinds Zoe Price Interiors: zoepriceinteriors.com
Tiling (downstairs) ABK Interno 9: abk.it/en/collection/Interno-9

LIVING SPACE
Set at a lower level from the kitchen, the open-plan living space, with its corner fireplace, leads out onto a sunken patio surrounded by a brick retaining wall.



KITCHEN
A dramatic Silestone-topped island stretches across the kitchen space, contrasting with the sleek white cabinetry.

to answer questions and make decisions. Using existing mains services on the plot saved money, but the proximity of trees meant that the flat-roofed garage needed to be built on an expensive raft-based foundation system with pads, so that the roots remained untouched. Fortunately, standard concrete strip foundations were acceptable to the structural engineer for the steel-reinforced main house.

The property has a super-insulated and airtight blockwork envelope, which maintains a comfortable temperature and was designed with a cantilevered first floor and roof form – allowing an extra 300mm of insulation to be added to the upper levels.

Dark grey insulated render was specified for the cantilevered pitched-roof wing, but the Italian manufacturer was wary of issuing a guarantee, as they were afraid that the colour could cause it to overheat in the sun. A paler shade of grey was subsequently chosen, and the company sent a representative from Italy to inspect the site, which caused a delay.

"We don't have renewables, like solar panels or a ground source heat pump, but we did invest in triple glazing, insulation and a highly energy-efficient boiler," says Teri, who works with Mike. Underfloor heating has been installed throughout, together with high-quality windows and doors. "Even in winter, the heating only needs to come on for an hour a day to heat the whole house, and the constant temperature means that house plants thrive."

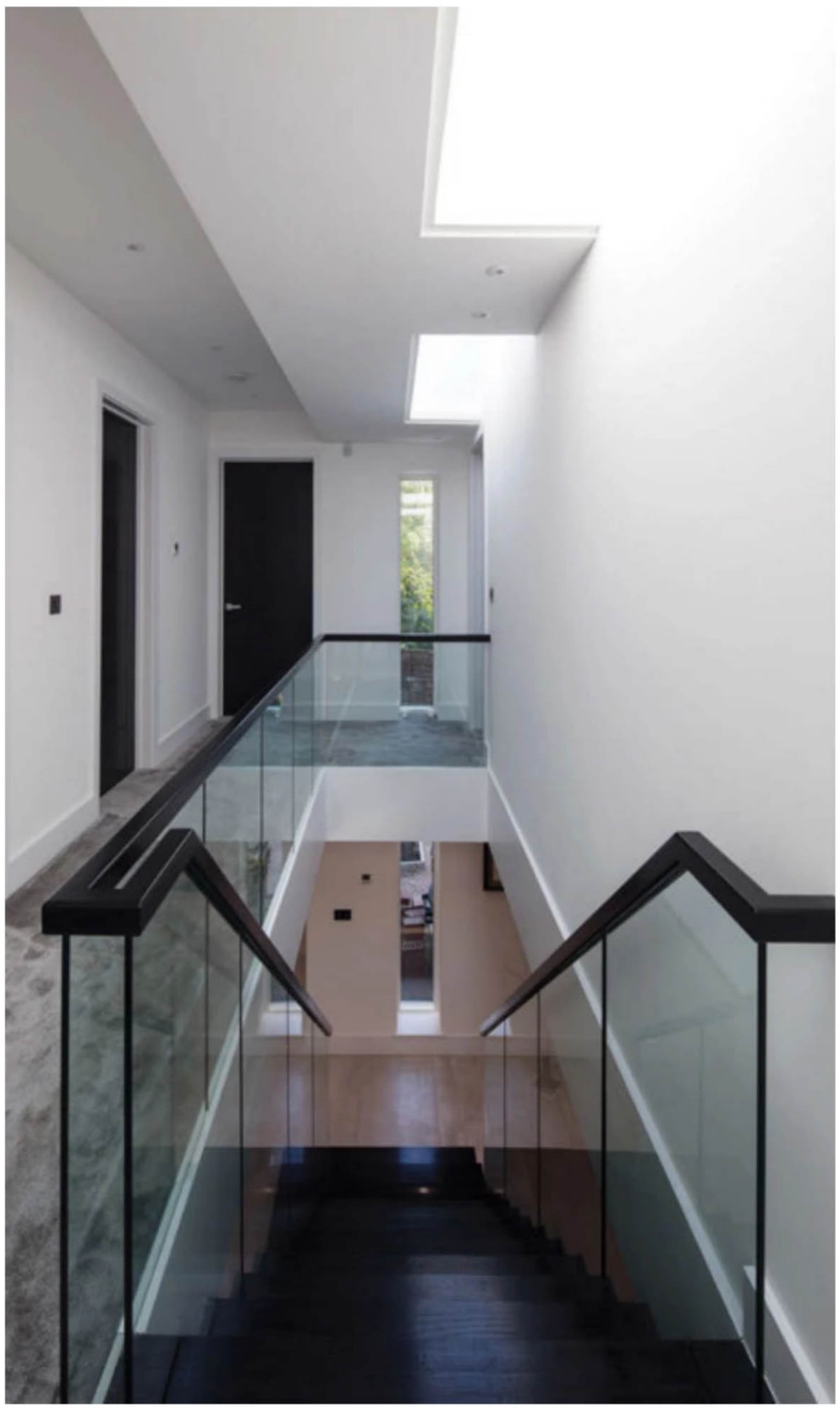
The new two-storey building was designed with an open-plan ground-floor layout, creating both views through the property and connection to the sun. Limited internal walls also help to ensure the entire ground floor is flooded with natural light.

A spacious hallway leads from the front door, where a dramatic black staircase may be lit from below by an LED strip – making it appear to float above the pale grey floor.

"We pinched the idea for our black-stained wooden staircase from a neighbours' house, and they gave us the name of the company they'd used in Wales," says Mike. "Most of the clothes in our wardrobes are black or grey, and when Teri and I worked together to design the slightly industrial interiors we limited ourselves to a similar palette."

The ground floor steps down to create a tiered progression from front to rear, which increased some room heights to three metres and allowed for a sunken living room, leading onto a lower rear terrace via a level threshold.

"Christian project managed the build and was very keen that we specified every tap and



BEDROOMS
The master bedroom has pocket sliding doors into a dressing area and en suite, with access onto a balcony.

BATHROOMS
A grey and black colour scheme in the bathrooms, makes a bold statement.

Mike & Ellen's top tip

"We were determined not to push up the build cost by making too many changes as we went along."

plug even before we broke ground, which was challenging but meant the project ran smoothly," says Mike. "When it came to the kitchen, we wanted something modern with clean lines that would blend with the rest of the room."

Teri chose the exposed brick walls which feature in the hallway and dining room, bringing texture and warmth to the spaces and echoing external brickwork. "Having an open-plan dining area means we sit at the table every day, rather than just using a dining room for special occasions," she says.

At first-floor level, the feature glazed gable to the west provides maximum light in the master bedroom while on the eastern gable the architects designed a large rectangular feature window to the study, with a set of double doors and a full-height section of apex glazing serving the guest bedroom.

"Once the new house was finished, we moved in from next door and the builders then started work on our old place, ready for it to be sold. We brought very few belongings with us, as we wanted to buy new furniture and modern artwork," says Teri.

"Being able to kit out the rooms before we moved in was a bonus and gave us time to really focus on the details. After spending 20 years in our old home it's been great fun to have a fresh start."

FINAL WORD

What was the high point of the project?
When we started to kit out the house and realised how well the design works – particularly the stepped levels on the ground floor.

...and the low points?
Designing bathrooms before you even have a room built was tricky, and we needed to lighten the render colour to ensure the company would guarantee the product. Generally, though, everything ran really smoothly.

Your best buy?
Our garden lights were a fiver each and the staircase was also a bargain, as it's made from inexpensive wood which has been stained.

Biggest extravagance?
Undoubtedly the wall lights in our dining room, which cost £1,000 each and were reclaimed from an East German petrochemical factory, so they're bomb-proof.

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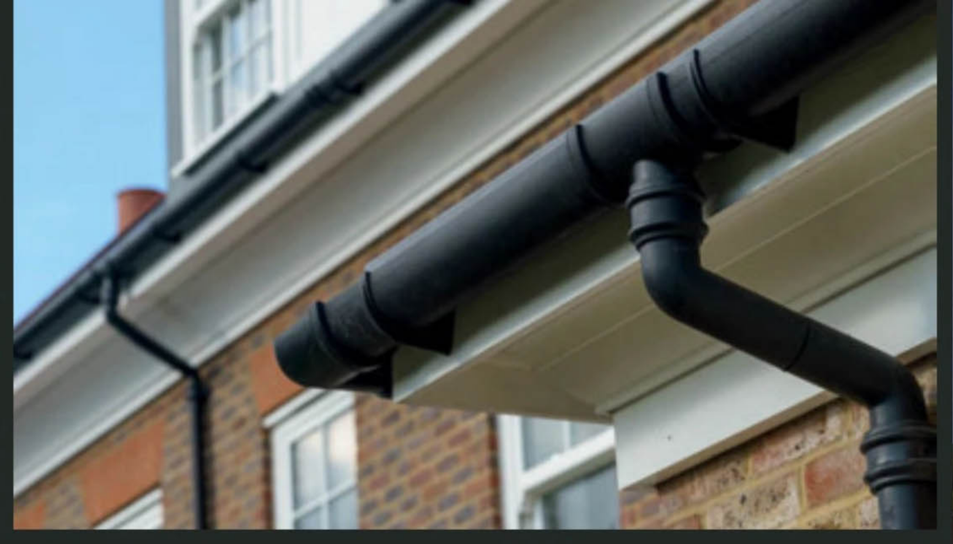

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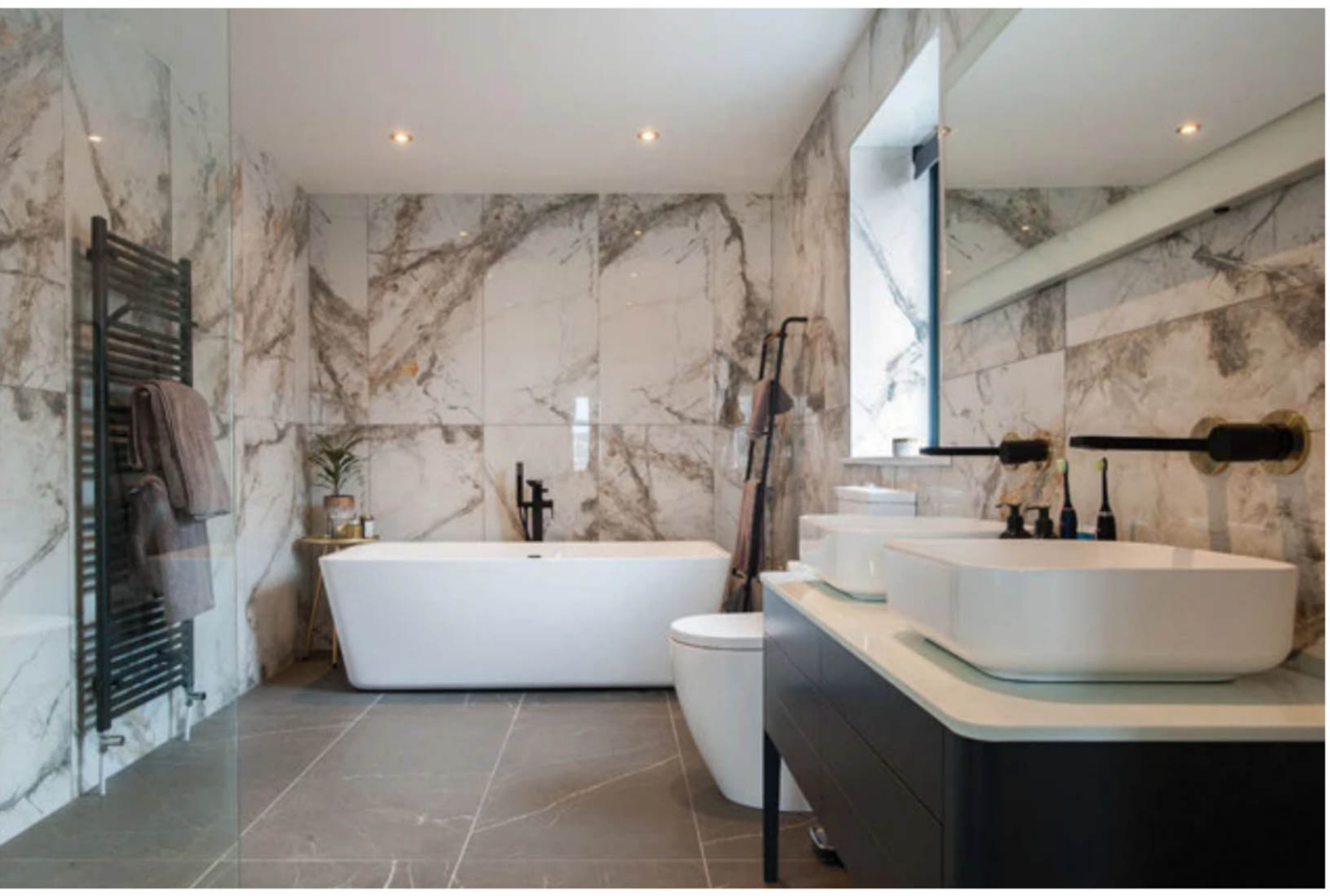
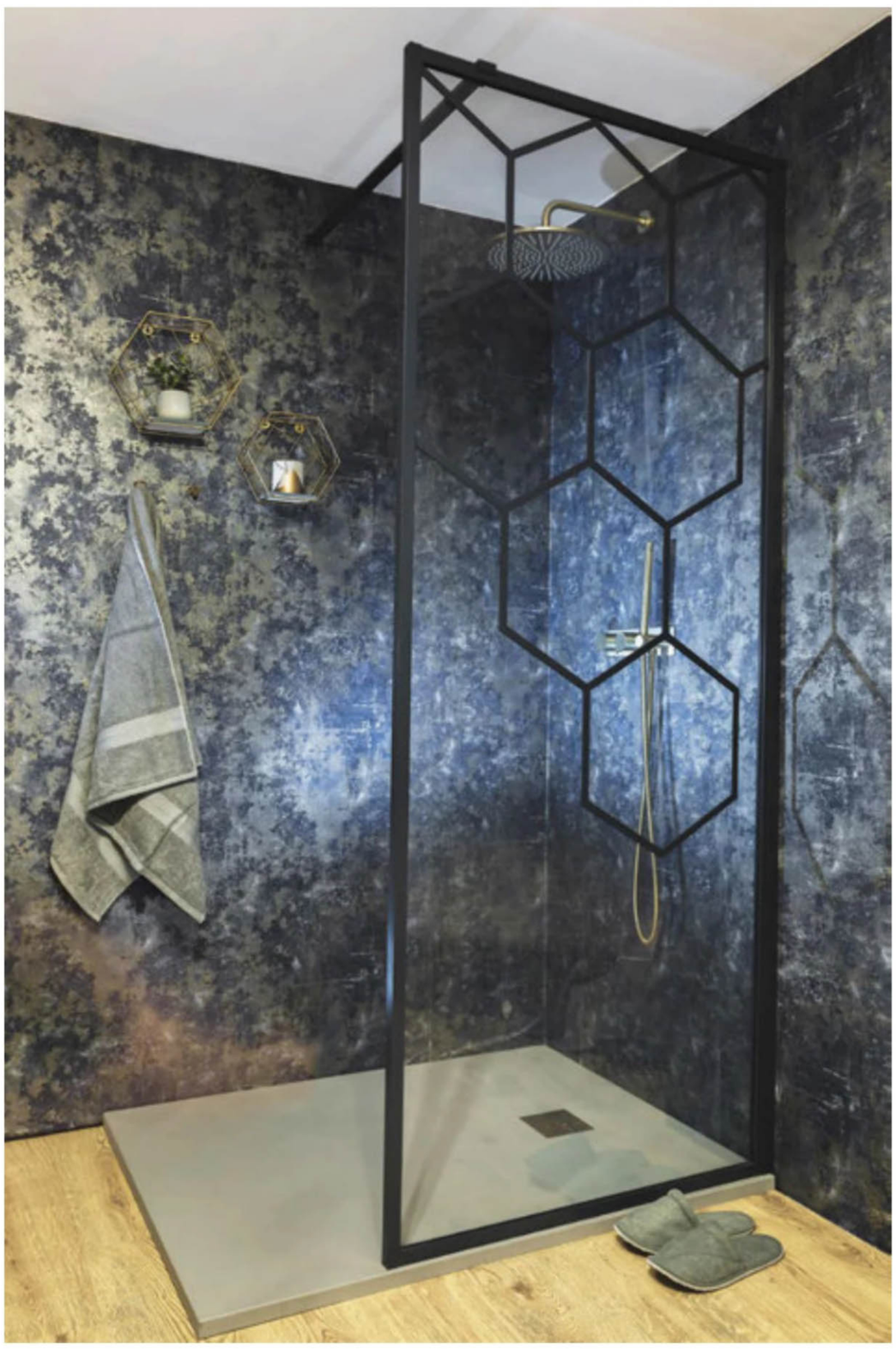




Pictures
A well-designed and appointed bathroom adds a real wow factor and offers a sanctuary away from life's cares.

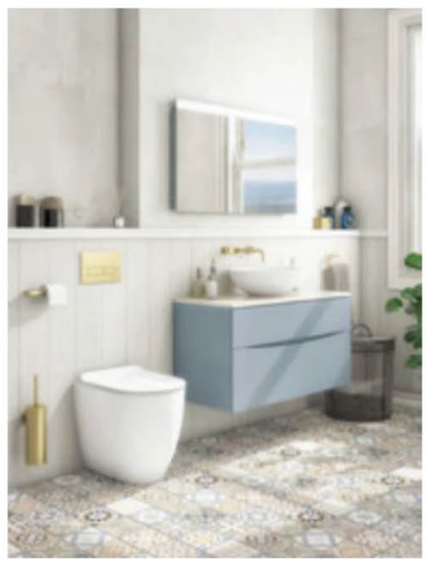
BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO **BATHROOM DESIGN**

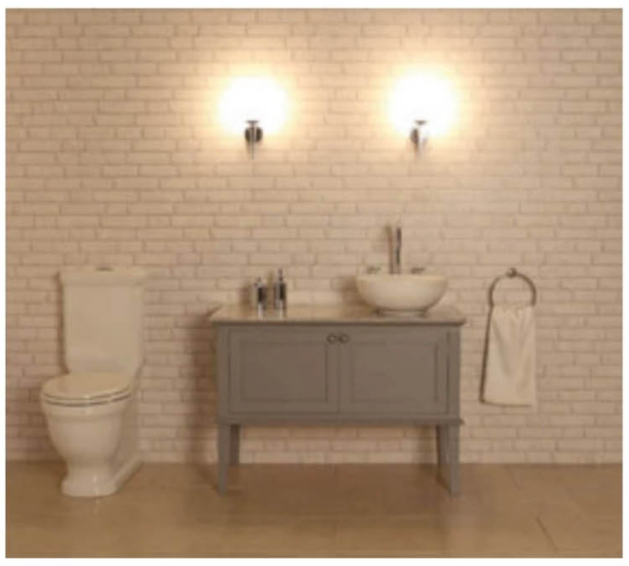
If you're considering adding a new bathroom in an existing house, then additional pipework will need to be installed to supply the sanitaryware and remove waste. If a bathroom is created where there wasn't one before then Building Regulations approval is likely to be needed, to ensure the room will have adequate ventilation and drainage while meeting requirements for structural stability, electrical and fire safety. Work to refit a bathroom doesn't generally need Building Regs approval, although drainage or electrical works that form part of the refit may.

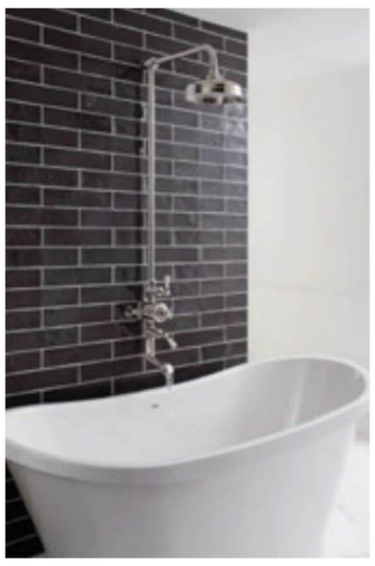
Designs for new homes and extensions often have bathrooms immediately above one another, back to back, or set close together to make the best use of drainage. Dwellings constructed after 1999 need to have a ground-floor WC, designed for wheelchair access.

Generally, a toilet is installed near an existing sewage stack, but if the new WC will be too far away then a macerator pumping system can be used to reduce the solid waste and pump it through a smaller diameter pipe to the main soil stack. This enables a bathroom to be located anywhere that conventional large bore pipework is impractical.

Bathrooms which are open plan to bedrooms, or tucked behind a partial wall or screen, create a boutique hotel feel which is currently popular. Think about practicalities such as damp, privacy and the weight of a full bath of water on the floor structure, as many free-standing baths can be extremely heavy.







HOW?

Decide on the look you want to achieve and create a mood board or Pinterest board of pictures, colours and concepts. Think about what you want in the room and then plan if your selection will fit the available space, while considering the position of any existing pipework or drainage. Check that the size of the various fittings will not only go up any stairs but will allow you space to move easily around the bathroom. New rooms may even be sized according to sanitaryware. Larger rooms can accommodate twin sinks, a separate bath and shower, or a free-standing bath.

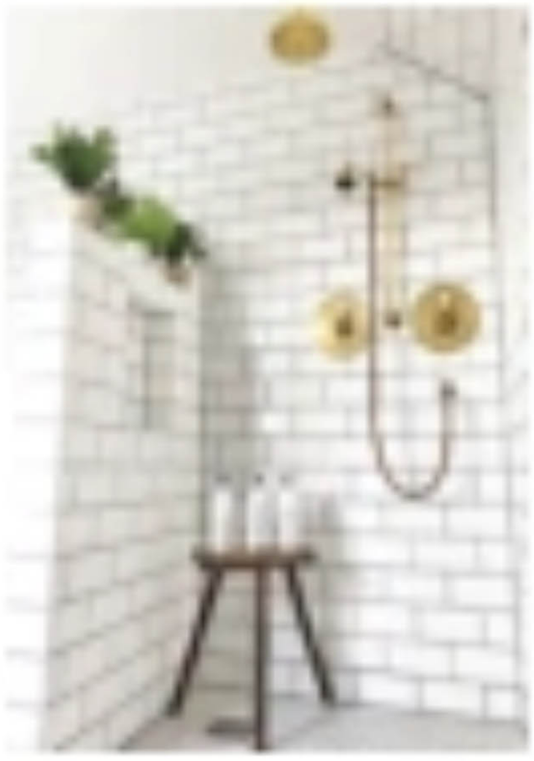
Think about the required space around each item for both comfort and practicality. Allow around 70cm in front of a WC and basin or beside a bath or shower. If everything is packed too tightly the room will feel cramped and be awkward to use, doors won't open fully, and it won't feel comfortable.

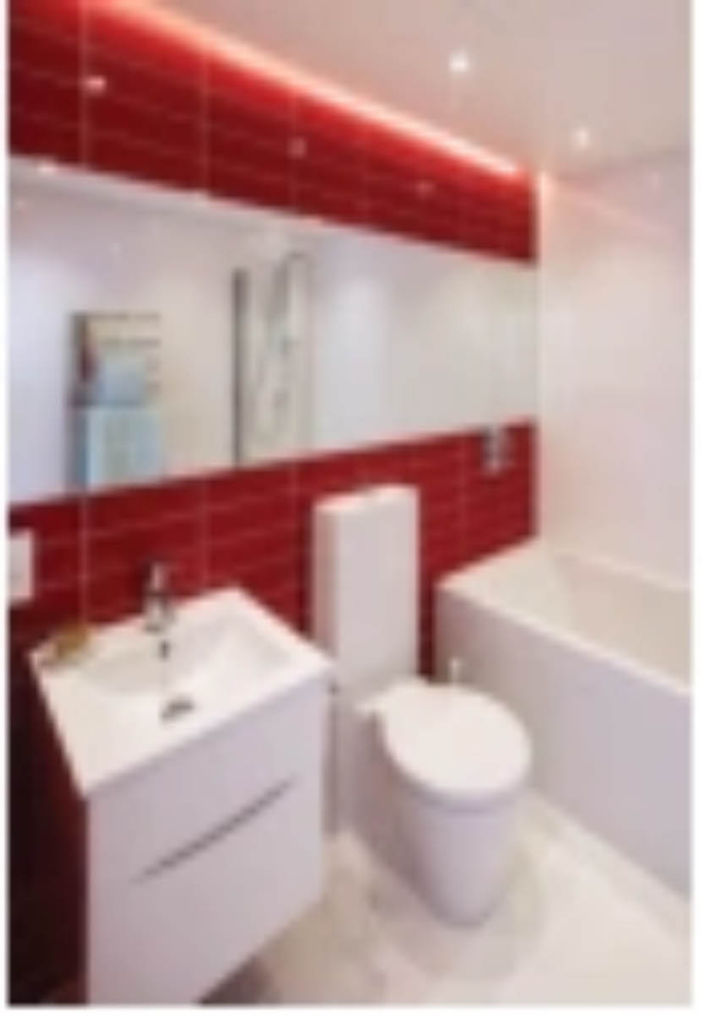
Wall-mounted basins and WCs create uninterrupted floor space, but you must first check with a plumber that these are suitable for the space. If your walls are too flimsy to support a wall-hung system then it may be possible to buy a special bracing frame, in conjunction with a WC unit, which will then house a concealed system.

A fully waterproof wet room with no shower tray can be a perfect solution for a small or awkwardly shaped bathroom, as it gives a greater feeling of space and is straightforward to clean – especially if you opt for a wall-mounted toilet and basin. The walk-in shower area is usually level with the surrounding floor, but with a slight slope to the drain, which is fitted directly into the floor. It may be easily accessed by the elderly or disabled and is practical for children, who can splash all they like. A wet room is easier to achieve downstairs on solid floors. If an architect is involved with the project, then they could help with designing the room. The internal layout should be finalised before building work begins to make sure that drainage and other pipework is correctly positioned.

Ensure that the electrics are also planned from the outset and completed at an early stage, prior to fitting the sanitaryware, so that all wiring may be concealed. Due to the regulations governing the use of electricity in bathrooms you should avoid free-standing, hanging or adjustable light fittings. Recessed lights and sealed units are the safest options.

Specialist bathroom companies often provide a design service free of charge and may produce a 3D walk-through computer graphic. Alternatively, you could create your own 3D model using free online tools which enable you to furnish and decorate virtual rooms.





Pictures
The illusion of space can be created with large mirrors. High gloss tiles reflect the light, adding an air of luxury

WHAT?

It helps to list everything before you start and to set a strict budget, which includes labour. Once the essentials are out of the way any surplus can be spent on luxuries. The bathroom, along with the kitchen, are significant factors when it comes to selling a property.

The addition of a new bathroom will usually increase the overall value of the home by at least the cost of the work involved, as well as adding to the overall comfort. As with installing a new kitchen, the cost of a new bathroom can vary considerably. Bathroom suites may be purchased for a few hundred pounds, but you could splash out and end up spending thousands.

When it comes to interiors for new builds, the general rule of thumb is that you can claim back the VAT on any permanent fixtures incorporated into the house which could not be taken with you if you moved. These include sanitaryware, heating and fixed flooring.

Take time shopping around, look online for the best buys and factor in a contingency sum for unforeseen expenses. It's the unseen items which are always forgotten and can soon add up to a hefty overspend. Think about the amount of water you're going to consume. You can usefully reduce this by buying low- or dual-flush toilets, low flow showers and basin taps, and a smaller capacity bath. If you have suitable cupboard space, you could fit a grey water recycling unit, which uses waste water from baths and showers to flush toilets.

With a little extra investment, rainwater can be used inside to feed WCs. Installing a domestic system is more straightforward in a new-build home, but with some alterations to downpipes and interior plumbing, a system can be added to existing houses.

No switch, apart from ceiling pull cord types, may be installed anywhere within reach of anyone using a bath or shower, and no plug and socket fittings – apart from special razor sockets – are allowed in bathrooms.

Most bathrooms are prone to condensation, and an extractor fan fitted to a window or an outside wall will considerably reduce this and prevent the room from becoming damp. Natural ventilation is great if there is space for a window, and opening roof lights can be useful as they save wall space and provide masses of natural light.

Avoid any floor surface that becomes slippery when wet and check whether natural products will require sealing and further maintenance. A timber sub-floor may need to be strengthened to take the weight of tiles, and water-resistant, insulated tile backer boards are available which create a sound base.

Most paint ranges include a kitchen and bathroom option for areas of high humidity which has moisture- and grease-resistant properties and produces a tough, scrubbable surface. Don't be tempted to choose standard paint, as this won't be able to combat the moisture content of a bathroom setting and can soon begin to mould or peel.

Wallpapers can add instant character to an otherwise featureless space, with vinyl papers available for kitchen and bathroom applications. Online decorating tools allow you to try out various wallpapers in a room set or using a photograph of your own room, to give an idea of the finished effect.

WHO?

If you have some DIY skills then installing bathroom sanitaryware is possible – although do employ professionals for any gas or electrical installations, such as extending your central heating system. Decorative finishes, including plastering and tiling, can make or break the whole look of a room, so it may be a false economy to try to do everything yourself.

Most specialist bathroom companies will be able to offer a complete design and fit service, organising the various trades and tackling as much or as little of the project as you want for a fixed price.

Alternatively, you could employ individual tradespeople and undertake some of the work such as preparation and decorating yourself. Make sure that all products and materials have been ordered well before work is due to start in order to avoid hold-ups, and check them for damage upon delivery.

If you're employing a building contractor or a specialist bathroom company they will usually organise the various subcontractors involved, including a qualified electrician. If you're managing the project yourself then choose a tradesperson registered with a Competent Person Scheme (competentperson.co.uk) or log on to the Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering (ciphe.org.uk) to find a reputable company.

DURAVIT

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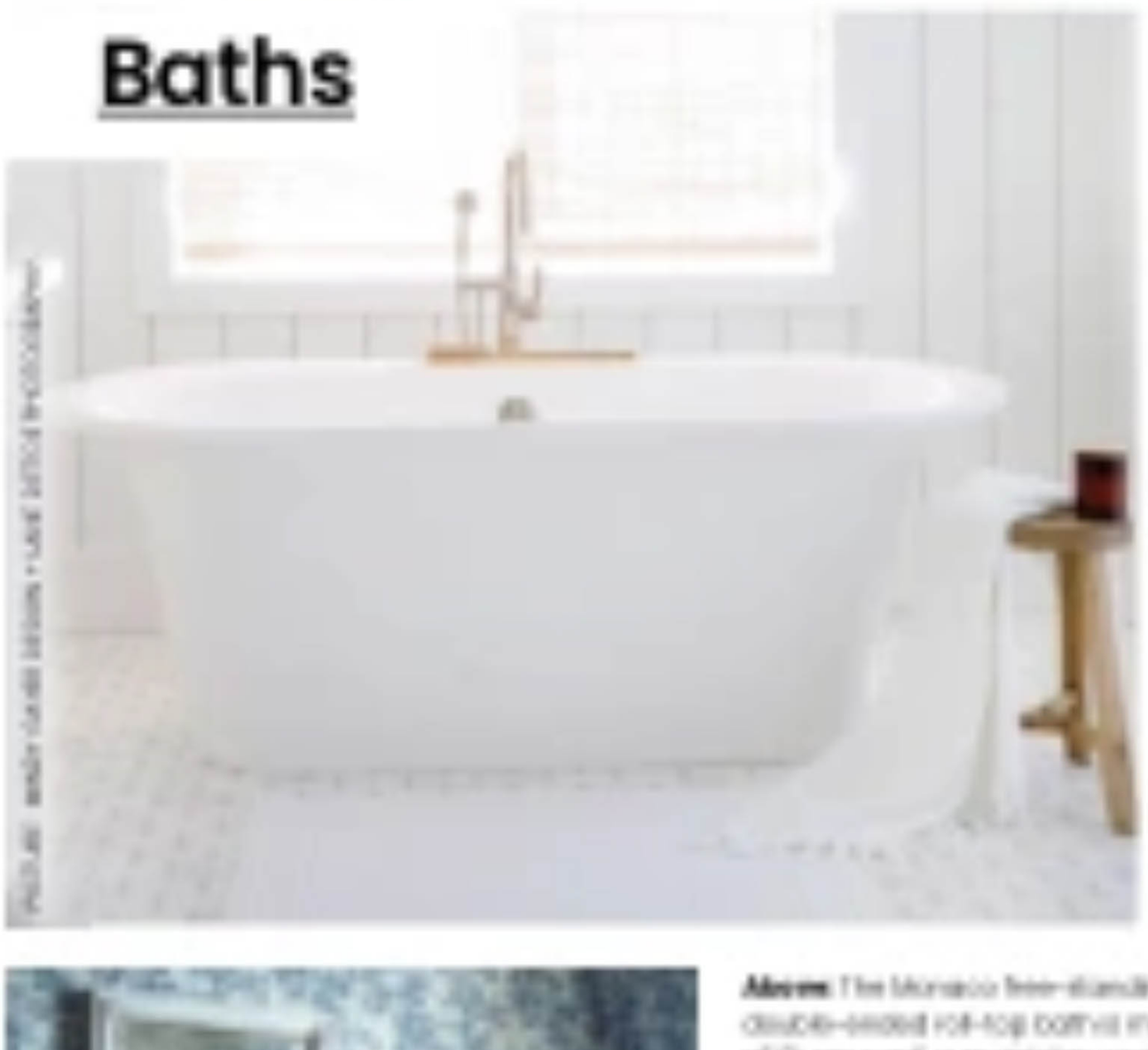
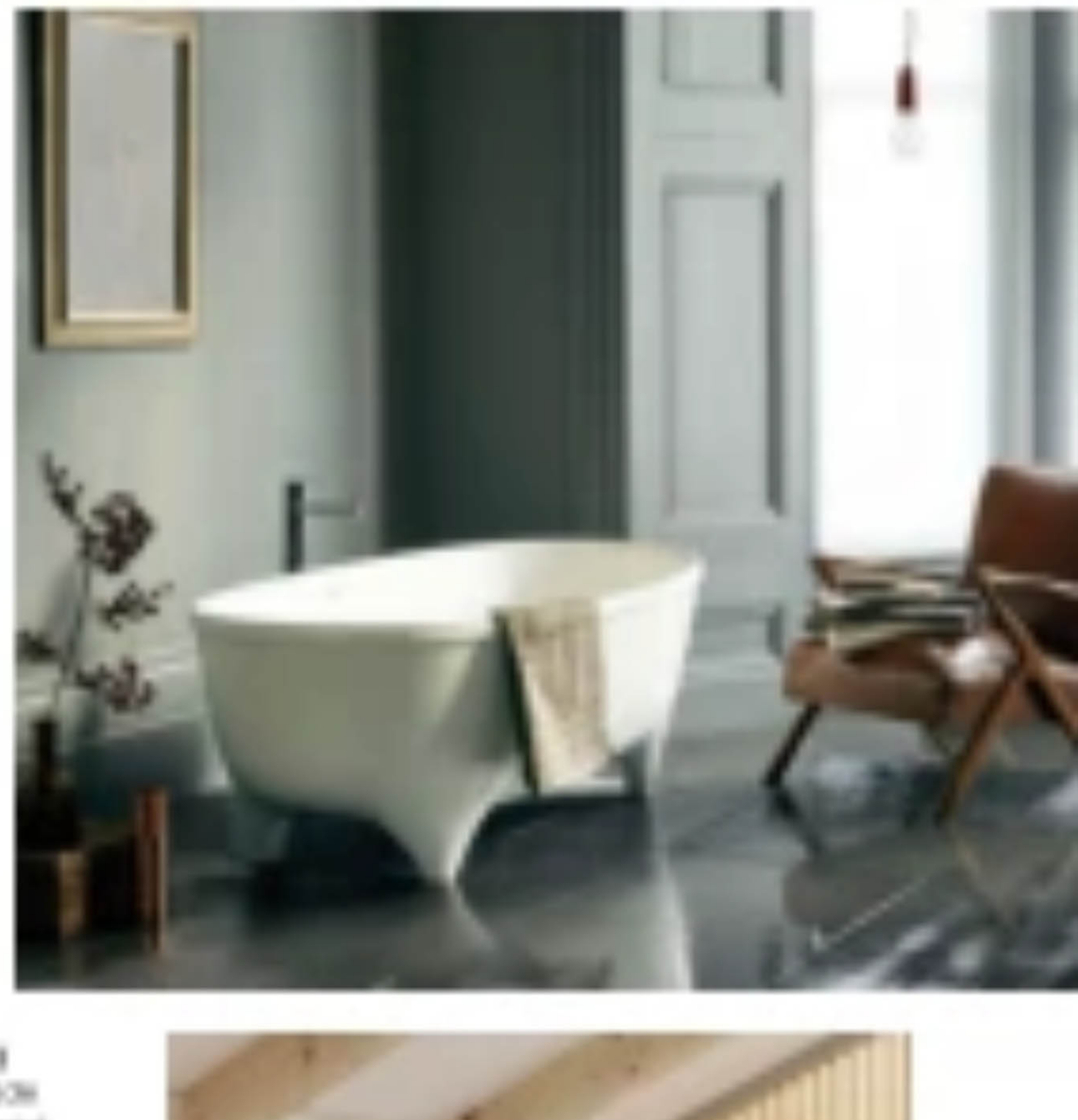
Current trends continue to steer new bathroom worlds: an interplay of harmonious rounded corners and impressively comfortable. Light or dark wood tones, subtly matt finishes, gently sliding handles or pull-out compartments with self-closing and inner lighting. Design by Sieger Design. **Duravit London**, open now. For more information visit **www.duravit.co.uk**

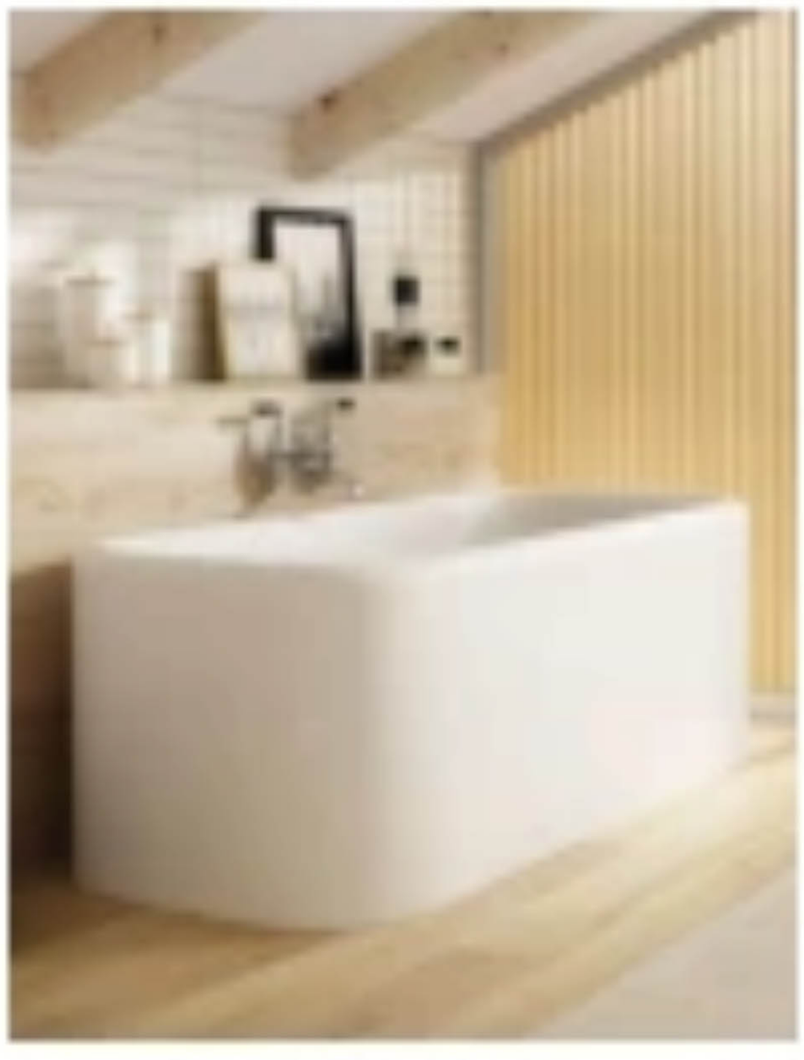
Shown in Mazarine Blue, this Victorian high-sprung bath (£4,283.33) is made of cast iron. A copper finish is also available. Shown with London stone (£1,017.50 each; sphere.co.uk)

Baths





Above: The Monaco free-standing double-ended roll-top bath is made of Quarrycast, a proprietary material made from volcanic limestone and resin. It comes in a choice of stone-inspired finishes (£1,995; bannatyneblue.com)
Above right: The Vigo bath is made from natural stone with a matte hand-polished finish. Price £3,995 (bluestonebaths.com)
Left: The Imperium Boreau bath is rounded on a solid plinth. Made from white bathstone, it is available in a choice of finishes, including high-gloss chrome and stainless steel. Available in four sizes, it is priced from £2,228 (bathroomsdirect.co.uk)
Right: The Arterra bath is constructed with Corian, a hard-wearing, stain-resistant surface made from a mix of organic minerals enriched with volcanic mineral-effect finishes. Heated to 120 degrees, it can be moulded into a variety of shapes. Available in a choice of white or matt finish, it costs £3,995 (arterra.co.uk)



Above: The Corbio stone rectangular basin, priced at £411, is displayed here on a single oak vanity (£662) (wickes.co.uk)

Above right: Available in 28 colours, the concrete Mini Elm basin is shown here in Timber, measuring 450mm x 320mm x 180mm. From £1,260 (allbesbyvalentine.com)

Right: The Ishihara Angular basin features a distinctive portal groove shape and a stylish gold rim. It measures 600mm x 175mm and costs £660 (bensherwoodcompany.com)

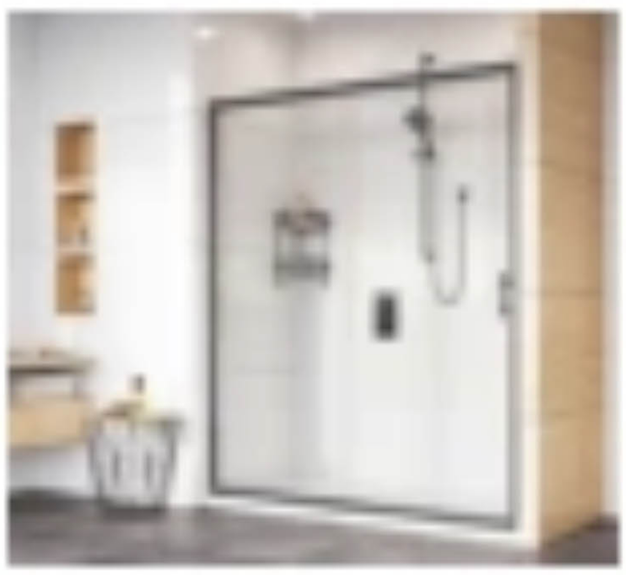
Below left: Available in black or white porcelain, the Bogart basin and pedestal costs £1,810 (bauhaus-classics.com)

Below right: The Stance bright white wall basin was designed by Thomas Coward for Kinvivo, Australia. Prices from £352 per sqm. (stance.com)

Shower solutions

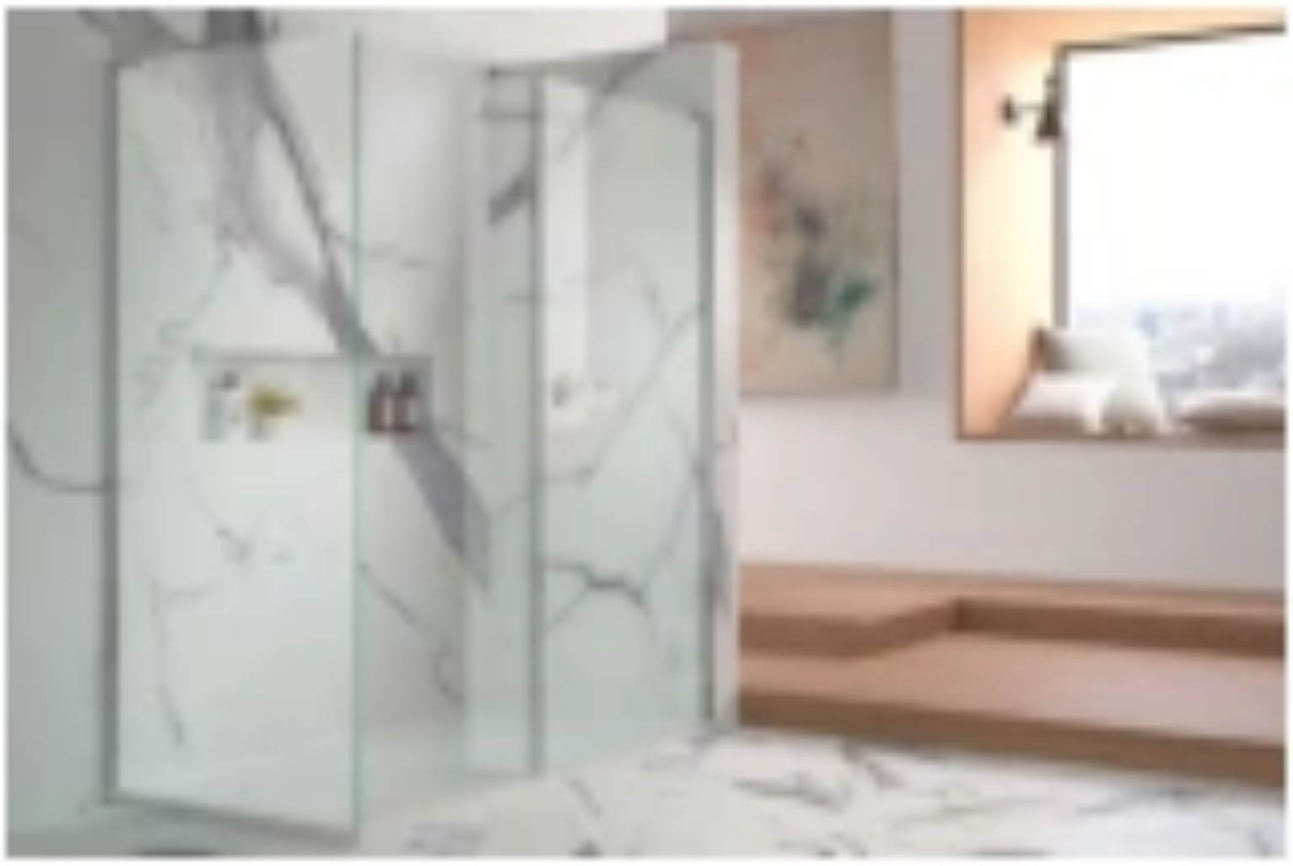
Left: The Curved shower surface is made from seamless stainless steel and stylish with the floor it is available in a variety of sizes and is shown here in city anthracite. Matt Inox/Ultra Coordinated Colours collection. [luxaccess.com]

Above right: The Mayfair complete walk-in shower enclosure from Luxaccess in a variety of sizes and includes a shower tray and walls, drain cover, glass screen, backing bar and wall fixing kit. Made from marine grade stainless steel and finished in brushed gold, it costs from £806. [luxaccess.com]



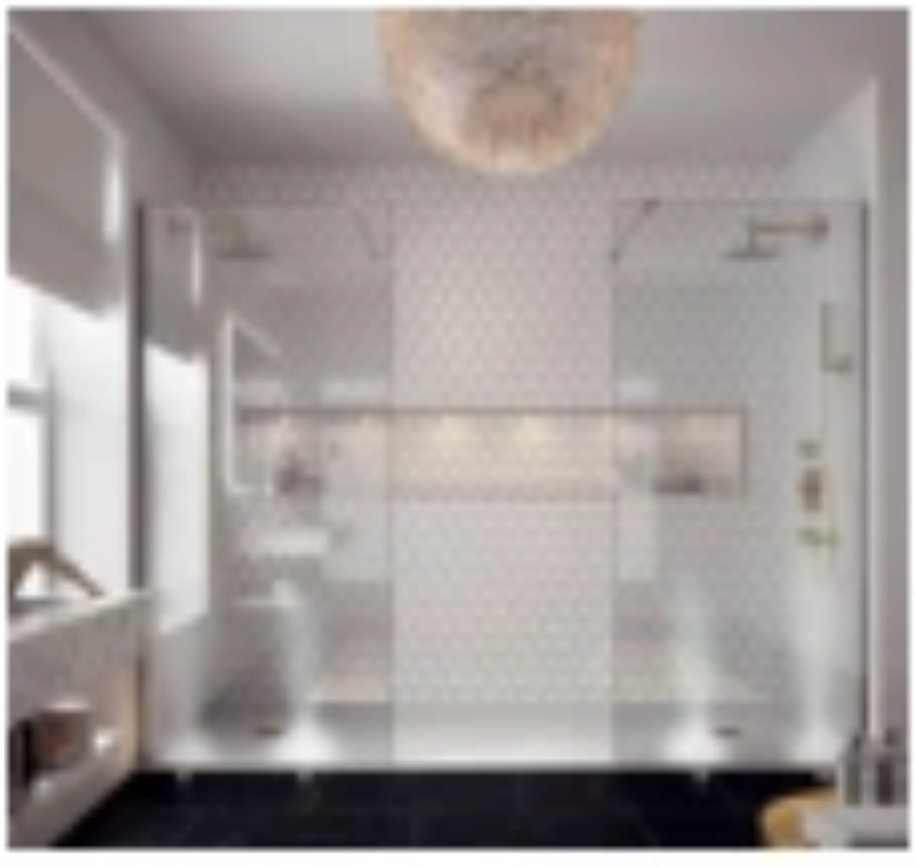
Above left: The easy to install bi-swift sliding door with in-line panel features 8mm ultra-clear glass protection. Shown here in matt black, a chrome finish is also available. Prices from £410. [connoll-shower.com]

Above right: The Liberty fluted glass wet room panel uses a stylish decorative glass available in chrome, black or silver chrome finish. The panels can be installed on a tray or attached to the floor, with a sealing tape system eliminating all visible silicone. Prices from £447.70. [connoll-shower.com]



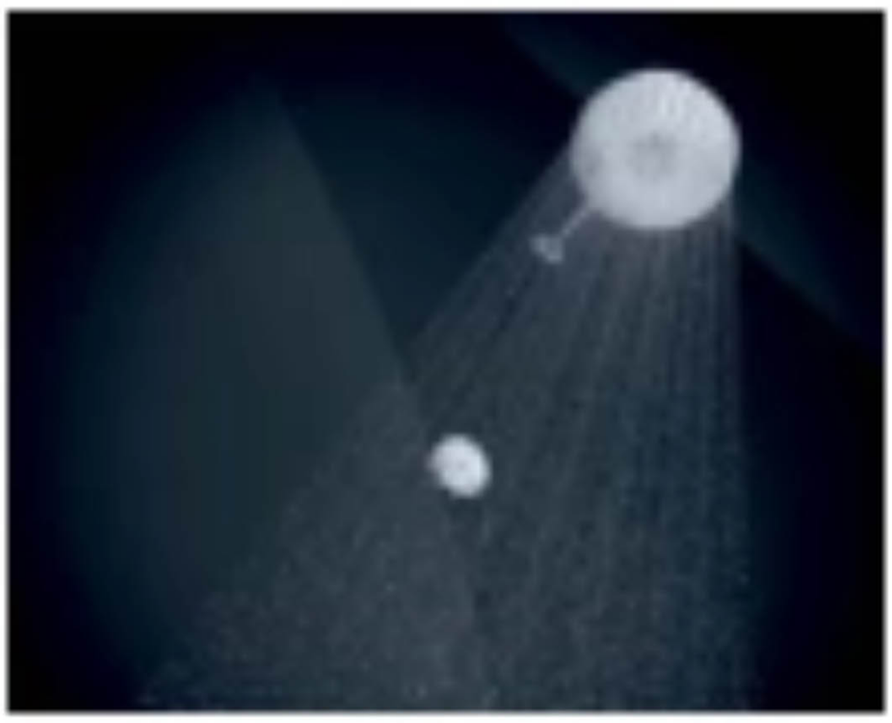
Above: The curved Graziano Plus shower 28 enclosure has a minimalist design, single-panel frameless glass. Available in a selection of sizes, prices start from £3,300 for a full enclosure excluding installation. [graziano.co.uk]

Right: The Twin shower recess features a pair of 8mm fixed glass walls and costs £1,666.66. [merlyn-showering.com]



Dual screen enclosure takes up a lot of valuable space in the bathroom – but does it really have to? The [mm] group of designers thinks not and therefore developed the innovative Quantum shower. After showering these doors can simply be folded against the wall. This provides a wall protruding into the room. The top fittings and shower hose are concealed and the bathroom appears much larger, particularly with mirrored glass. [duravit.co.uk]

Shower heads

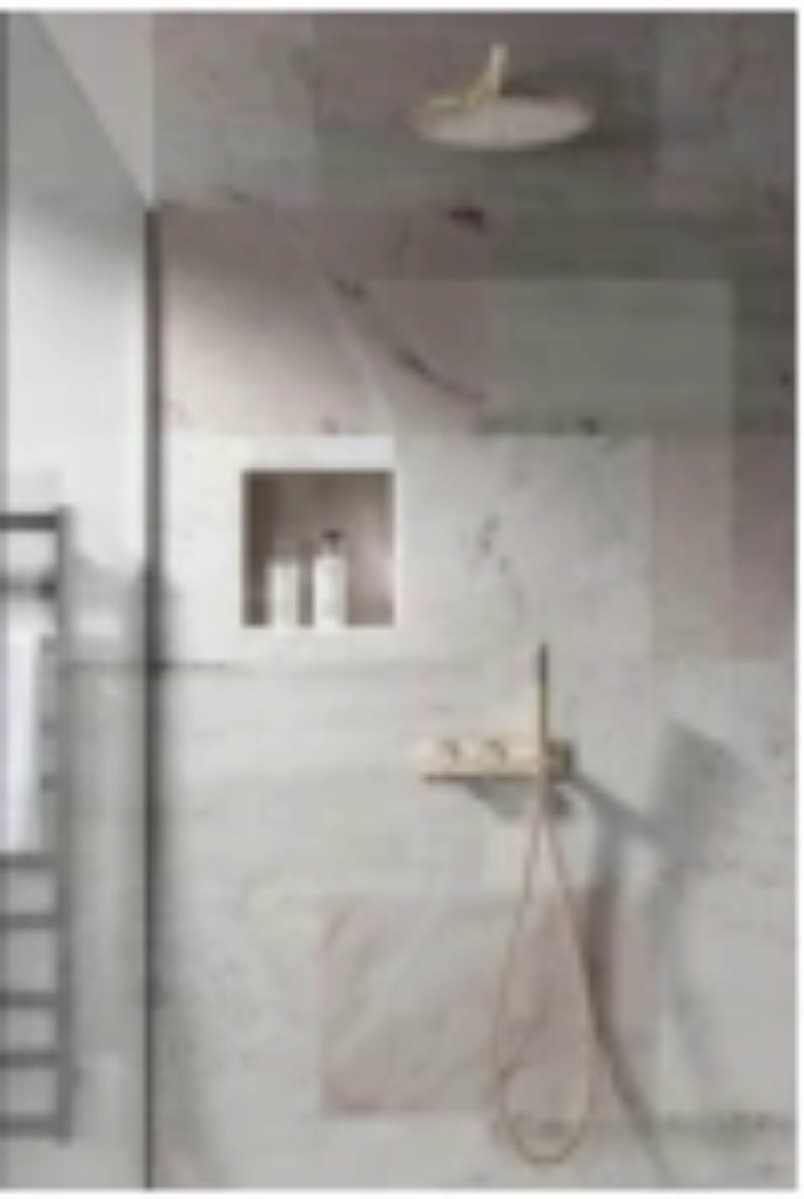


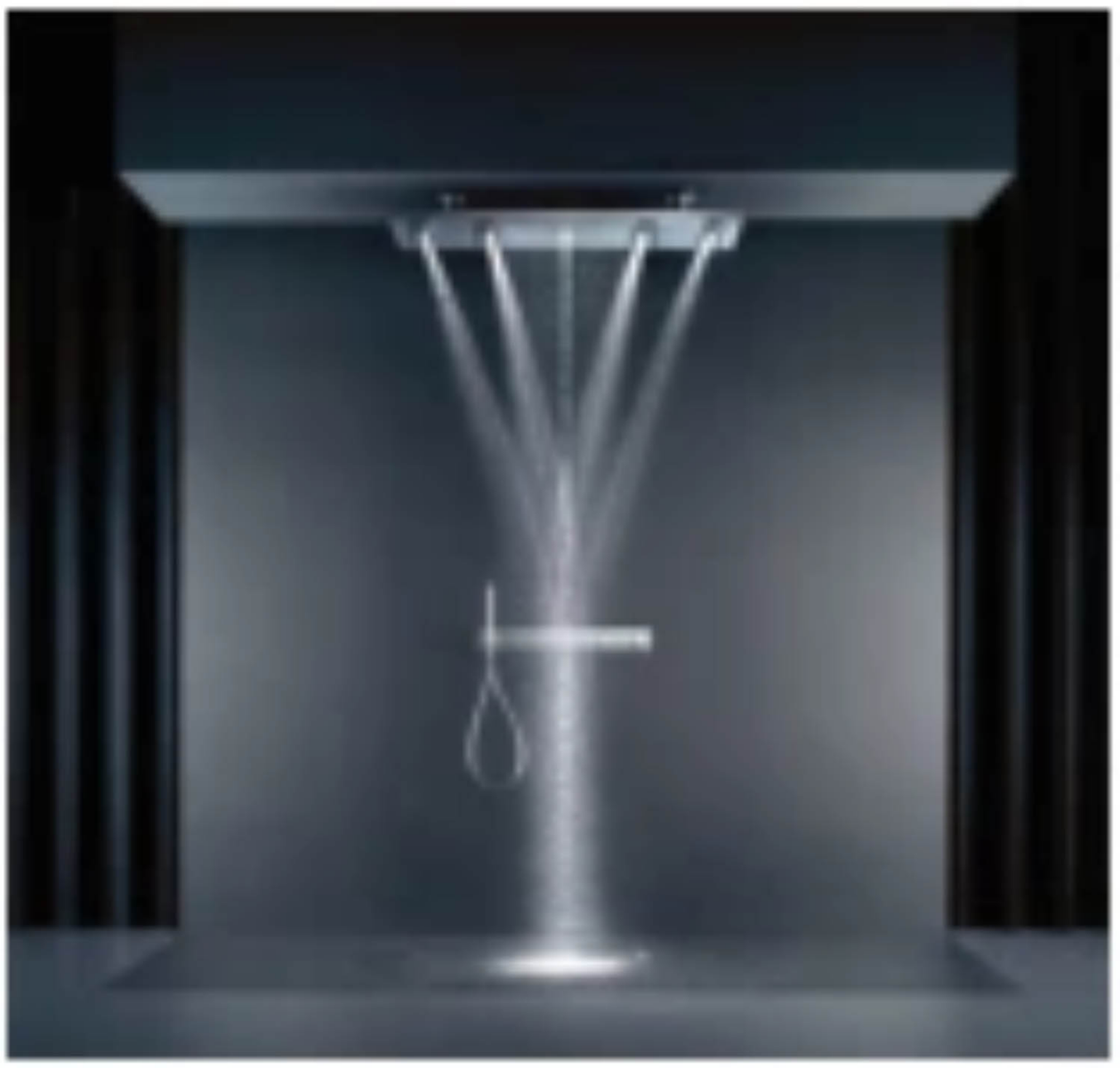
Left: The Inspire 10 Smart/Connect shower head uses Bluetooth connectivity to a battery-powered remote control, which can be placed freely in the shower to select one of seven spray types to choose at relaxing from or powerful jet. Available in a round or square design, it costs £579.99. (grohe.co.uk)

Right: Made from stainless steel and finished in chrome, the 62 Series Dress Code wall-mounted rain shower head is priced from £1,826. (gessi.com)

Left: For a statement piece, these Brushed Brass floor-standing tapered shower pipes are priced from £1,034 each, paired with a Brushed Brass shower rose (from £450). (drummondtaps.co.uk)

Below: The Inizio thermostatic exposed shower features a sleek, contemporary design with Safe Touch technology ensuring the valves remain cool to the touch. Price: £320. (bristan.com)

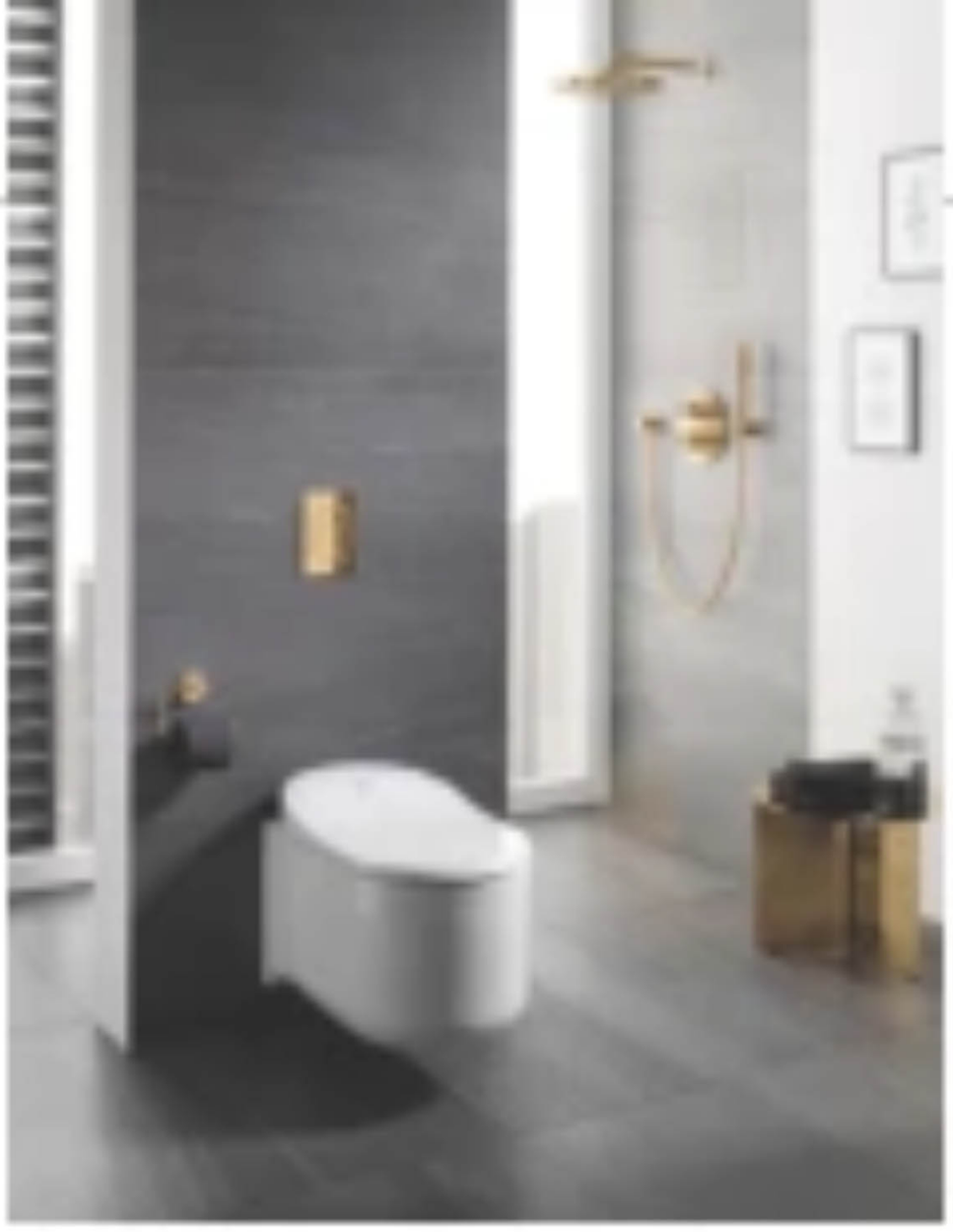




Above: The Ideal Rain Mix shower system in Chrome features patented AutoJet technology to deliver 28 per cent more spray coverage and tests the strength of rain consistent. Price: £727.98. (ideal-taps.co.uk)

Far left: Shown in brushed black, the MPRO thermostatic shower valve with two-way diverter and fixed slide rail kit costs £616. The MPRO 300mm shower head is priced at £208. (crosswater.co.uk)

Left: Finished in chrome, the Universal Recessed Shower Kit with lighting 37201 features rain, mono and powder rain spray types. Price: £1,561. (bear-design.com)



Above left: The Nuage range of sanitaryware is made entirely from CARILAVI including the cloakroom basin (£767) and pan (£1,178). (carilavi.co.uk)

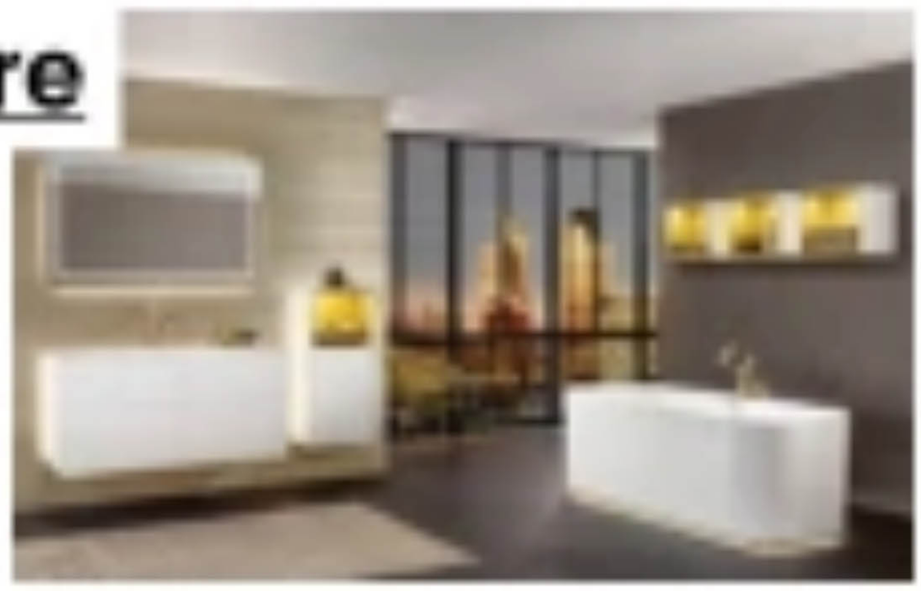
Above right: The Sonnia Arena shower toilet combines the benefits of a bidet with innovative features including a touchscreen remote control, air-infused shower spray, wireless bowl, automatic lid opening and customisable flushing and rinsing using water technology, available with the floor-standing model. Price £1,530. (geberit.co.uk)

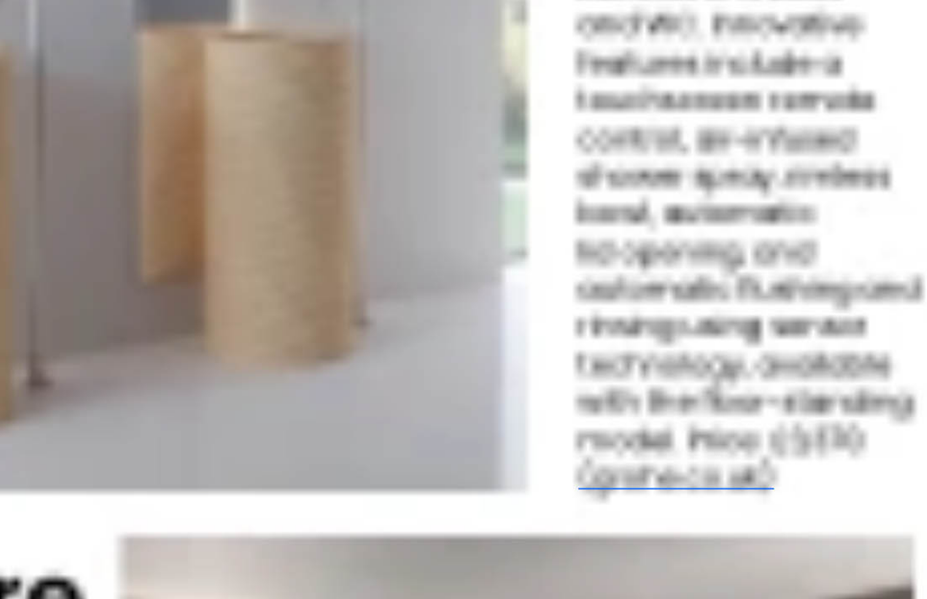
Sanitaryware

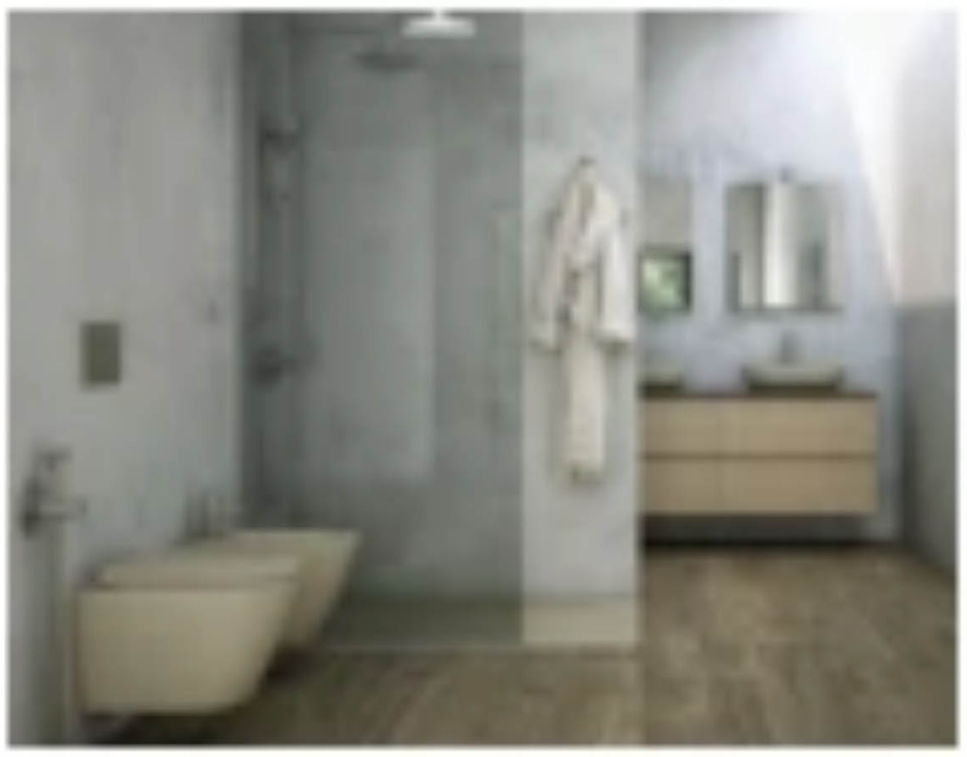
Above: This Milano Verdi bathroom set includes the Ashford toilet and pedestal basin set (£1,104.99), the Legend shoulder-marked floor-standing slipper bath with a choice of feet (£1,179.99), the Trent brushed bronze radiator (from £239.99) and the Elizabeth traditional overhead basin pillar taps (from £48.99). (englishbathroomshop.co.uk)

Below: Coloured sanitaryware from RAK Ceramics is shown here in matt cappuccino, comprising a wall-hung slimline WC (£419), bidet (£391), basin unit (£812) and countertop vessel unit (£299). (rakceramics.com)

Furniture



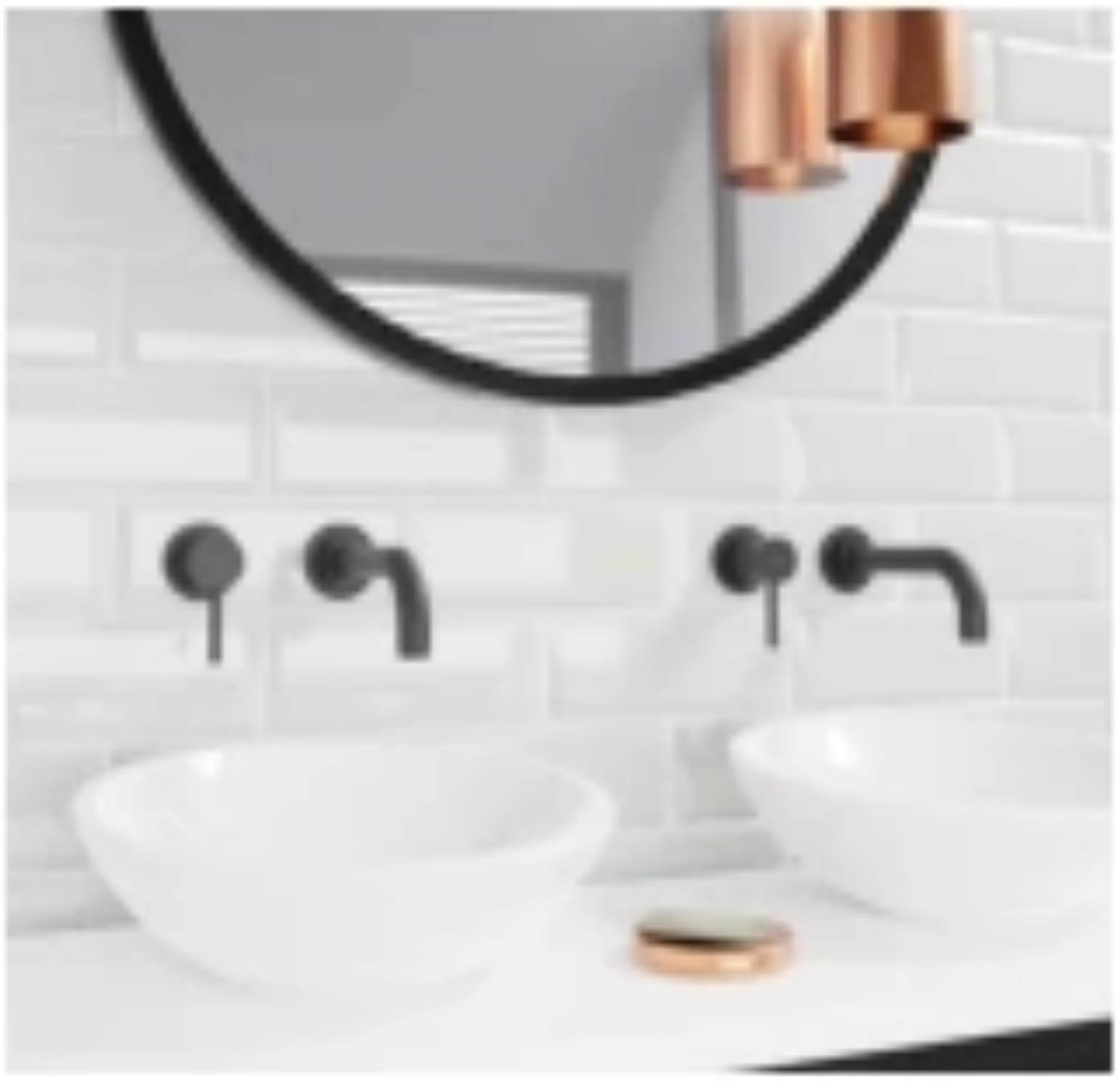




Right: The Arvos collection features this free-standing Quarry bath with optional design integrated LED lighting (motion feature) (£4,043.80), the 600mm wall-hung unit (£3,815.20), and the shelf include with interior lighting and charging station (£1,548.80). (villeroy-boch.co.uk)

Right: Bright gloss white and oak effect co-ordinate in this Iconic vanity bathroom furniture, which includes vanity unit, mirrored wall cabinet and bright wall cabinet. Price on application. (classicfurniture.co.uk)

Taps



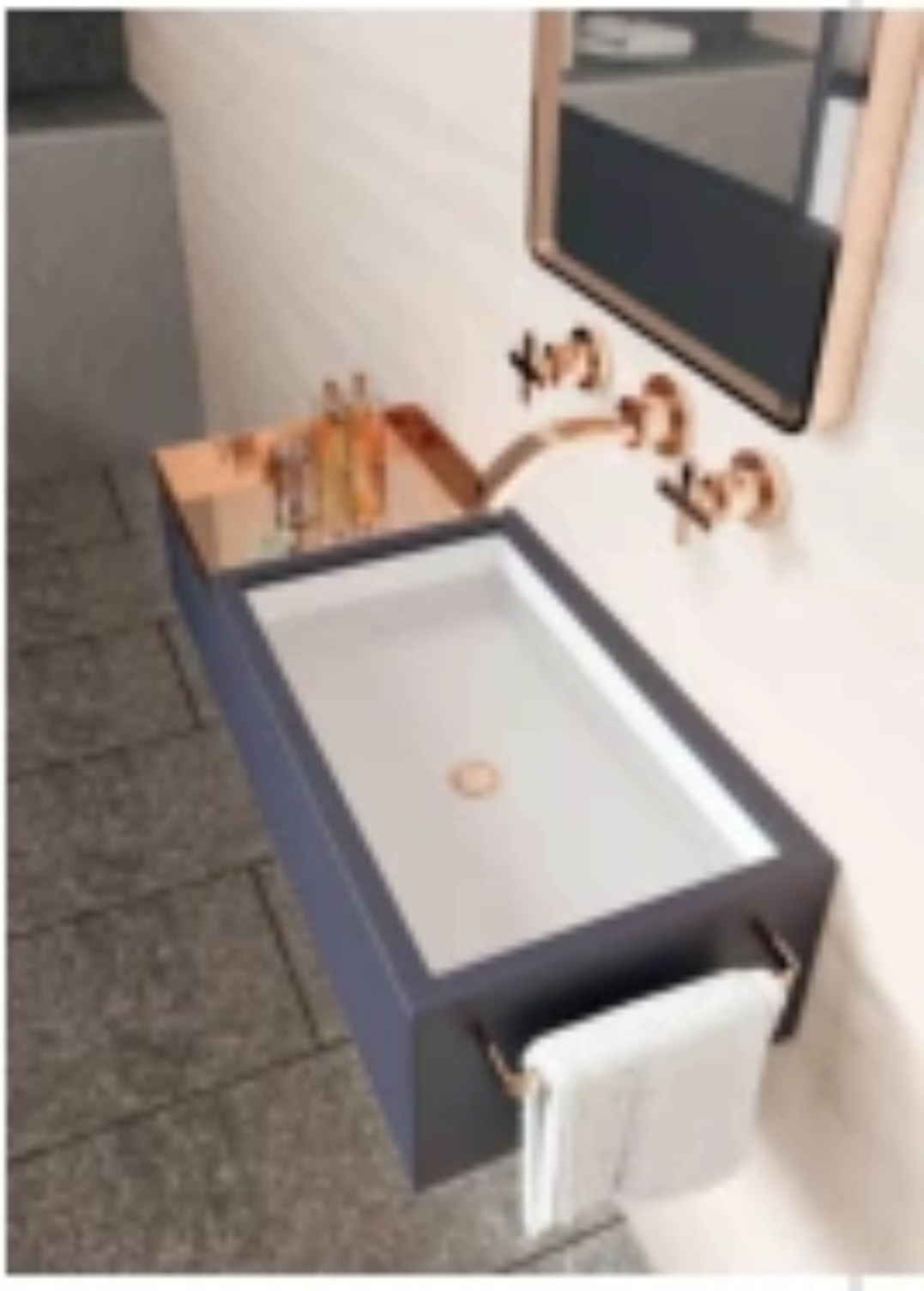
Above left: This traditional floor-mounted bath/shower mixer with hand shower and cross top handles is shown in both finishes, priced at £1,605.00. [lusterware.co.uk]

Above: The Harmonia wall-mounted basin mixer is shown here in a matt black finish, and requires a minimum 0.4 bar pressure. Price £268. [vadea.co.uk]

Left: The floor-standing Monopod single lever basin and bath mixers are both shown here, available at different heights and different spout lengths. Prices are from £1,478 for the basin mixer and £1,031 for the bath mixer. [hansgrohe.co.uk]

Left: The Dual U water-saving minimum-pressure basin mixer is shown here in chrome (£208), paired with a matching black overflow washbasin. Price £168. [utilitysink.co.uk]

Right: Shown here in a rose-gold finish, the Serenade wall-mounted shower/bath mixer has a square-form valve technology for precise control. It requires just 0.2 bar minimum pressure and is priced at £668. [vadea.co.uk]



House in the country

Anthony Smith has built a charming chocolate box house for his daughter on his Derbyshire farm

Words **Louise Parker** Installation **Tom Morrison**

Anthony Smith bought a farm and land in Derbyshire in 2008, where he built an impressive country home using a green oak frame and featuring lots of glazing. A ramshackle, four-bedroom bungalow on the site sat empty, being too dilapidated to renovate. In 2014, while empty homes officers from the council assessed the property was made fit for habitation, Anthony expedited his plans to demolish it and build a modern energy-efficient home.

"I actually started planning the build in 2012, but a pipistrelle bat was discovered in the bungalow and everything was put on hold while surveys were carried out," explains Anthony, who runs a successful bathroom company and has suckler cattle on his small farm.

Following two years of ecological surveys, a number of factors delayed the build further, and the project eventually broke ground in 2018.

By this time his daughter, Trinity (now 19), was starting university, and so the house was designed for her to move into once she graduates.

"My sons both work in London, and I couldn't see the benefit of building there – the cost would be too high. But building here made sense, and it gives Trinity somewhere to come home to," explains Anthony.

The traditional brick-and-tiled four-bedroom country home has been designed to echo the main house, an oak-framed porch and oak soffits and fascias visually connecting the two properties. Dormer windows and traditional glazing to the front give the new home a classically handsome appearance, while the rear facade has a more contemporary look where full-height glazed panels, black in some sections to conceal the joists, stretch up to the top of the gable, while bifold doors connect the living areas with a generous elevated patio and the fields beyond, where trees have been planted to create a parkland.

IN BRIEF

PROJECT New build
LOCATION Derbyshire
COST Already owned
SPENT £650,000
WORTH £925,000

EXTERIOR
This home features brick facades and decorative detailing to create a charming country look

The layout and orientation have been designed to maintain privacy from the main house and the farmyard. It also means it benefits from solar gain and maximises the far-reaching views of Derbyshire countryside, where a Roman road bisects Anthony's farmland leading to the brow of the hill opposite. Anthony says: "I've allowed metal detectorists onto the land who have found all sorts of small metal objects including Roman, Tudor and Elizabethan coins and pottery. It amazes me that for 2,000 years people have travelled on this road and perhaps rested on the brow of the hill, which is a great vantage point. I feel like this is a new time for this land, which has a very real sense of history – this house forms the next stage of that."

Anthony approached architect Martin Tucker, with whom he had worked before, to draw up the designs

The floorplan

The T-shaped floorplan features a dining room, kitchen, family/casual dining area and, with a separate lounge and utility, upstairs are four bedrooms, two en suites and a family bathroom. There is also a separate garage with a room above.

Helping you

Get your Planning Permission

Having problems with a planning application, been refused permission, want to know whether your property has potential or just need help dealing with the planning system?

Roy Speer and Michael Dade are planning consultants and writers who help self-builders throughout the country to get the go ahead with their newbuild, conversion or extension projects.

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- Appeals
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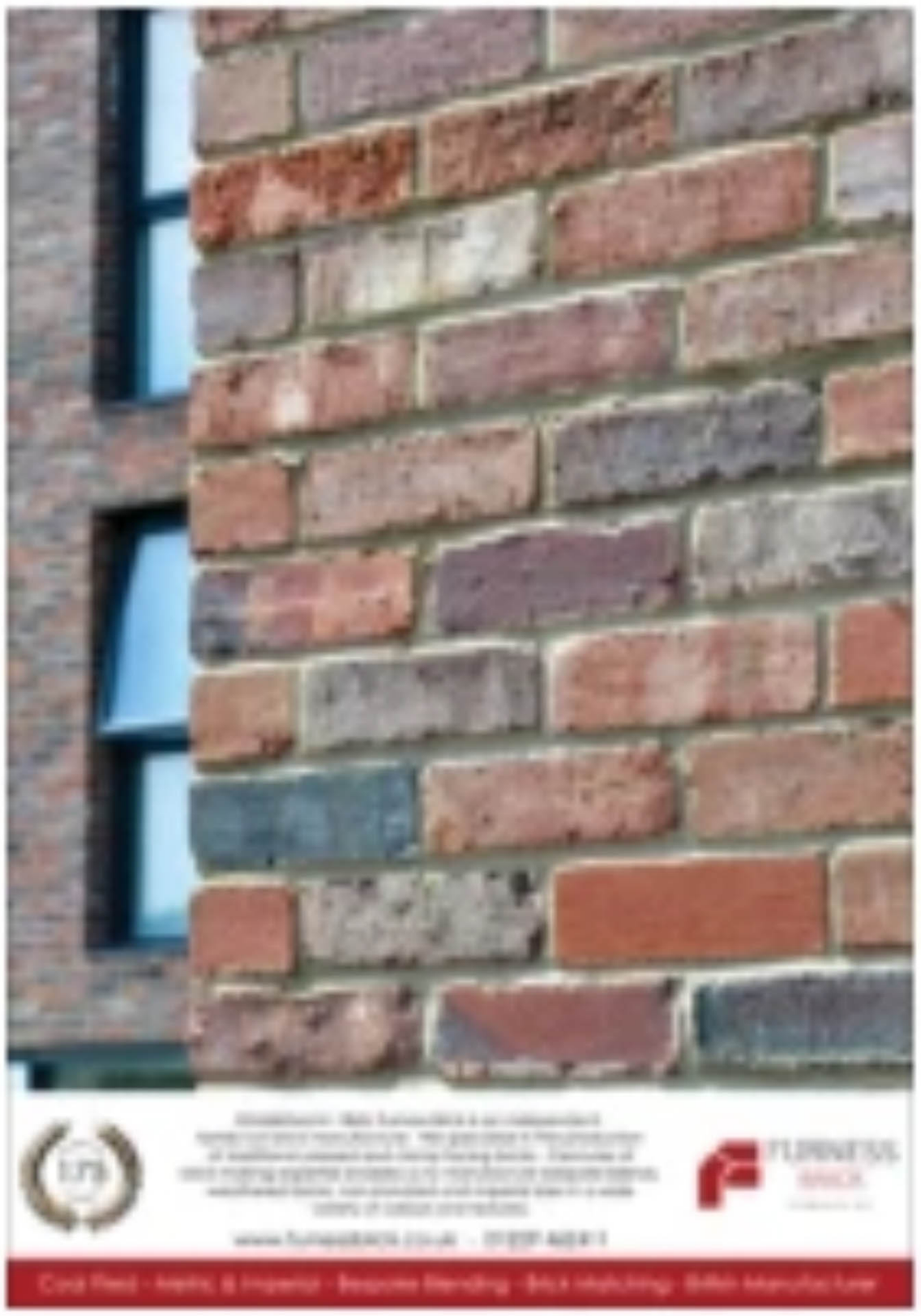

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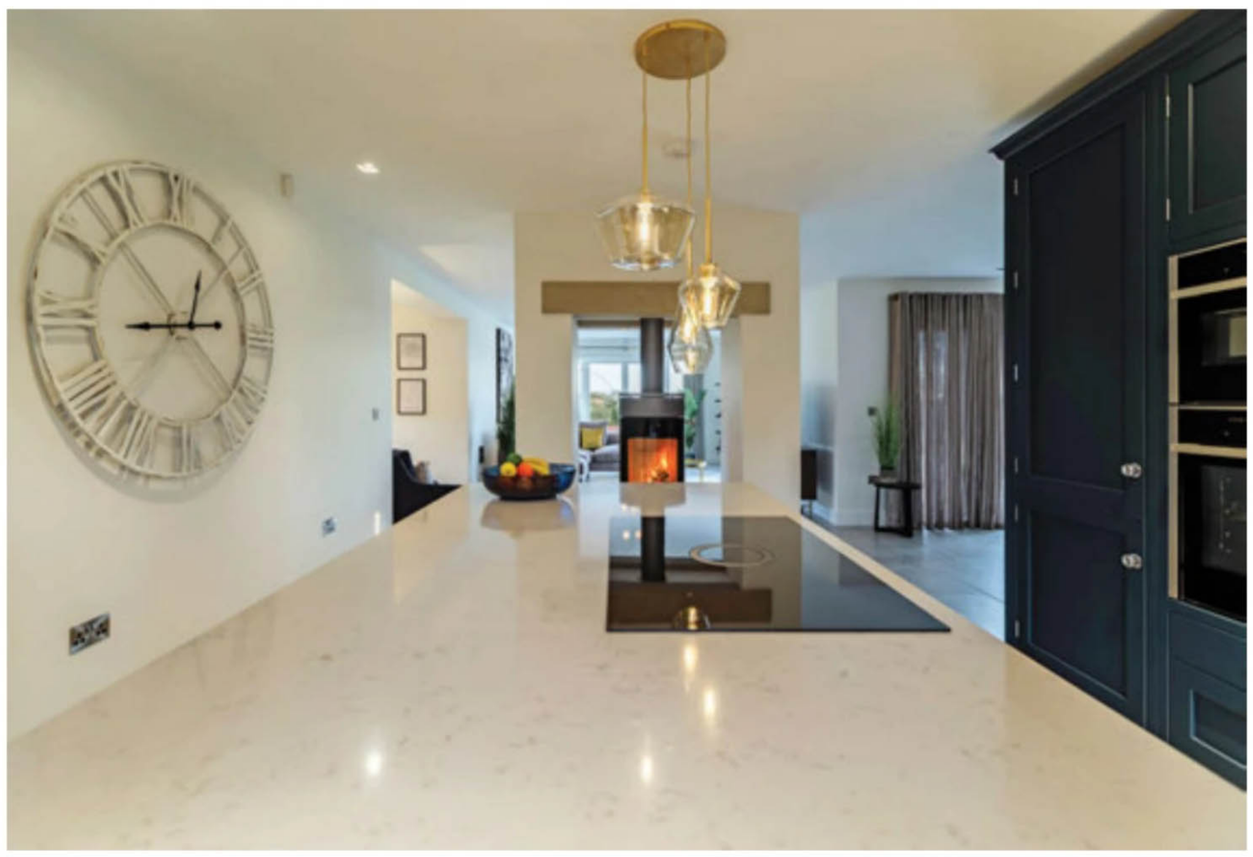

IN DETAIL

PROJECT

Architect Martin Tucker: martintucker.net
Builder Gary Stuart: 07792 598043
Plumber Penguin Plumbing: 0800 020 9711
Electrician A Swanwick Electrical: 07729 766550
Lighting designer Secret Lighting: 01588 650587
Garden design Bottle Kiln Landscapes: 07946 274534

STRUCTURE

Plastering Mitchell Plastering and Drylining: 0115 932 5049
Oak frame porch Border Oak: 01568 708752
Roof tiles/slates Heritage Clay Tile Co: heritagetiles.co.uk
Bricks Furness Brick & Tile Co: furnessbrick.co.uk
Windows Frame Trade: 01773 714809
Internal doors Buildbase: buildbase.co.uk
Insulation Extratherm, Buildbase: buildbase.co.uk

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Kitchen and worktop Newark Interiors: 01636 613600, newarkinteriors.co.uk
Appliances Neff: neff.co.uk
Bathrooms Villeroy & Boch: villeroy-boch.co.uk
Bathroom supply XTwo Store: xtwostore.co.uk
Flooring: Porcelanosa: porcelanosa.com
Staircase TK Stairs: 01482 426388
Tiles Porcelanosa: porcelanosa.com
Stoves Rias, from Robeys: 01773 820940
Switches Rako Controls: rakocontrols.com
Sockets Click: click4electrics.co.uk
External paving York Stone, Bradfords: bradfords.co.uk
Smart home and security Alexa: amazon.co.uk, Ring: ring.com
Builders' merchant Buildbase: buildbase.co.uk, Lester Lowe: lesterloweltd.co.uk
Underfloor heating Retherm, Stoke on Trent: retherm.co.uk
Air source heat pump Nibe: nibe.eu
Solar panels supply Retherm, Stoke-on-Trent: retherm.co.uk
Furniture West Elm: westelm.co.uk; Marks & Spencer: marksandspencer.co.uk; made.com; Swoon: swooneditions.com; Camerich: camerich.co.uk

KITCHEN
A waterfall marble worktop, so-called because it continues down the sides of the island unit, all the way to the floor.

for planning. The design features an open-plan layout where the spacious kitchen is separated from the day room by a partial wall housing a rotating stove. The dining area is adjacent, and beyond the generous entrance hall is a wide doorway leading to a separate lounge.

Four bedrooms upstairs include two en suites, with a large family bathroom complete with 1,200mm shower enclosure and a free-standing bath. Anthony's long-time friend Gary Stuart was contracted to demolish the bungalow and carry out the build, which began with a soft strip out of the bungalow removing all non-structural elements. This allowed reusable elements of the building to be recycled, while minimising the risk of harming any bats, should any new evidence of their presence be discovered.

Four bat boxes were created on site, and once the garage was constructed a roost was also provided there.

Concrete foundations were laid with a block and beam floor before work halted for the winter of 2018/19, recommencing in the spring. "We weren't in a rush to finish so we decided to stop work while the weather was so bad. Gary was fine with it – he's permanently busy so he had plenty of other work on," explains Anthony.

The brick has ornate features that enhance the traditional appearance, including a ribbon course, parapets and dentil corbeling in the eaves. Anthony was careful to check in to monitor progress regularly, something he learnt the hard way when building his own house. "I was working away quite a bit when our house was built, and so any changes that I wanted to make had to be done later, and ended up being much more expensive. I wanted to avoid that this time," he says.

As it was, Anthony lost his £10,000 deposit on his windows when the supplier went into liquidation a week

DAY ROOM
A rotating stove can face the informal sitting area or turned around towards the kitchen.

before they were due. This held up progress while a new window company was found. “I planned to have composite windows with aluminium outside and oak inside, but I settled for uPVC,” says Anthony. “I was so frustrated – they were the only company who asked for a large deposit, and the only one that let me down. There were further problems when the glass didn’t fit, and had to be made three times before it was right, so when it finally went in I was really pleased,”

Large amounts of insulation, an air source heat pump, solar panels, a sewage treatment plant and rainwater harvesting all ensure the house is highly energy efficient. The south-facing day room is warmed by the sun as it shines through the glazed bifold doors, flooding the open-plan living areas with natural light.

Underfloor heating warms the polished concrete-effect floor tiles that run throughout the ground floor. An oak Shaker kitchen designed by Newark Interiors has been painted dark blue, with a generous island with waterfall marble worktops and a breakfast bar spanning the entire length. Neff appliances include an induction hob with a down-draught extractor in its centre, allowing the impressive chandelier above

LIVING ROOM
A separate living room will eventually be accessed by a hidden door from the hallway that will rotate, making this space truly private.

LIGHTING
LEDs have been used to create a flexible lighting scheme that is high tech but cheap to run.

MASTER BEDROOM
Glazing provides beautiful views on two sides.

BATHROOM
A curved tiled wall- and ceiling-mounted bath filler create a spa feel to the family bathroom.

the central unit to take centre stage. Glass-fronted cupboards display glassware, while a separate utility room and and cloakroom keep clutter at bay.

Anthony and Trinity worked together to choose the furnishings and decor, assembling mood boards and browsing online to create an interior scheme full of breezy neutrals that is contemporary and yet fitting for this traditional country home. High-end furniture and fittings were sourced from the likes of West Elm, made.com, Marks and Spencer and Swoon, and a lighting designer was commissioned to create a selection of moods using LED downlighters as well as striking feature lights.

"I don't regret employing a lighting designer, and it's a nice thing to have, but I got carried away with it and maybe it's a bit over the top!" confesses Anthony. "I wanted this house to be in the vernacular on the outside, and a contemporary, comfortable home inside, and I think I have achieved that."

FINAL WORD

What was the low point of the project?
Waiting 12 weeks for windows and losing our 30 per cent deposit, which was £10,000, when the supplier went bust the one week before supply date.

And the high point?
When the glazed gable finally went in – it's full height and it took three attempts to get it right – it really is an industry that deserves a bad rap and should strive to be better.

What did you learn during the experience?
To avoid suppliers who request sizeable unsecured deposits.

What do you like most about your house?
Being inside but at each turn there are great outdoor views – and watching the sun rise or set, rain or shine. it just fills me with happiness and energy.

What was your greatest extravagance?
A lighting designer – the lighting is amazing but it came at a massive cost and was at times very hard work.

And your best buy?
The kitchen, utility and cloakroom cabinets.

LESSONS LEARNED

Russ and Janice Quinlan have completed their second self build, improving on their first log home by using structural insulated panels.

STORY: **RUSSELL QUINLAN** PICTURES: **BRIAN SMITH**

IN BRIEF

PROJECT New build
LOCATION Scottish Highlands
PLOT COST £60k
SPENT £260k
WORTH £250k

My wife, Janice, and I had spent just 10 years in our previous log home, Long Rig, which we had self built, and although it was a lovely house and the views were spectacular, we found it was getting too big for us. With neither of us getting any younger, we explored ways we could downsize but still retain some of the features of Long Rig, and even improve on some of them.

The landowner who originally owned the plot at Long Rig also sold us the new plot at Fyvie Station, but unlike Long Rig, our new house would be on the grid as the mains ran along the side of the site.

Initially we sketched out a plan of a single-storey house, based on the good bits of our old house. The first thing we wanted was to keep the panoramic front windows and the vaulted ceiling in the living room. Within the 110-sqm floorplan we wanted two bedrooms, a utility room, large bathroom and a good-sized kitchen as well as the main living room which would be a feature.

I then started looking for log home suppliers like we had done previously, and although there were a few offers, most were located way down in southern Scotland or northern England. I had read in this magazine about the benefits of SIPS construction so I started to investigate.

I discovered that the insulation properties for a SIPs house were far superior to any log house, and upon further investigation I found a local builder only nine miles away who sold this type of kit, along with superior Norwegian windows and doors. I was impressed with our initial discussions and also the price. So that was the first part of the jigsaw solved.

EXTERIOR The timber-clad house has been built using SIPs, and is fitted with Norwegian-made windows and doors.

Having lived in a timber house before we wanted most of the interior and also the exterior made of wood. After discussions with a Scottish timber supplier, we opted for larch cladding, applied vertically and pressure-treated with Osmo oil as we didn't want the usual aging effect, preferring the original larch colour. We also decided to replicate Long Rig's inside cladding and so chose fire-treated redwood, clad horizontally throughout, except for the bathroom, kitchen and utility room which were finished in plasterboard.

So the house construction consisted of a SIPS-framed structure, which included a SIPs vaulted ceiling, larch

LOCATION
Station Brae is just 20m from the old Fyvie railway station and enjoys panoramic views through large gable windows.

cladding externally with redwood interiors, and Norwegian double-glazed windows, clad externally in aluminium, coloured anthracite grey, and internally in redwood to match the walls.

One obstacle was proving that the plot, which made up the corner of a field and used to grow crops, wasn't considered by the planners to be prime agricultural land. If it was we wouldn't be able to build on it. It took a while but we eventually got clearance to go ahead, allowing us to proceed with how the house would sit on the plot to get the best from the proposed solar thermal and PV panels and to maximise the view from the panoramic front windows.

I sketched this all out and then commissioned a local architect to handle the planning and Building Control aspects, as well as make a few tweaks to our original design.

Full planning was granted in August 2018 but various delays meant we couldn't break ground until the end of November. Having employed various contractors when building Long Rig, I knew which ones we wanted to use again, and one of them was the groundwork contractor. Once he started he really cracked on and by the end of December had levelled the site and built up the footings. By late February the slab was laid and the underfloor heating pipes installed.

We had decided to follow the Passivhaus example by insulating the slab with 150mm of insulation laid up to and around the walls. The underfloor heating pipes were then clipped to this, with 100mm of concrete poured and power floated. This saved about £4,000 by not requiring a screed. Power floating the concrete also meant we could lay the oak engineered flooring directly on top, as well as the tiles in the bathroom, kitchen and utility room. So by mid-March the concrete was laid and we were ready for the SIPs kit.

The kit arrived 10 days later and within 24 hours it was basically up. I was amazed at how quickly everything went up and within four days the whole frame was complete, including the battens for the exterior cladding. Three weeks later all the windows were in and the house was wind- and watertight. By the end of April our new home was fully clad, and the roof tiled.

During the roof work, all the solar panels were also installed. This time we decided to put them into the roof instead of above it, like we had at Long Rig. We think it looks much neater and it also saved on tiles.

As we found previously, it takes a lot more time to complete all the inside work, including the plumbing, electrical work and dry-lining of the walls but we worked through it over the next couple of months.

When we designed the house we explored the various options for powering the underfloor heating. We had a pellet boiler in our old house, but after discussing our requirements with our plumbers, who were renewables installers, we decided that the house was so well insulated it didn't need one. After much discussion and a lot of Googling we opted for a Mitsubishi 5kW Ecodan air source heat pump linked to a control system built into the hot water tank and thermostats in every room.

ENERGY STORE: Station Brae has been fitted with a 5kW Ecodan heat pump and a Tesla Powerwall2, to store the energy generated by the PV panels.

Another piece of technology we installed was a Tesla Powerwall2, as I wanted to store the energy generated by the PV panels (4kW) during the day while we were both out and use it at night.

LEFT: Long Rig, built using a Finnish log cabin kit, was the Quinlans' first self build.

"The good thing about the heating, PV panels and Powerwall is that they all have apps where you can check exactly what's happening."

The floorplan

The single-storey home has a fairly simple layout, with a large living/dining room to one end next to a small kitchen. The bathroom is next to this, and two bedrooms are located opposite, with a boiler room in the corner.

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INTERIOR
The kitchen, utility and bathroom are finished with plasterboard and tiled.

The good thing about the heating, PV panels and Powerwall is that they all have apps where you can see exactly what's happening at any time, and even control some of it from your phone. As a paid-up geek I find this fascinating.

The only way we could afford the ASHP, PV and Powerwall was with an interest-free grant from the Energy Savings Trust. The grant is for 10 years and we are hoping the RHI payments, plus a possible new Solar Export Tariff, will help pay for this.

We finally moved in on August 10, 2019, almost exactly a year after we got planning permission but only eight months since we broke ground. which I think is amazing for what we have.

In the first few months since we moved in we have found the temperature in the house is a steady 20-21C (which we can reset if necessary) and we just love the look and feel of wood everywhere.

One of the reasons we bought the plot was because it is right next to an old railway line and is 20m from the old Fyvie Station. It's fascinating to read the history of the place and that's why we named the house Station Brae. We are currently laying old railway sleepers around the edge of the garden to keep the railway theme going – in the best possible taste of course!

> "We wanted our little house to feel comfortable and luxurious, to make the most of the fabulous views and to blend in with the landscape."

We designed the house to be as low maintenance as possible, based on what we knew from Long Rig. Our power usage from the grid was just three units for one week last autumn, so the battery and PV are working well so far. We will see how it fares for the rest of winter.

Our air source heat pump has performed really well. During prolonged days of minus temperatures this winter, all our rooms have remained wonderfully warm so it was well worth it. A pellet boiler would have been too much. The ASHP is also much easier to control.

With the all-wood interior, combined with the high spec insulation in the walls, roof and front door, we feel this is the last house we will build as it has everything we need. Another reason for choosing the site was its close proximity to a main bus route. I am 66 and we have to plan for a time when we can't drive.

At Long Rig, we had amazing views but it came at a cost. The elevated site meant exposure to the winds. Although still having a lovely view (the main windows look towards Fyvie Castle), Station Brae is not exposed to high winds which helps keep the temperature reasonable.

Now we are settled into our new home, we are on the Green Homes Network (energysavingtrust.org.uk) as we feel we can offer advice on the technologies we have installed.

So what did we learn from our second self build? Well, as always seems to happen, we overspent, so we decided to apply for equity release funds. However, it seems most lenders will only do this if the house is 'traditionally built' using blockwork so anything else, such as SIPs or timber frame, will not be accepted, even though this form of construction is so prevalent, especially in Scotland. We never thought it would be a problem so

LIVING AREA
The vaulted main living area is well lit through extensive glazing in the gable end. The interiors are largely clad in redwood timber.

IN DETAIL

PROJECT
Architect Katrina Denholm, Aberdeen: kdarchitect.co.uk
Structural engineer
McKenzie-Willis Aberdeen: 01224 639111
Groundwork contractor
Turriff Building Services: 07816 615323

STRUCTURE
Builders Russell Construction Moray Ltd: rcm-ltd.co.uk
Kit suppliers including windows and doors
Angus Homes Ltd, Turriff: angushomes.com

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS
Window and door suppliers
Nordan Windows, Aberdeen: nordan.co.uk
Electrician Andy Duguid Ltd, Ellon: aduguidelectrical.co.uk
ASHP, solar thermal and all plumbing
Plumbing and Renewables Ltd: plumbingandrenewables.co.uk
Solar panels ASE Solar Ltd, Forres: aessolar.co.uk

let our experience be a warning to those hoping to get equity release on their new house. Even having a 10-year structural warranty didn't make any difference.

The fact that our house was valued recently at less than it cost to build doesn't worry us at all because this really is our last house – honestly!

FINAL WORD

The high points

Being our first SIPs house it was amazing to see how it came together so quickly. The builders and groundworkers were thoroughly professional. Even when there were minor hiccups, they were sorted out without any hassle.

The low points

Everything to do with the build went really smoothly. The only low points were the planners and some of the silly things we had to do to get it through planning.

Our best buy

The plot. There is so much history associated with Fyvie Station and we are right next to the actual railway line, providing a lovely walk. The old sandstone sidings along the track and the old buildings in the yard opposite are really interesting which is highlighted on our website: stationbrae.uk.

What did we learn?

Because we had the experience of Long Rig, we were able to size the rooms which we knew worked for us. We decided on a bigger bathroom which incorporates a shower and bath where Long Rig had them separately. We loved the vaulted ceiling and the big windows of our former home so they were also incorporated and the view from them allows us to see Fyvie Castle. As a structural engineer I have always found the fact that SIPS and timber-frame houses are frowned upon by certain lenders incredible, especially in Scotland where they are more common than brick built. Our house is strong enough to last for years – and we have the structural calculations to prove it so I am amazed that viewpoint has never been challenged.

BEDROOMS/ BATHROOM

As a 'forever' home, there are just two bedrooms, and large bathroom.

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Perched on high

Peter Burridge and Tracey Gilpin faced numerous challenges when they decided to build a new beach house on their dramatic cliff-side plot, perched high above a Cornish beach.

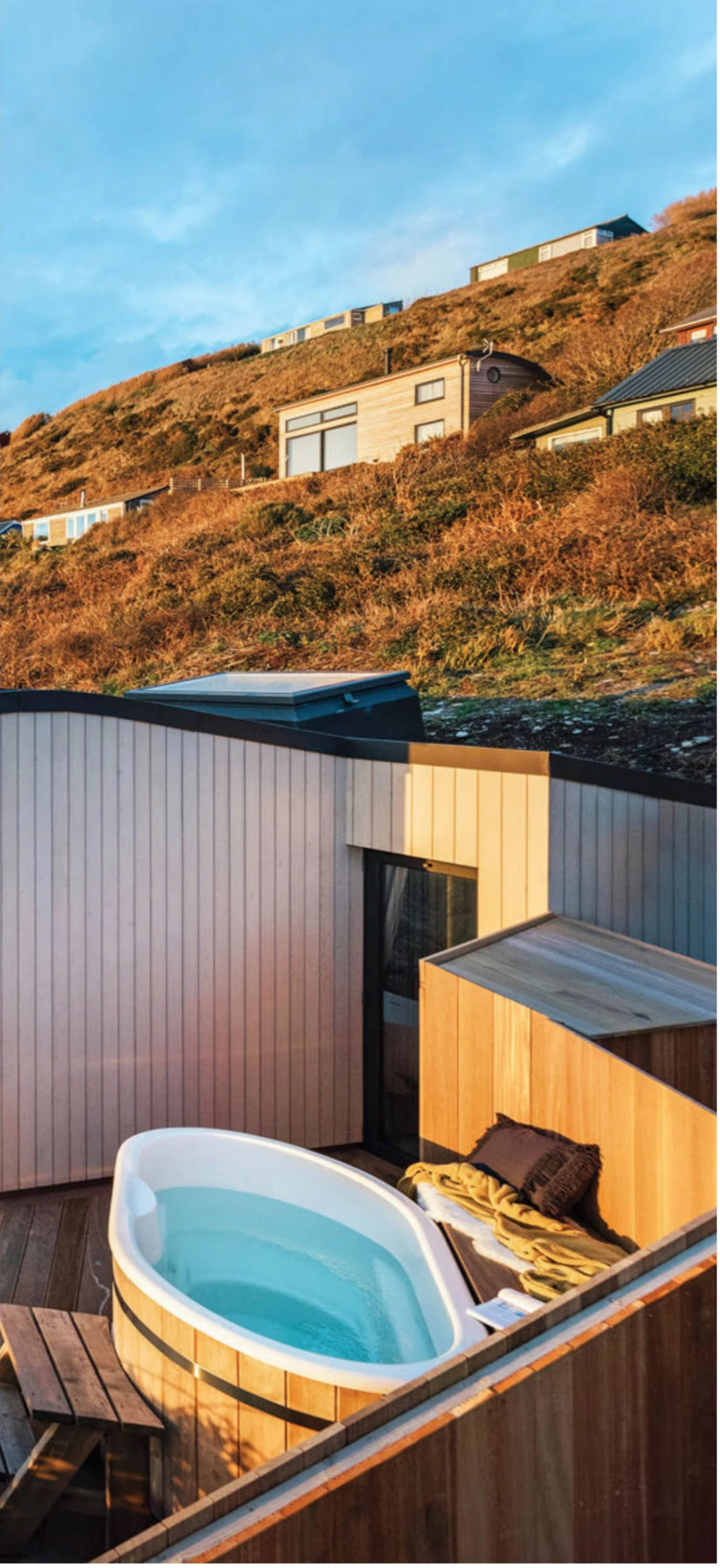
STORY **DEBBIE JEFFERY** PICTURES: **UNIQUE HOME STAYS**

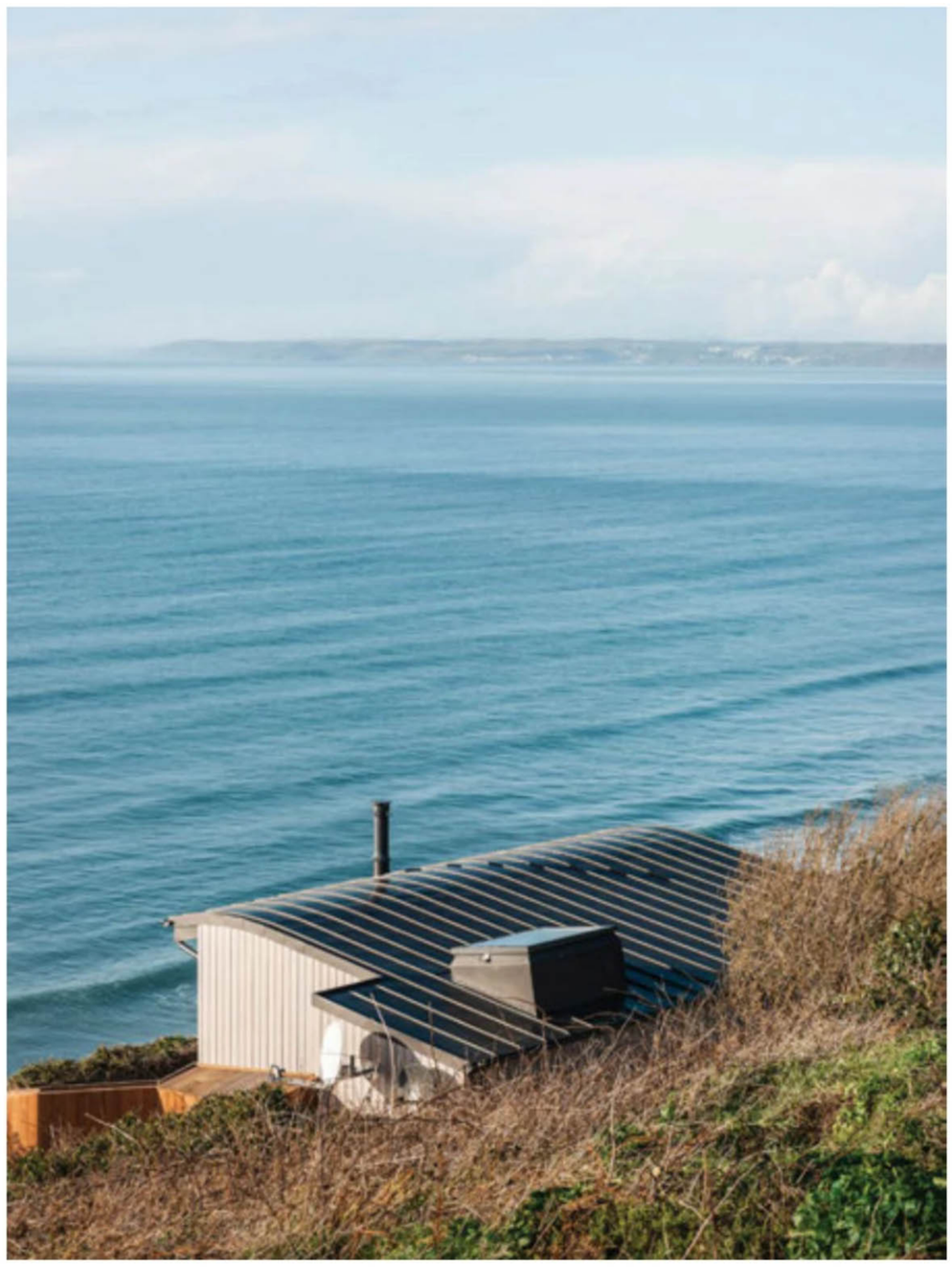
IN BRIEF

PROJECT New build
LOCATION Cornwall
COST £220,000
SPENT £4,440/sqm
WORTH £700,000+

"We first came to know and love Whitsand Bay when our children were young but our family's connection to the area goes back much further," explains Tracey Gilpin. "My mother, who's now in her 80s, spent many happy summers there with her grandparents. The adults and young children would travel up from Torpoint on a charabanc, with the older children walking behind, and sometimes they'd camp for a few days in the meadow below the Clifftop Cafe."

Tracey and her husband, Peter, followed in the family tradition and would often take their children to the area for seaside holidays. They noticed a chalet was being sold at auction but it seemed beyond their budget. Then, in 2015, another holiday chalet came onto the market. "The old timber-clad bungalow had no foundations, but there was mains water, and electricity," Peter explains. "We decided we





EXTERIOR
Perched high on a Cornish cliff, Orlagh has incredible sea views. The windows were positioned to protect privacy and the front door window allows a view straight through to the beach. Clad in Siberian larch, the freehold chalet is located at Tregonhawke Cliff, Whitsand Bay. The surrounding land is owned by the freeholders.

could make the figures work if we rented it out and decided to go for it because of the fantastic plot."

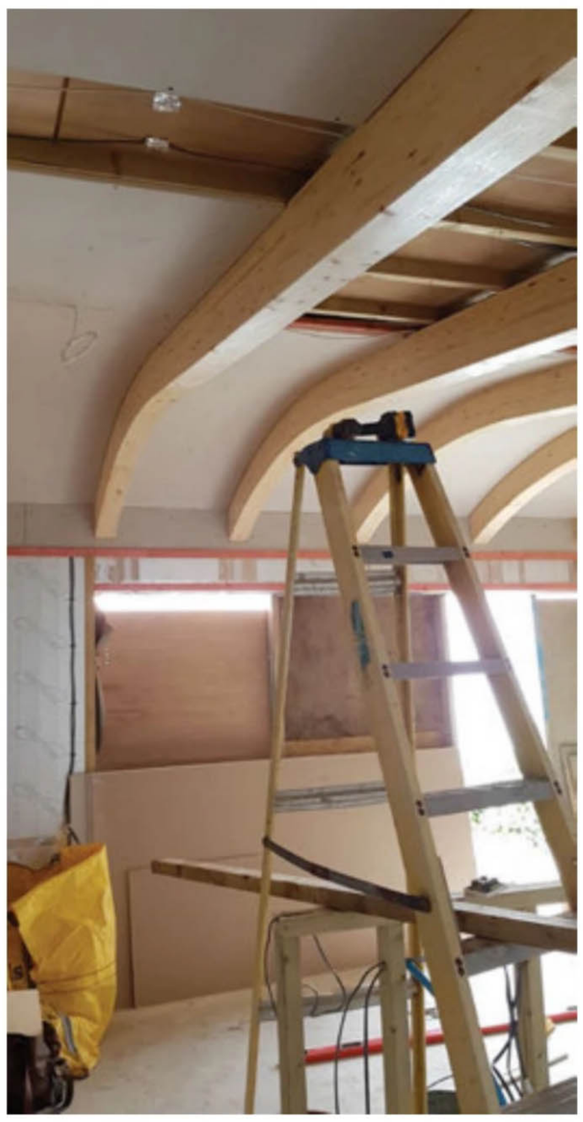
It is believed that the site was first built on during World War II, with chalets designed for Plymouth families to use during air raids. Part of the cliff-top was owned by the Edgcumbe family and, when they decided to sell, about 50 of the chalet owners got together to raise enough money to buy the land, which is now owned and managed by the Tregonhawke Cliff Chalet Owners' Association.

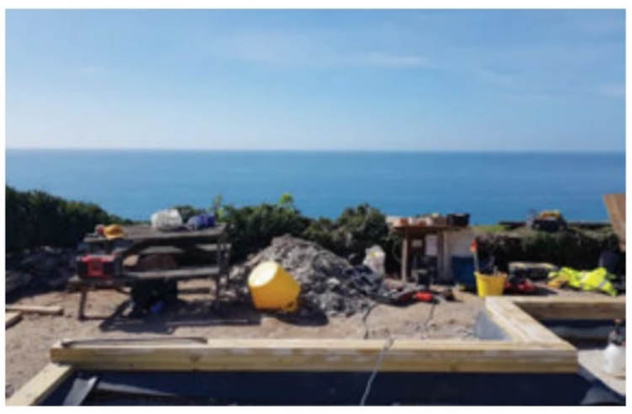
When Peter and Tracey acquired their plot in 2016, the site contained a wooden chalet with a corrugated iron roof, which had been built in the late 60s by the parents of the family who owned it. Panoramic views of the whole of Whitsand Bay can be enjoyed from the south-facing plot and on a clear day it's possible to see as far as the Lizard, way down in the west of Cornwall. "There are no properties in front of us but there is a reassuringly large chunk of cliff," continues Tracey, a teaching assistant. "We see the sun rising behind

BEFORE

BEFORE

"We deliberately remained hands-off during the build, although we did landscape the garden ourselves, once the builders had left."





THE BUILD
The original chalet was demolished and replaced with a timber-framed, larch-clad cabin. The clifftop site proved difficult to access, with concrete delivered by a mini dumper truck from a lorry 200m above.

the Rame Peninsula, with its little chapel silhouetted on the hilltop, and watch it setting over the hills behind the fishing villages of Looe and Polperro."

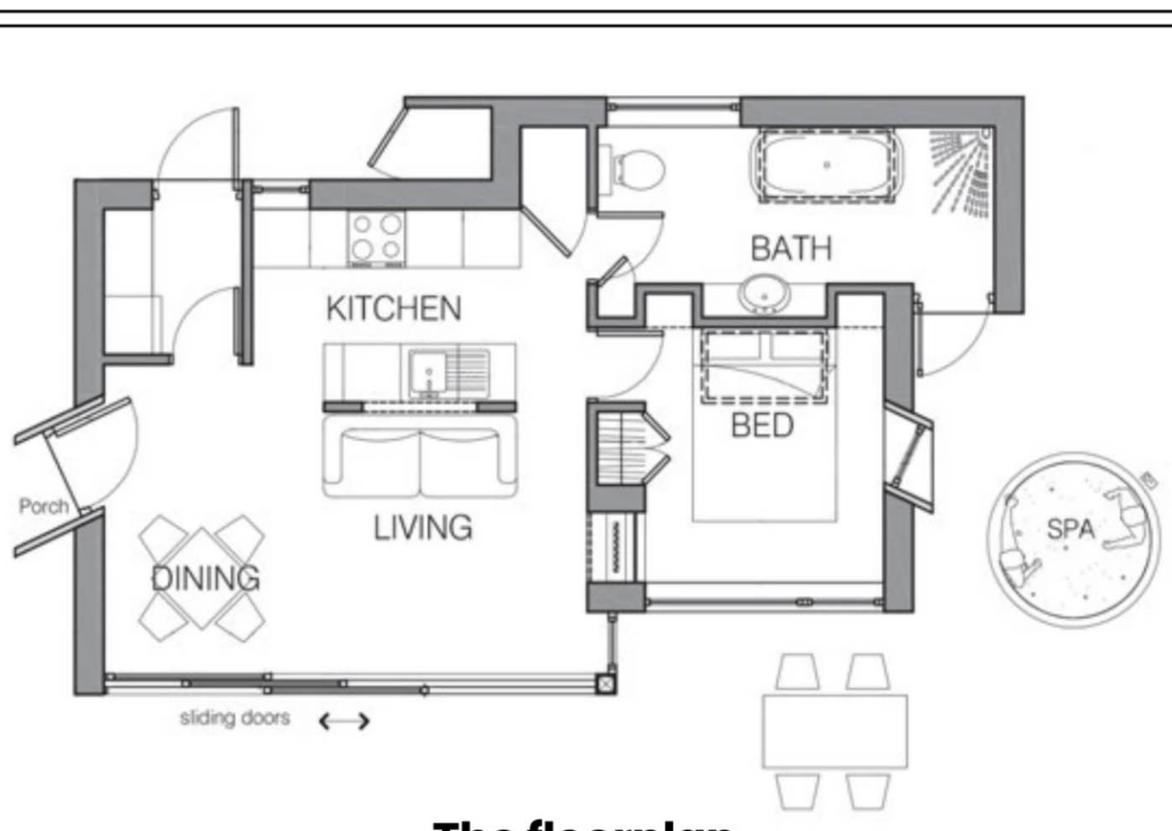
There were three small bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, bathroom and utility room in the single-storey building and, despite draughty doors and windows and the noticeable lack of insulation, the Burridges enjoyed many weekends and holidays at the cabin.

"We needed hot water bottles in winter and Peter often went to bed with a hat on," laughs Tracey. "The setting is the main attraction as it's about halfway up the cliff from the beach, which we are always grateful for when returning back up carrying wetsuits, bodyboards and picnic things."

Tracey and Peter started to rent out the cabin on a casual basis, being careful to describe the very basic condition of the property. "One guest had spent a week there every summer during his childhood and told us that very little had changed in the last 40 years," Peter, a drug sample collector, recalls. "Another couple spent their honeymoon there in 1976 and returned to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary."

The cabin was growing increasingly dilapidated, however, with unreliable plumbing and electrics, and the Burridges considered renovation but eventually decided that the best option would be to demolish the old structure and build a sustainable replacement.

With no previous construction experience, they approached McCaren Architecture for advice in 2017 and started working with Fleur Powell, who had completed similar projects. Fleur not only



The floorplan

The single-storey cabin has an open-plan living/dining/kitchen space, with a bedroom, bathroom, utility area and boot room. The space has been carefully designed to create a flowing layout to maximise the view.

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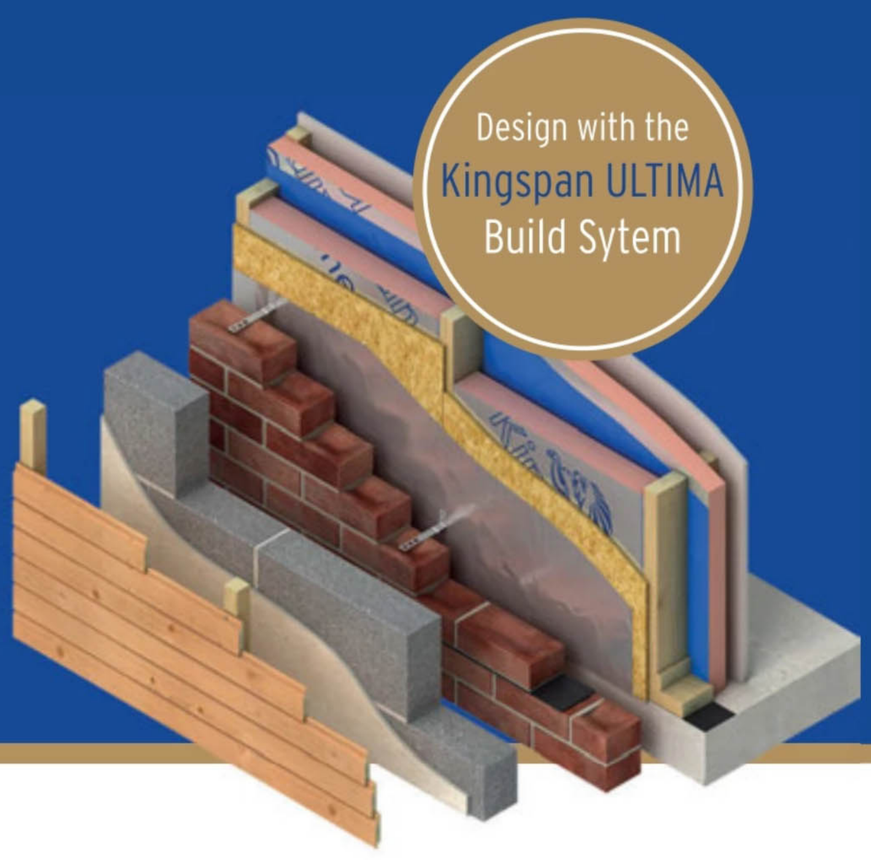

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dealt with the design but eventually managed the build and collaborated on the interiors.

"We wanted our little house to feel comfortable and luxurious, to make the most of the fabulous views and blend in with the landscape," Tracey explains. "We also contacted Unique Home Stays to see if they would be interested in marketing our property for holiday rentals and they were keen, as long as the finished building matched their customer profile."

With its elegant curved roof, angled wooden porch and subtle palette of predominantly grey materials, the new cabin conforms to planning restrictions, remaining within the footprint of the previous building, with a ridge height just a few centimetres higher than its predecessor.

> "We wanted our little house to feel comfortable and luxurious, to make the most of the fabulous views and to blend in with the landscape."

LIVING/ DINING AREA Italian feature wallpaper incorporating gold thread was chosen for the living space, where underfloor heating has been laid and a welcoming wood-burning stove installed.

"We decided quite early on that we'd like a curved zinc roof and wood cladding but the plans went through a number of revisions," says Peter. "We wanted an open-plan living space, a king-sized bedroom, a bathroom with a bath and shower, a wood-burner, and a boot room where guests could leave muddy walking gear or wetsuits – and we needed to fit all this into 50 square metres."

Obtaining planning consent proved quite slow, but no major changes were required. "We did need to build in a renewable energy source and wondered where to locate the solar panels, as we didn't want to spoil our roofline or anyone else's view," Pete continues. "We decided to place them in front of the property and fix them to the retaining wall. It did, however, mean we needed to purchase an additional piece of land to do this."

KITCHEN
The kitchen is tucked at the back of the floorplan, but a low plinth ensures that there are still ocean views.

By March 2017 the plans were ready for tender but finding a builder willing to tackle such a small project with limited site access, 200m down a steep path, proved difficult. The path is only suitable for small four-wheel drive vehicles, and access is restricted to permit holders, while no vehicles are allowed to use it during holidays and at weekends.

"At night we can stargaze because there's so little light pollution and we go to sleep listening to the waves crashing below."

IN DETAIL

PROJECT

Architect McCaren Architecture: mccaren-aia.co.uk
Builder Bling Construction Ltd: 07977 252019
Structural engineer Brody Forbes: brodyforbes.co.uk

STRUCTURE

Glulam beams Buckland Timber: bucklandtimber.co.uk
Zinc roof A & S Roofing Systems: 01837 810287
Siberian larch cladding Bond Timber: bondtimber.co.uk
Windows and doors Aspect Windows: aspect-windows.com
Balau decking eDecks: edecks.co.uk
Timber treatment Sioo: sioox.org.uk

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Feature wallpapers Glamora, Italy: glamora.it/en/collections/
Bathroom (bath, WC, sink, black taps, shower) Lusso Stone: lussostone.com
Engineered wood flooring Beach Bros: beachbros.co.uk
Porcelain tiles Mandarin Stone: mandarinstone.com
Contura wood-burner Kernow Fires: kernowfires.co.uk
Electric blinds Rogers Blinds & Awning: rogersblinds.co.uk
Sound system Sonos: sonos.com
Extractor fan Elica: elica.com
Sintered stone worktop Neolith: neolith.com
Worktop cutting Mayflower Stone Ltd: mayflowerstone.co.uk
Kitchen appliances Neff: neff-home.com
Gold brass kitchen sink The 1810 Company: the1810company.co.uk
Ofuro hot tub Royal Tubs: royaltubs.co.uk
Kitchen supply Simply kitchens: simplykitchensuk.com
Underfloor heating electric matting Prowarm: prowarm.com
Industry Anthracite porcelain tiles Mandarin Stone: mandarinstone.com
Solar panels Hyde Park Electrical Ltd: hydeparkelectrical.co.uk
Mixed grade Assisi flooring Beach Bros: beachbros.co.uk

Orlagh is available for holiday rental through Unique Home Stays: uniquehomestays.com

"The builders we contacted weren't keen and we began to review our finances and the business plan, as well as investigating where any savings could be made," says Peter.

"By the end of 2018 things were looking more positive. Martyn Tambling, of Bling Construction, had completed a project for our architect and had been let down on a job he was due to start in 2019, so he was looking for another project and his enthusiasm boosted our confidence. We signed a contract and he started work in the February."

The existing chalet was demolished and the site cleared, with the pathway and stone walls rebuilt and extended using stone from the excavations. Transporting concrete for the raft foundation from a lorry 200m down a cliff was a major issue, as it was only possible to half-fill a small dumper truck on each trip. The builders only just managed to finish work before the lorry driver needed to rush off and clean his hoses to prevent the concrete setting inside them. Fortunately, the weather remained dry throughout the build.

Siberian larch, treated to quickly weather to grey, was chosen to clad the exterior of the new timber-framed building and complements the sleek curve of the wave-inspired zinc roof. Dark grey porcelain tiles on the patio meet up to the low stone wall to the front of the cabin and a sustainable hardwood deck was built to one side.

Inside, dark oak floorboards run through the living area and bedroom, with grey porcelain tiles in the bathroom and boot room designed to make the most of the underfloor heating in these areas. Stained ply emphasises alcoves and window ledges, contrasting with the white ceiling and pale glulam beams arching towards the front of the building, which is made almost entirely of glass.

"Fleur not only managed the building project, but also worked with us on the interior design," says Tracey. "We didn't want the typical beach house

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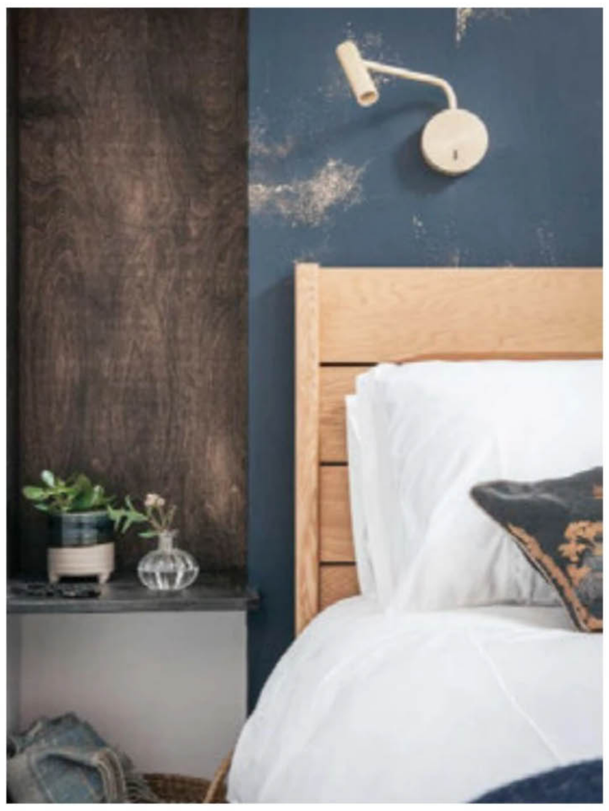


Peter & Tracey's top tip

"Invest in a strong trolley at the outset and don't wait until most of the furniture has been carried in by just the two of you!"

of pale wood and white cotton so there are little glamorous accents of gold and splashes of colour."

Fleur adds: "The success of this project lies in the strong rapport and understanding that developed between designer and client, and in a mutual commitment to maximise the site's potential. This collaborative attitude extended in the construction phase to include a talented contractor, who paid close attention to detailing and finishing to deliver the shared goal of producing somewhere unique."

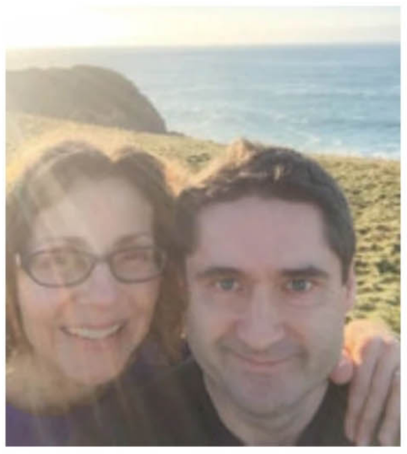
Once the 10-month build was finished, the Burridge family and their guests could begin to enjoy the luxury of the new cabin. "We deliberately remained hands-off during the build, although we did landscape the garden ourselves once the builders had left," says Peter.

"At night we can stargaze, because there's so little light pollution, and we go to sleep listening to the waves crashing below," says Tracey. "In the day, we watch the birds darting around the scrubby bushes or soaring on the sea breeze. It really is the most relaxing place to be."

BEDROOM
Bedroom alcoves are lined with black-stained ply with the grain still visible, and dramatic dark blue wallpaper with gold splashes has been used behind the bed.

BATHROOM
Made-to-measure waterproof wallpaper with a nautilus design covers the rear and end walls of the spacious bathroom, with its free-standing bath, walk-in shower, stone sinks and underfloor heating. There is a door to the hot tub outside.

FINAL WORD



What was the high point of the project?
Working with a fantastic team of people: our architect has such an eye for detail. Fleur was always professional and enthusiastic, with a great ability to empathise, and our builder was completely unruffled by any aspect of the build.

...and the low points?
Our project ran incredibly smoothly, although the builder did struggle getting the bath into the bathroom. Our trickiest problem involved siting the TV, as wall space is limited, so we had a table made to our specification, with the TV hidden inside and sockets set in the floor below.

Your best buy?
Probably the plot itself and the view it affords.

Biggest extravagance?
The bathroom is quite big for a property of this size and has a large Lusso stone bath, as well as a walk-in shower, with made-to-measure waterproof wallpaper featuring a green nautilus design.

Urban industrial look

JB Kind has launched a new range of doors to meet the trend for industrial-style home interiors. Its Urban Industrial range features two new door styles, the City and Metro, which combine the cool appeal of the urban landscape with the stylish lines of modern city living.

A variant on the Crittall-style doors previously only available in metal, the Urban Industrial style is made of 9mm MDF and is suitable for new builds, renovations and refurbishments. With their clean lines, geometric shapes and angular styling, the doors have a high-quality painted finish and are available in black and white with glazed versions too.

When it comes to open-plan interior spaces, the glazed versions of these doors really come into their own, allowing for a space to be kept open or divided off while still allowing the light to flood through.

They can be fitted into existing door frames with regular handles and hinges, with no need for specialist ironmongery. A 10mm trim allows the bottom of the doors to accommodate different floor levels.

The Art Deco-style City door comes in black or white, with the black version available in both clear and tinted glass, for two totally different looks.

The Metro door has a funky, five-recessed panel ladder design, with the middle panel set in a sophisticated and slightly off-centre position to accommodate the handle.

Stylish new handle from Italy

Intona is the first offering for 2020 from Italian door handle manufacturer Manital. The company has been designing and producing handles for more than 30 years. Designed by Mario Mazzer and Giovanni Crosera, the stylish handle for doors and windows has a sinuous, elegant and modern look, which draws its inspiration from 50s architecture such as the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Made in zinc alloy, Intona is available in different finishes (glossy and satin chrome, satin nickel, bronzed), to which are added the black and white colours, achieved with epoxy paint.

Crittal's Corporate W20 windows and doors offer a stylish alternative to the ubiquitous folding and sliding doors. The slim-profiled windows can reflect the timeless style of a period house or adeptly define spaces in a new home. Crittall pioneered the original, iconic steel window frames almost 200 years ago and has continued to modify its products to meet today's stringent regulations. Custom-sized doors and fixed safety glazing can be supplied in a choice of colours, offering complete design flexibility.

Evolution's garden rooms can add style and energy efficiency to a home. Their timber alternative uPVC, is weather proof, and virtually maintenance free – needing just a quick wipe down rather than the regular sanding and painting of traditional wood.

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SEVEN DRIVEWAY DESIGN IDEAS

BY DARIUS NEGAHBANI

A driveway isn't just a place for parking the car, it's a focal point for your home – and usually it's the first thing anyone sees. A great driveway design can ensure your property maximises its kerb appeal and stands out from the rest. The most striking driveway ideas make great use of the size, shape and space – and that means being robust, resilient and functional, as well as looking good. Whether your property is small or a grand design, here are some driveway ideas to get you started.

1: STONE

Hard-wearing and sophisticated, a stone finish can make even the grandest of houses seem all the more impressive, year after year. Here, Drivesys Split Stone adds vintage charm to a new property.

2: GRANITE SETTS

Modern, striking and elegant, they bring a touch of class to a home. Drivesett Argent is an affordable alternative.

3: A CLEAN LOOK

Straight lines and clean edges complement a contemporary look. Linear paving can be laid in a number of attractive combinations.

4: SHAPELY IDEAS

Inject some personality into your paving by throwing some shapes into the mix. These can work with other features such as flower beds.

5: COBBLED STONES

Cobbled stones will enhance the period feel of a home. Whether laid in diagonal lines or curving around the corner, they can transform a tired driveway.

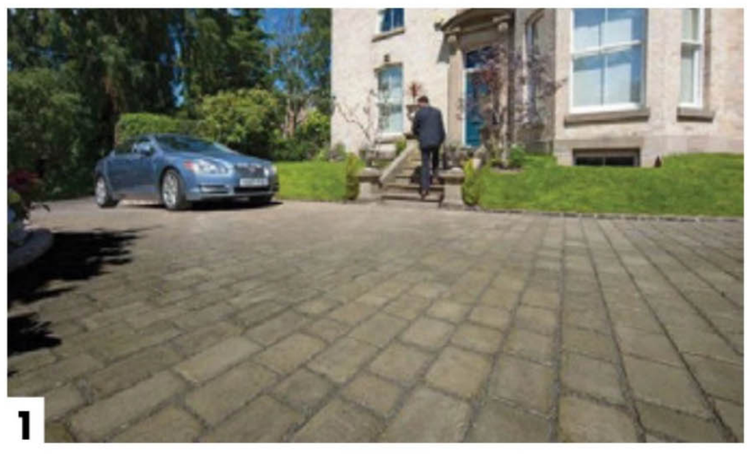
6: KEEPING IT NATURAL

A natural stone surface is attractive. Drivesett Natrale Block Paving comes in a range of different styles, sizes and colours.

7: SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Permeable paving helps drain rainwater and ensures a driveway stays in great shape.

Marshalls: marshalls.co.uk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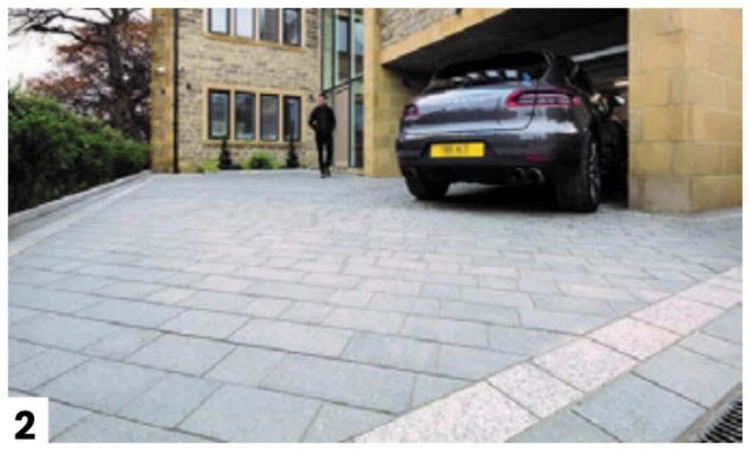
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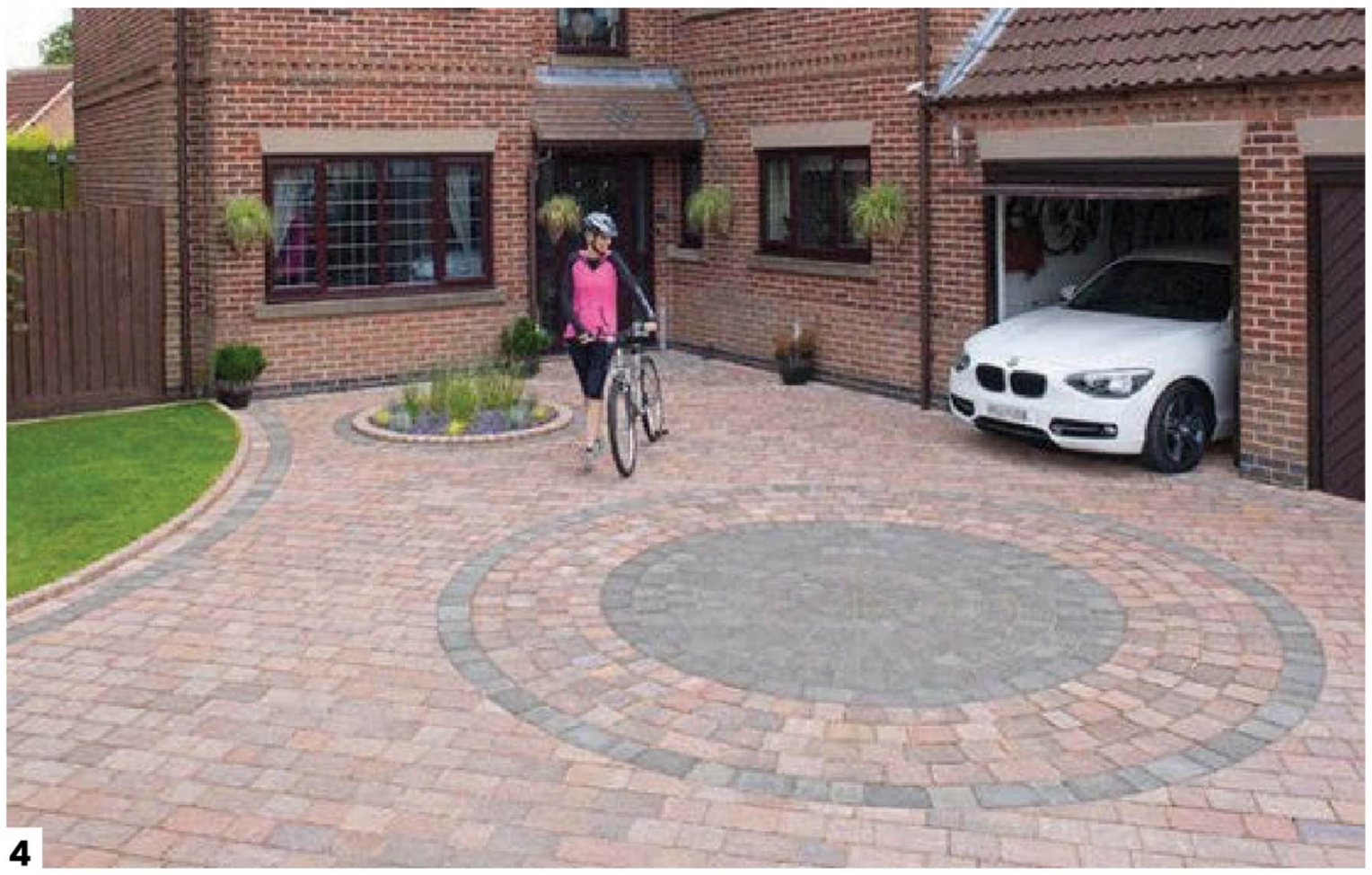
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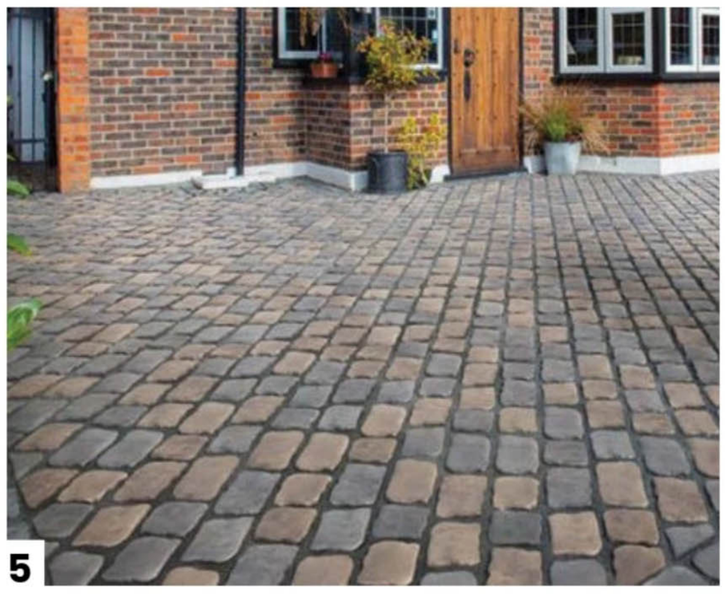
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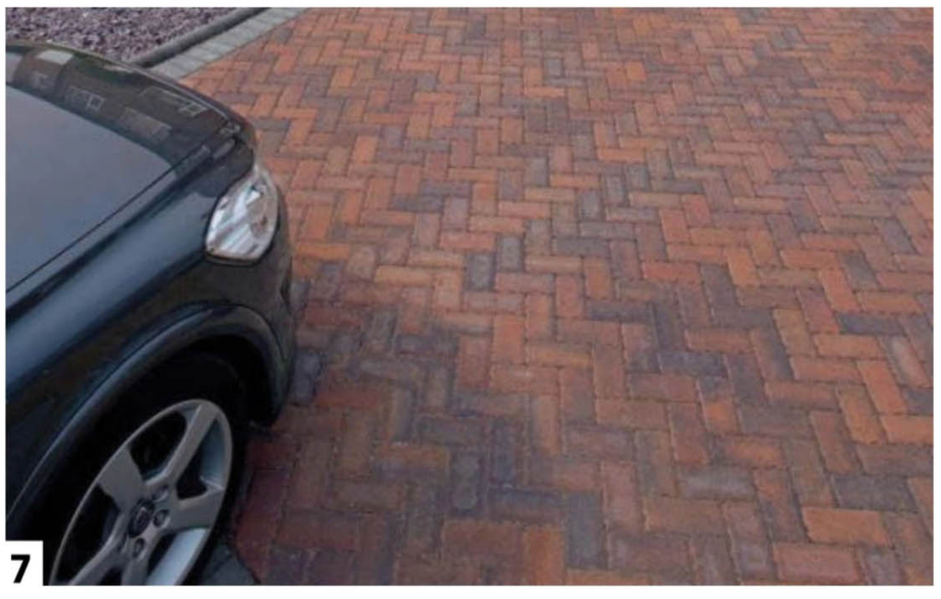
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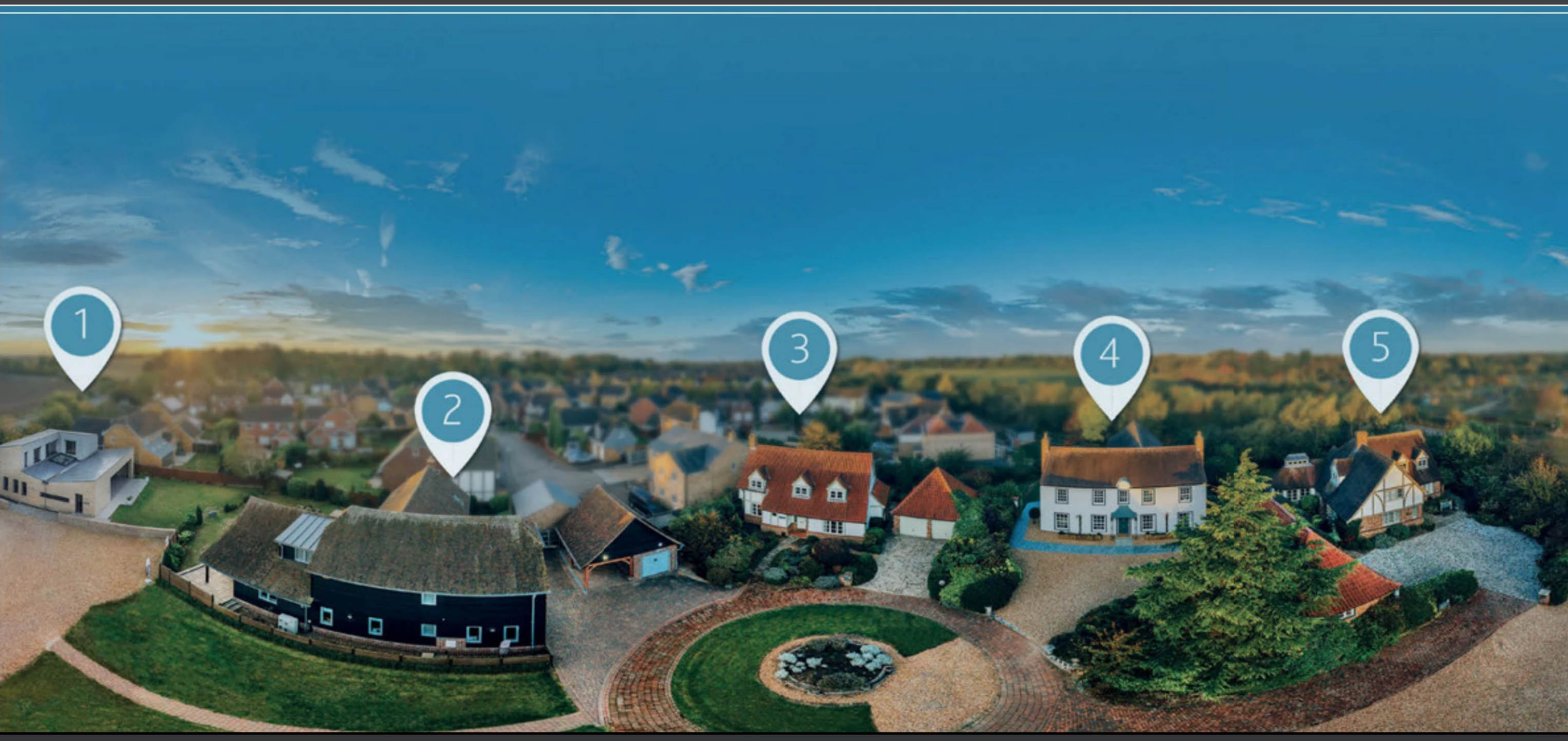

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The GROHE Euphoria SmartControl 310 shower system allows easy adjustment of spray settings including EcoJoy, reducing water consumption by around 50 per cent. Available in Chrome and Moon White finishes, with a choice of a round or cube head and hand showers. Price: £1,312.73. (grohe.co.uk)

The steel enamel used in Kaldewei's bathtubs lasts up to 30 years, and can be fully recycled at the end of its life. (kaldewei.co.uk)

Designing an eco-friendly bathroom

WORDS: **ANDRÉ FONSECA**

We've all got the environmental message about the dangers of plastic and the problems it is causing. We also understand about energy efficiency and what is required to reduce energy loss in our housing stock.

Many of the systems installed in our homes were designed in times of plenty, meaning many of them are fairly wasteful.

Take our bathrooms for example. A fairly new single-flush toilet can use six litres of water, and older models can use far more. Since the average person flushes five times a day, that's around 30 litres of water going down the drain.

Showers require heat and power, bathtubs are made from non-recyclable materials, and cleaning products can be potent and harmful to the environment.

Thankfully many companies are now designing more environmentally friendly bathroom products, and there are several ways we can minimise the impact of our bathroom choices.

Choosing low-flow fixtures

People have already become more conscious of the water they are using. Initially people turned off their taps when brushing their teeth, and installed more water-efficient toilets.

However, it's now possible to take water-saving even further, with low-flow fixtures in your bathroom. Highly efficient shower heads, toilets and taps all drastically reduce the amount of water being used without affecting the shower, flush or flow.

Dual-flush toilets have two flush options, helping to reduce the average water consumption per flush to four litres or less, while choosing the right shower head, such as the Euphoria Smart Control from Grohe, can reduce water usage by restricting and aerating the flow.

Recapturing heat

Most modern homes enjoy the convenience of a power shower. Some of these use mains cold water heated to order, which means it won't run out – but power showers represent one of the biggest uses of energy in the entire house.

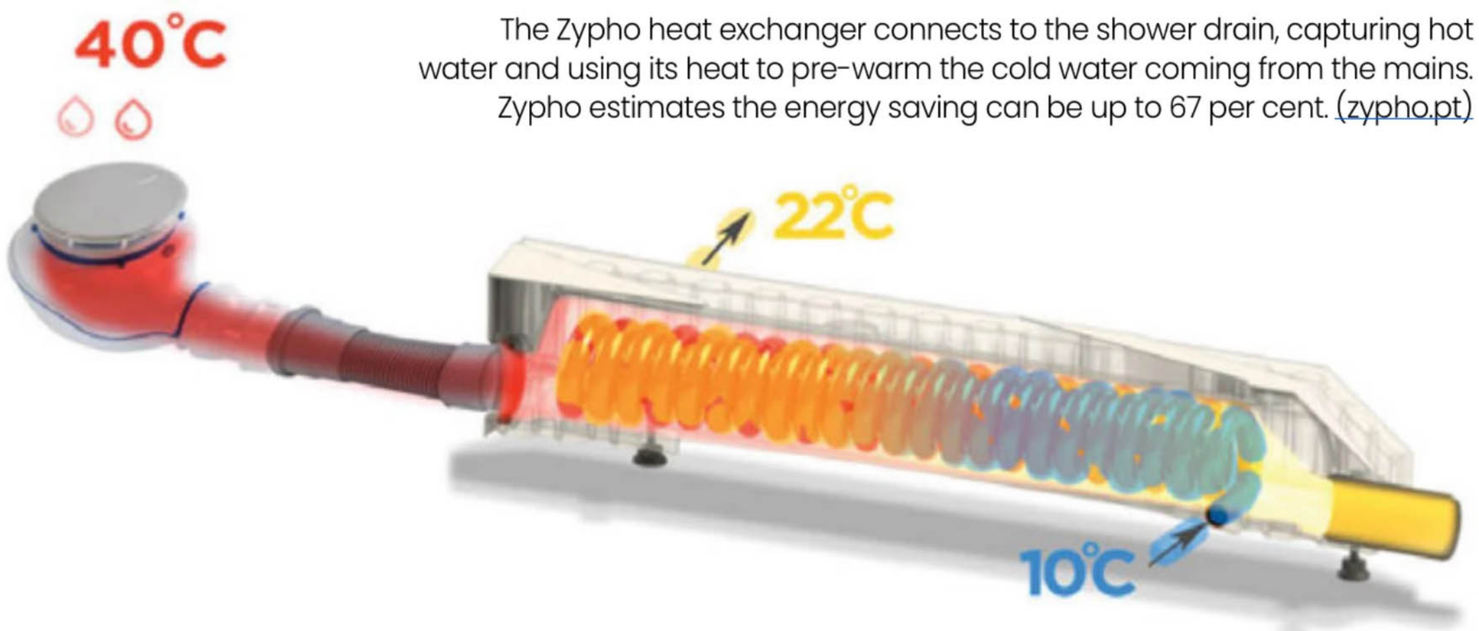
A lot of that heat energy simply disappears down the drain. In fact, in a power shower heated to 40C, the water going down the drain is still around 38C.

Zypho has created an innovative heat recovery system that can be retrofitted into existing showers to recapture that heat using a heat exchanger, pre-heating the cold mains water going into the shower, helping to save up to 67 per cent of the energy cost of heating a shower.

Installing recyclable or recycled products

Most bathroom products are non-recyclable. Take bathtubs, for example. Most are made of fibreglass or acrylic, both of which are difficult to recycle. One of the main reasons for this is their durability and longevity, which is a good eco-credential to have.

However, a German company called Kaldewei has created bathtubs made



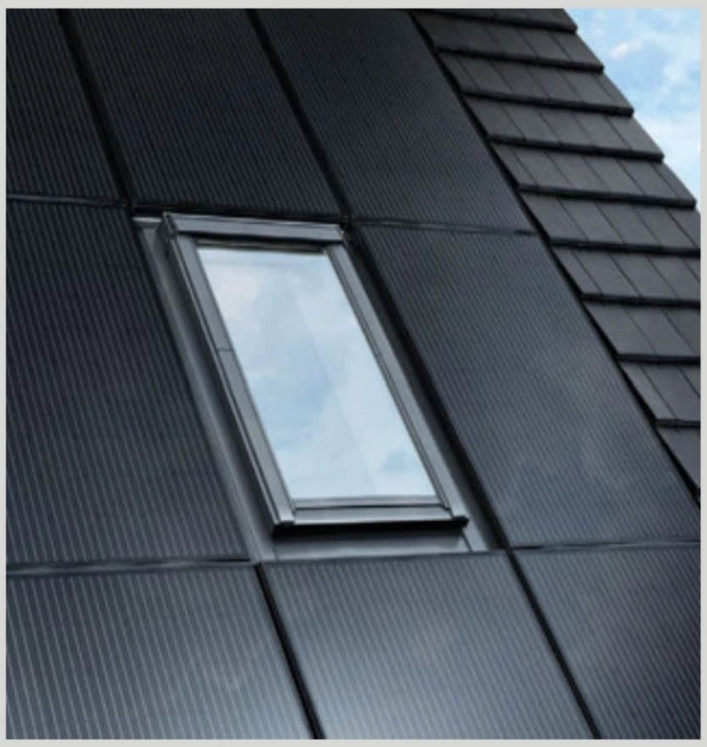
The Zypho heat exchanger connects to the shower drain, capturing hot water and using its heat to pre-warm the cold water coming from the mains. Zypho estimates the energy saving can be up to 67 per cent. (zypho.pt)

Solar panels and roof light compatibility announced

Viridian Solar is to collaborate with roof window company Velux to seamlessly combine roof-integrated solar PV and roof windows. Viridian Solar has launched a new solar roofing kit that interfaces with the VELUX ODL Solar Integrator, and engineers and designers from the two companies have worked together to confirm the compatibility, reliability and robustness of the combination.

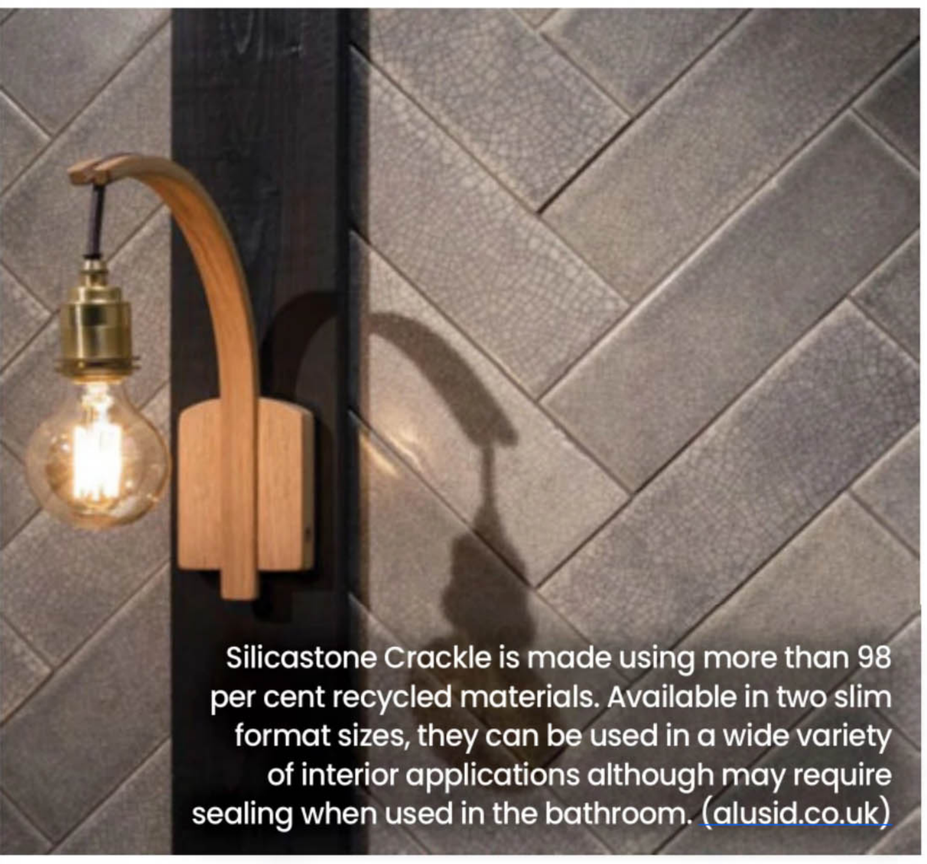
The Clearline fusion Velux integrator (F16-VC) is compatible with the Velux ODL in MK08 (780mm x 1,398mm) window sizes.

Stuart Elmes, CEO of Viridian Solar, commented: "In countries such as Norway and the Netherlands we already see homes with roofs almost entirely filled with built-in solar panels, and other geographical markets such as the UK are moving in the same direction with new building regulations. We are delighted that developers can



now choose a high-quality solution by combining Clearline fusion solar roofing with Velux roof windows seamlessly integrated together."

The Velux ODL solar integrator is available from specialist dealers. The Clearline fusion F16-VC will be available from Viridian Solar stockists in April. (velux.com)



Silicastone Crackle is made using more than 98 per cent recycled materials. Available in two slim format sizes, they can be used in a wide variety of interior applications although may require sealing when used in the bathroom. (alusid.co.uk)

from steel enamel. These tubs have a 30-year guarantee, meaning they can last as long as traditional bathtub materials, but they can also be fully recycled, along with all of their steel fittings.

Another material to consider is recycled tiles. Commonly used in bathrooms because they are relatively watertight, tiles resist the growth of bacteria and mould, and can be easily wiped clean.

Most tiles, however, are created from virgin materials, using vast amounts of natural resources. Alusid have created a range of tiles using more than 98 per cent recycled materials, with a range of effects and colours.

Eco-friendly cleaning

Once your new bathroom is installed, choose cleaning products with care. Many detergents are far stronger and more intensive than they need to be, often containing ammonia or bleach. They have great antibacterial and antifungal properties, but are particularly bad for the environment and can be toxic.

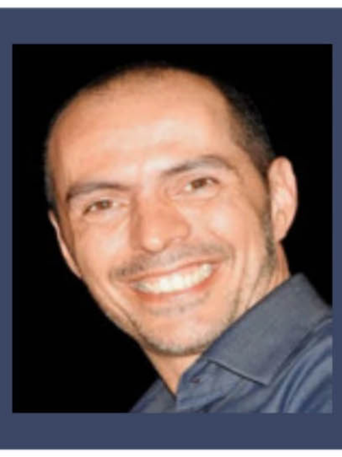
A simple alternative may be to make your own cleaners from natural products such as white vinegar and lemon. Not only does this combo cut through grease and oil very well, but it is also very gentle to the environment.

There are plenty of environmentally friendly cleaning brands available, such as Seventh Generation. All of its products are made from natural, non-toxic ingredients with essential oils used for fragrance.

Another, more widely available option is ECOver. The company is B-Corp certified, demonstrating its commitment to social and environmental good. This bathroom cleaner is particularly effective in hard water areas and the packaging is also biodegradable.

Improving the eco-friendliness of your bathroom has never been easier. There can be some additional costs to factor into your design budget, but running costs can be lower, which is good news.

André Fonseca is CEO of Zypho, which has invented shower-drain heat recovery solutions for domestic and commercial showers. (zypho.eu)



Nationwide announces £1bn fund for greener buildings

Nationwide Building Society is to offer low-interest loans to homeowners wishing to upgrade the energy efficiency of their homes as part of a new £1bn fund. The money will also be lent to buyers of highly efficient new-build homes with an A-rated Energy Performance Certiicate.

Nationwide chief executive Joe Garner has called on the government to overhaul council tax to incentivise green home improvements, as well as calling on other financial institutions to follow their lead and offer discounted rates for energy efficiency standards. The Help to Buy scheme, he says, should become a 'Help to Green' programme.

The home improvement loans will have an introductory interest rate of one per cent for the first two years on loans of up to £25,000.

"Nationwide Building Society's core social purpose is to help people into a place fit to call home," said Mr Garner. "There is now also an urgent imperative to reduce carbon emissions from those homes.

"On behalf of our members we are calling for government, housebuilders and lenders to work together to make a significant contribution to achieving a net-zero carbon footprint.

"Our suggested reforms are about creating meaningful incentives for people to green their homes. It's not about penalising those in society who are least able to pay or putting the burden on local authorities. This is the greatest mutual challenge we face, and we will only make a difference if we work together."

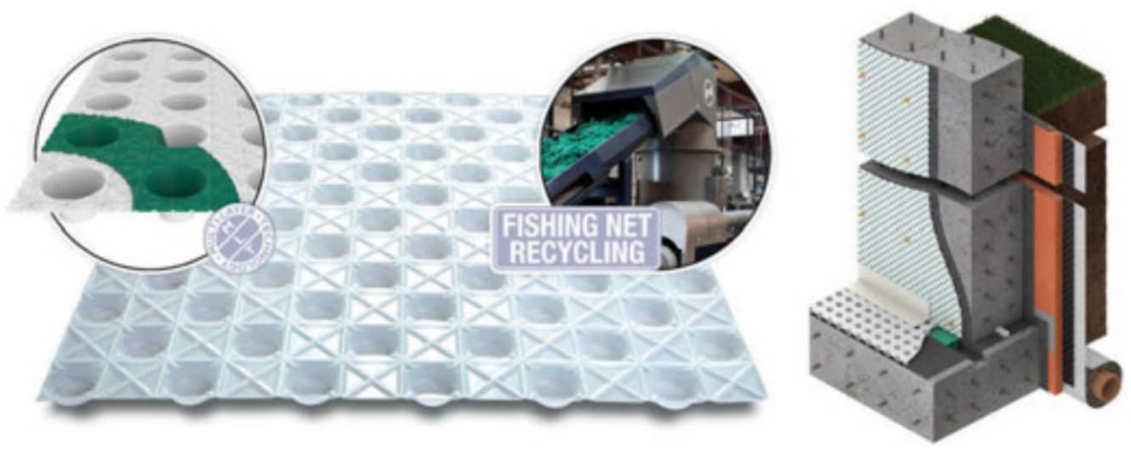
Dr Rhian-Mari Thomas, chief executive of the Green Finance Institute, said: "Developing the market for financing net-zero carbon and climate-resilient homes is a key objective of the Green Finance Institute's Coalition for the Energy Efficiency of Buildings.

"We welcome the leadership shown by Nationwide in supporting homeowners and consumers with innovative financial products.

"Nationwide is one of more than 40 members of our coalition which spans the UK government, private sector and civil society working collaboratively to launch scalable financial solutions during the course of this year, building on market insights and consumer research that are due to be released over the next few months."

Building Matters

Smart technology company Eave has developed a unique system for hearing protection for construction workers. Company founder Dr David Greenberg (above), a former NHS audiologist, focused on the construction industry because of its high risk of noise exposure. His solution is a digital headset that monitors and maps noise exposure, displaying it via a Cloud-based software platform. The headset's 'hear-through' technology allows wearers to listen to conversations, while reducing loud background noise. Signals such as alarms or sirens can also be heard.



GREENER BASEMENT SYSTEMS

Safeguard Europe has upgraded its basement waterproofing system to include a new radical cavity drain membrane that tackles three critical areas of environmental concern in its materials, manufacture and distribution.

The new membrane – Oldroyd Xv Eco White – comprises 50 per cent recycled plastic, largely sourced from discarded or scrap fishing nets.

The membrane is manufactured in plants where 98-100 per cent of the electricity is sourced from renewables.

Safeguard has also relocated its new production facilities close to a port, reducing the number of road miles involved in distribution.

Despite their popularity, basement builds are complex and fraught with challenges for installers.

Safeguard has four systems suitable for the most common basement scenarios:

- new-build reinforced concrete;
- basement underpinning existing structure;
- piled wall with sprayed concrete; and
- existing basement refurbishment.

New electric Muck-Truck

A new battery-powered wheelbarrow has been added to the Muck-Truck range. The Power Barrow 4WD features four-wheel drive to manoeuvre with ease and the bucket tips electronically at the touch of a button – a first for Muck-Truck.

The new barrow has a five-hour running time and can carry loads of up to 365kg. It can also be converted into a vacuum or a snow plough. Fitted with a ball hitch to tow trailers and turf tyres for protection from grass, the Power Barrow has outstanding stability on uneven ground and up hills.

Storm crates

Brett Martin Plumbing and Drainage has launched StormCrate55, an underground modular geocellular unit which offers a cost-effective solution to surface water run-off.

Weighing 15.5kg and measuring 1,200mm x 600mm x 347mm, the modular units can be easily lifted by hand and then laid or stacked in rows. Manufactured from recycled plastic the units have a loading capability of 562kN/m² and can store up to 237.5 litres in the event of heavy rains.

The units are suitable for landscaped areas, playgrounds, pedestrianised spaces, parking areas and driveways.

Stainless steel gutters from Alumasc

Alumasc Rainwater Infinity stainless steel gutters offer a contemporary, eco-friendly and cost-effective alternative to plastic gutters that look sleek and have no risk of shrinking, leaking or colour fading. Although supplied in their original galvanised steel finish, Alumasc can also provide Infinity steel systems in six different pre-coated colour finishes upon request, as well as plain zinc or copper. All colour-coated lengths are protected with an adhesive film to prevent damage on site. Designed for ease of installation as well as quality, the dry-joint system ensures there is no need for additional silicone sealants. Gutter lengths and angles are jointed with EPDM rubber-sealed connectors, for a watertight installation, that are push-fit for speed.

Timber frame sales to reach £800m in 2020

Sales of timber homes and buildings are expected to reach £800m in 2020, with growth in timber-frame housebuilding outpacing traditional construction methods.

This is the major finding of The Timber Frame Construction report from MTW Research.

The report identifies key growth sectors, noting that the recent government focus on modern methods of construction will inject additional impetus for sales of volumetric buildings, closed panel and SIPS technology in particular.

It discusses the positive impact of the Climate Change Committee's assertion that 270,000 timber-frame homes built each year could triple the amount of carbon captured in UK homes and that the 1.5m new dwellings planned by 2022 "where possible" should be timber frame.

MTW estimates that the top 25 suppliers account for less than 30 per cent of the timber-frame housing market, underlining the high level of fragmentation in the market.

"Consolidation of the timber-frame market through mergers and acquisitions is increasingly likely in the next few years as competition increases," said MTW director Mark Waddy.

"Market positioning is also set to grow in significance, with the timber frame market increasingly segmenting and polarising – for example, into higher value volumetric and lower value open-panel products."

The report segments the timber-frame building market by sector and type, finding that offices, leisure and retail account for the largest share in 2020, with infrastructure and education also significant in share terms.

Detached houses account for almost one-third of buildings though semi-detached houses continue to gain share of the timber-frame market. (marketresearchreports.co.uk)

FANTASTIC FACADES

James Butler looks at why glass reinforced concrete (GRC) is becoming popular with high-end housebuilders.

The UK's first major use of GRC was probably an office block near to St Paul's in central London. Originally the UK headquarters of Crédit Lyonnais, the eye-catching, four-storey office block was designed by architects Whinney Son & Austen Hall. The building was refurbished in 2013, when it became Grade II listed for its contribution to the built environment.

A decade before, the building, which was then over 25 years old, underwent various safety tests, focusing particularly on the GRC and its integrity. Building engineers concluded that the external concrete cladding was in such good condition that its lifespan was effectively indefinite. GRC had arrived – and architects soon started considering it as an ideal replacement for the much heavier pre-cast concrete.

Since then, the lightweight material has taken the commercial construction sector by storm, with many iconic buildings in the UK using GRC instead of traditional pre-cast concrete, brickwork, rendering or stonework. It is estimated that its use has grown year on year by more than 10 per cent in recent times.

What is GRC?

Architects and builders alike enjoy working with GRC thanks to its ease of handling (due to its lightweight properties), its good environmental credentials (less material used) and the impressive creative possibilities it brings to projects. But what exactly is this material?

Known as GRC or glass-fibre reinforced concrete (GFRC), the material comprises high-strength, alkali-resistant glass fibres which are embedded into a concrete matrix. These fibres act as the main load-carrying component, while the surrounding matrix keeps them in position, and transfers loads between the fibres. Both fibres and matrix are good at retaining their physical and chemical identities, combining these properties to create a high-performance composite.

This differs from traditional pre-cast concrete, which uses steel as the main load-carrying element. While this works well in the medium term, steel has a tendency to corrode, leading to potential structural issues within a couple of decades.

GRC is usually manufactured in thin sections, by a machine spraying an enriched grade of cement and aggregate mix with glass fibres dispersed through it. These fibres serve a similar purpose to steel rebar in reinforced concrete. The big difference is fibres do not rust.

Above For the facade of this building in Canada, öko skin slats in silver grey were used. **Right** The juxtaposition of bold colours and shapes creates a strong architectural statement for these two family homes in Munich. **Below** GRC has been used to create a more natural effect for this garden spa room in Austria. The tough GRC creates a hardwood effect, with none of the maintenance or treatments required for wood products.

A relatively recent innovation is the use of glass fibre mesh to reinforce the concrete. This method achieves the same structural strength as the traditional sprinkled glass fibre system, but enables the GRC to be much thinner – and lighter. While the older method requires the sprayed GRC to be 40mm to 100mm thick, the mesh alternative uses a much thinner, lighter layer of GRC of only 13mm. This thinner system still reaches the highest testing level for impact resistance.

Key benefits

GRC panels are typically used to create a lightweight cladding system and can be made to look almost identical to natural stone or even wood. Installation is easier and more cost effective due to the lower weight of the panels, which are 75-80 per cent lighter than pre-cast reinforced concrete cladding.

Given the growing significance of sustainability, this point is becoming more important. Recent tests show that GRC is now seen as an energy-efficient material which is capable of a BREEAM A+ material rating.

Increasingly, architects and designers are taking the experience they have gained from large commercial developments and applying this creativity to private housing.

GRC panels can be created to replicate complex profiles, giving the appearance of much heavier and expensive stonework. These panels generally take a ribbed or sandwich form and provide exceptional durability, fire resistance, weather resistance, and sound insulation properties.

Indeed, given the repercussions of the Grenfell Tower fire, architects and developers are now taking a 'belt and braces' approach to safety, increasingly relying on GRC to contribute to a non-flammable A1 fire rating for the building.

In the UK the material has been used to provide stunning facades on stand-out commercial developments such as Heath Lodge homes in Ealing, and apartments in the village of Crowthorne, Berkshire.

Recently completed projects on mainland Europe demonstrate the huge and as yet untapped potential for this material within the housebuilding sector here in the UK.

James Butler is head of London-based Pura Facades: purafacades.co.uk

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A FULL LIST OF MEMBERS CAN BE FOUND AT:

www.selfbuildportal.org.uk/members

ASK OUR PLANNING EXPERT

Our Plot Doctor **Roy Speer** answers your planning questions.

Should I complain about council's behaviour?

Q I made a straightforward planning application which is recommended for approval. The problem is that one member of the planning committee wants to call it in to committee for a decision. The chair said 'no' and the councillor came up with various reasons why it should go to committee. Somehow, it's now been put on the list so it looks like it will go. This is ridiculous. Should I lodge a complaint and if I appeal will this be taken into account?

A Don't panic (yet). If the proposal is sound, there's a good chance it will be approved by the committee and these manoeuvrings will all become by the by. Complaining at this stage could risk upsetting things and prove counter-productive and it's not likely to get you a decision any faster. If the application were to be refused, with an officer's recommendation for approval on your side, you're likely to be in a strong position to appeal, although a positive recommendation wouldn't guarantee success. Should an appeal be made, the inspector won't be interested in how the decision was made and whether the application should have gone to committee. It would be assessed on its merits. The council's behaviour could, though, be relevant to an appeal cost claim but that is a separate matter from the decision itself. If the inspector believes the council acted unreasonably, costs might be awarded.

Do I need to submit so many reports?

Q The council gave me pre-application advice which said we could get planning permission, with all the usual caveats, of course, but that was the gist of it. The letter went on to list all the documents I would have to put in with the application and it's a long list. The officer says I need a tree survey, phase 1 ecology report, drainage report and highway report. Can this be right? Can I challenge this or is there nothing I can do about it and just have to do it all?

A It's no skin off the council's nose to provide a long shopping list of requirements. It costs the council nothing and it's good back-covering because it can say they relied on the experts' professional opinions. I suspect half the time these reports don't get read, beyond, perhaps, the conclusions. Some of the information can be dealt with simply. A drainage statement might be no more than a short description of the proposed methods of foul and surface water disposal. Similarly, a highway report might be a statement of dimensions of width and visibility splays in conjunction with the application drawings. Trees and an ecology report are probably going to require specialists to produce them.

The thing to do is to discuss each requirement with the planning officer to ascertain what level of detail or extent of coverage the council expects. In that way, you can establish which ones you, your planning consultant or designer can produce and which ones will mean employing a specialist. Having been told an ecology report would be necessary on a case recently, I was able to persuade the council's ecology consultant that it would be disproportionate in the particular circumstances of the case. There's now a formal procedure for challenging validation requirements that applicants think are inappropriate or excessive. However, it's likely to be quite rare that it's worth going through that and, galling as it may be, it's often easier to go along with what the council asks for.

Potential building plot?

Q Our property has four acres and includes some large outbuildings. There's one corner which is slightly separate from the rest of the garden which we could divide off as a possible building plot. We don't know what sort of house to build but expect it would be three or four bedrooms. Do you think this could work?

A There would be many factors to consider. Likely to be most significant is whether your site is in or outside a town or village. The fact that the land extends to four acres suggests that it's outside but, potentially, the part where your house is and where the corner in question is located, could be on the edge of a settlement. If there are houses adjoining, that would be a plus point, although not enough in itself to get you home and dry. Where the council doesn't have sufficient housing sites, the opportunities around towns and villages are likely to be better. If there are buildings or uses on the site, that could be helpful because you might have something to trade for planning permission. If buildings have conversion potential, assuming they don't have historical or architectural value, it's sometimes possible to replace them, depending on the council's attitude. I haven't mentioned planning policy yet. You would need to know that and the circumstances in which your council would be prepared to grant permission. A pre-application enquiry or professional opinion should give you a good idea.

ASK OUR LEGAL EXPERT

Property law specialist **Guy Elyahou** answers your legal questions.

Can I claim against retired architect?

Q My architect has been paid to inspect and provide a certificate when I complete the final local authority inspection of my new build later this year. He now says that he has retired and will not provide the final certificate. Surely he can't simply retire mid-contract? I would have thought that the architect is in breach of contract and should have either:
• put a time limit on the appointment; or
• told me at the relevant time that he planned to retire; or
• transferred the appointment to a new practice.

A It does seem like your architect is in breach of contract, or at least failing to perform an implied or express term of what was agreed. However, there are additional elements of his conduct to be considered.

The first question is what type of agreement was made; was it written or verbal? If written, what were the terms? I presume it would have included the normal suite of services and payment provisions.

If the agreement was verbal then certain terms will be implied. These terms can be also implied into written contracts if the matter is not addressed in the written terms. These implied terms are that:
• the contract will be carried out with reasonable skill and care;
• the works will be completed in a reasonable time frame; and
• the consultant will be paid a reasonable fee for the work carried out.

Terms can also be implied in order to make a contract effective. I would suggest that issuing a final completion certificate as part of the services would be such a provision; without it, the agreement would be inefficacious.

Unless there is an express term allowing him to terminate the contract at his will (by giving you reasonable notice) then it is unlikely that he can relieve himself of his responsibilities.

There are provisions or rather "excuses" for non-performance. At the risk of stating the obvious, a failure to perform would amount to a breach of contract leading to damages.

Death, for example, is a fairly obvious excuse. In such a case the benefit and burden of the contract passes to the person's legal representative unless the obligations are personal (which I suspect they would have been here).

Frustration and impossibility in performing the obligations are another valid excuse. Impossibility would be some unforeseen physical impossibility in performing the contract. Frustration would be some unforeseen intervening event or change of circumstances that is so fundamental in nature as to determine the contract prematurely.

> 'The role of an architect is generally considered to be personal in the sense that he cannot arrange for the general performance of his duties by another person."

Again, unless there is some underlying health issue that would prevent him working then mere retirement (out of choice) does not release your architect from his obligations.

Unexpected difficulty and additional expense are in general not an excuse for non-performance. Neither is weather, unless it is so exceptional and extraordinary that it could not reasonably be anticipated.

One point you mentioned in your email is the possibility of passing on the obligations to a third party. The role of an architect is generally considered to be personal in the sense that he cannot arrange for the general performance of his duties by another person.

The essential characteristic of the architect's role is that if it is not performed it is not a defence for the architect to show that he delegated his performance to a person to whom he reasonably believed to be competent to perform it.

Initially I would confront the architect with the knowledge that you now have in relation to his non-performance and ultimate breach of contract. Hopefully, you will be able to reach an amicable solution.

Failing that you may want to consider what remedies are available to you for a breach of contract. You need to be aware that all claims have a limitation period – normally six years from the date of the breach.

There are two options to you for a breach of contract: damages and specific performance. The latter is where the courts compel the other party to complete their part of the bargain.

If you are going to bring an action for a breach of contract then you must have suffered some loss. You need to consider who you are going to sue and whether they have sufficient assets. There is little point in suing the architect if he does not have any money, or did you contract through a limited company? In which case you must put in a claim immediately to register yourself as a potential creditor and to prevent the company being wound up.

The damages that are recoverable are those that are in the reasonable contemplation of the contracting parties at the time of entering into the contract. You should be able to recover monies for the breach and the cost of remedying the breach. Put simply you can recover the monies that would put you in the position had the contract been properly performed.

If normal channels to settle this dispute have not succeeded then you could send out a formal letter before action. Guidance can be provided from consumer direct: gov.uk/consumer-protection-rights.

Guidance on how much you can claim and how to do this is available at: hmcourts-service.gov.uk/info about/claims/index.

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Diary dates

To publicise your course, seminar or exhibition, contact Louise Parkin on l.parkin@sbdonline.co.uk. Visit: selfbuildanddesign.com/events

Courses & Seminars

Brighton Permaculture Trust
Selfbuilding an Earthship
April 17-19
Income-based fee £175-£340
Brighton
Learn about building an environmentally sensitive home as well as what is involved in building an earthship. The event will describe how to gain autonomy and be free from gas and electricity bills, and understand basic building physics which can shed light on how all buildings work. The course provides the knowledge and confidence to take ideas to the next stage. (brightonpermaculture.org.uk)

Brighton Permaculture Trust
Building with Cob
May 9-10
Income-based fee: £124-£275
Brighton
You will learn how to make your own earth building materials - cob, earth mortars, renders - and then build with them, creating your own cob pizza oven. This course is for anyone thinking about building with cob. It is suitable for complete beginners, as well as those who are familiar with eco-building and want to know more. Participants will learn about the raw materials and how to mix them, as well as gain practical experience of building cob ovens. (brightonpermaculture.org.uk)

Build a Dream Self Build Association
Self Built House Site Visit
May 5
Bath
The first Tuesday of most months, this series of talks by industry experts and experienced homebuilders provides valuable information and advice, acting as a venue for meeting like-minded self-build enthusiasts to form strong alliances. This meeting will be visiting a finished self build house and a separate self build plot in Bath (badsba.co.uk)

Centre for Alternative Technology
Eco Refurbishment
April 17-20
£500 incl full board
Machynlleth, Powys
Find out how to make critical improvements to your home to make it more comfortable, cheaper to run and better for the environment. Learn about energy efficiency, renewable energy, water reuse and conservation, healthy buildings and hazardous building materials. The course is led by Nick Parsons, who has worked for over 25 years in energy efficient and sustainable building and renewable energy. (cat.org.uk)

Centre for Alternative Technology
Introduction to Renewables for Households
April 18-19
£200
CAT, Machynlleth, Wales
Covering the basics of wind, solar PV, solar thermal, biomass and heat pumps, this course will enable homeowners to identify which renewable technologies are best suited to their needs. They will be guided in how to construct a household energy profile, and how to modify it to suit their available energy provision. (cat.org.uk)

Centre for Alternative Technology
Timber Frame Self Build
April 27-May 1
£700 incl full board
CAT, Machynlleth, Wales
Learn a range of timber frame building techniques, how to use tools safely and correctly, marking out, measuring and cutting the frame as well as frame raising. Also included are talks on planning, ecological building materials and low energy homes. Lots of hands-on experience will be gained culminating in a finished timber frame at the end of the week. There will also be time during the course to ask questions about individual projects so take along drawings and plans. (cat.org.uk)

Centre for Alternative Technology
Build a Natural House
May 5-9
Waged £650, low waged/ concession £600
CAT, Machynlleth, Wales
This course is all about building using natural materials. Practical and hands on, the course looks at groundworks and foundations, and then building a small section of wall. Techniques include timber framing, straw bale, hempcrete and rammed earth, and cob and clay will be used within the building. A section of roofing will also be built by fixing pre-cut rafters, felt and battens and a small area slated. (cat.org.uk)

Centre for Alternative Technology
Building with Rammed Earth
May 9-10
£270; low waged/concessions £240
CAT, Machynlleth, Wales
Flexible in design and application, rammed earth has excellent thermal mass, load bearing, fireproof and acoustic properties as well as embodying low-tech construction methods. This two-day hands-on course gives a good grounding in this building method and its application around the world. (cat.org.uk)

Centre for Alternative Technology
Sustainable Building Materials
May 18-22
Waged £750, low waged/ concession £700
Machynlleth, Powys
This course will enable participants to evaluate the environmental impacts, social and health implications and performance of various building materials, which can be used in isolation or in combination with each other. Covering availability, cost, physical properties, ecosystem enhancement, construction methods, ease of use, mainstream acceptance, design limitations and logistical considerations, the course provides in-depth knowledge of building for comfort, practicality and sustainability. (cat.org.uk)

KLC School of Design
Introduction to Bathroom Design
May 16
£190
Chelsea Harbour, London
Designed for practising interior designers as well as those looking to improve the aesthetics of their own home, this area of design requires specialist knowledge. The course will consider the fundamentals of practical bathroom design with an emphasis on planning and designing a bathroom, and putting these into practice in practical workshops which respond to a client brief. The day will also examine planning issues, the latest style trends and new technology. (klc.co.uk)

KLC School of Design
Experience Interior Design
May 30
£190
Chelsea Harbour, London
This day provides a concise introduction to the world of interior design. Despite the prevalence of design in today's media, confusion surrounds even some of the most basic principles. To gain a better appreciation for interior projects, or as a basis for further study, this practical day provides a compelling, comprehensive and enjoyable introduction. (klc.co.uk)

Mike Wye & Associates
Lime Plastering
April 24
£120 plus VAT
Buckland Filleigh, Devon
The Lime Plastering course is an opportunity for some 'hands on' experience in using both traditional and modern lime plasters and techniques to conserve, maintain or upgrade traditional buildings. This course offers far more depth than the Practical Use of Lime Course, which covers other tasks such as pointing. (mikewye.co.uk)

Mike Wye & Associates
Tadelakt Plaster
May 1
£120 + VAT
Buckland Filleigh, Devon
The Tadelakt Plaster course teaches how to achieve the beautiful, water repellent tadelakt finishes for use in wet rooms and bathrooms. For each session there is a step-by-step demonstration by an experienced,

Potton Self Build Academy

Potton Planning Clinic
April 17, NSBRC, Swindon
April 24, St Neots, Cambridgeshire
Free of charge
This planning clinic is designed for those who have identified a building plot. A team of experts will be present to advise on whether a plot of land is suitable to build on, suggest how designs can be tailored for the plot, explain how to navigate through the planning process, and provide advice on energy efficient construction methods and details on project costing.

How to Find and Appraise a Plot
April 24, Swindon
May 16, St Neots, Cambridgeshire
£165 (for 1), £247.50 (for 2)
St Neots, Cambridgeshire
This extensive and informative one-day event will provide all the advice and knowledge needed to find that ideal plot, and then describe how to appraise it. It will provide the information required to determine the suitability and to overcome possible obstacles.

Introduction to Self Build & Land
May 9, St Neots, Cambridgeshire
May 23, NSBRC, Swindon
Free of charge
This seminar provides an introduction to the process of self build especially for beginners, covering key topics including finding land, home design, getting planning permission and how to build a timber frame home. This seminar will provide all the information needed to begin a self build journey. The day also includes a chance to browse Potton's show homes.

(selfbuildacademy.co.uk)

specialist plasterer. A range of boards and terracotta pots will be practiced on, with guidance at hand throughout. A range of colours, finishing soaps, lustres and micas are available for creating unique tadelakt finishes. Sample boards can be taken away at the end of the course. (mikewye.co.uk)

Mike Wye & Associates
Venetian Polished Plaster
May 15
£120 + VAT
Buckland Filleigh, Devon
The Venetian and Polished Plaster Course teaches how to achieve beautiful finishes using Venetian Plaster and Stuccolustro including the associated soaps, waxes, lustres and micas. The approach is to create a relaxed environment to enjoy learning, with ample opportunity for discussion throughout the day. For each session there is a step-by-step demonstration by one of the experienced, specialist plasterers. Participants have a range of boards to practice on, with guidance at hand throughout. A range of colours, finishing soaps, lustres and micas are available for creating unique polished plaster finishes. Sample boards can be taken home at the end of the course. (mikewye.co.uk)

National Self Build & Renovation Centre
The Self Build Course
May 9-11
£395 incl VAT
NSBRC, Swindon
This three-day course will cover a wide range of aspects that need to be considered when undertaking a self build. Learn about budgeting and finance, finding and evaluating land and design and specification. Then look into the different building systems and construction methods, and how to get planning permission, what is allowed under permitted development and complying with Building Regulations. Advice will be provided on hiring trades, arranging contracts and tendering. Learn the skills needed to manage a project, and understand eco legislation, eco design, planning and management. (nsbrc.co.uk)

Scandia-Hus
Sussex Show Home Open Day
April 25
Free of charge
East Grinstead, West Sussex
Scandia-Hus has over 40 years' experience in the self-build industry so it has a wealth of knowledge to be shared at its own open day:
• Inspiration: contemporary and traditional show homes open
• Self build expert advice: including building with timber frames and advice from architectural designers
• Key suppliers: including windows, doors and heat recovery systems
• Seminars: throughout the day on topics such as finance, underfloor heating and insulation. (scandia-hus.co.uk)

School of Natural Building
Understanding Technical Details
April 24
£75 incl lunch
Glasgow
This one day workshop will cover natural foundations that can save you money, the difference between plinth walls and foundations, airtight doors and windows without expensive tapes, weather protection and the importance of drip edges, how to attach wall cupboards and sockets to straw walls, compression for load-bearing and infill, how to build the roof first on a loadbearing building, and prefabrication developments. Early Bird offer of £100 for two people, for bookings made 3 weeks before the course date. (schoolofnaturalbuilding.co.uk)

School of Natural Building
Natural Plasters & Renders
April 25
£75
Glasgow
Then this newly developed course will give you an understanding of hot topics such as:: healthy indoor air quality, humidity regulation – say goodbye to mould and condensation, historical precedents – plasters that last, the natural cycle of lime, how and why lime works better than cement, making clay plasters from earth, and realistic costs. (schoolofnaturalbuilding.co.uk)

Exhibitions

Affordable Art Fair Spring
Apr 30-May 3
Hampstead, London
This fair will bring together works by thousands of international living artists to a stunning location in the heart of Battersea Park, all available for between £100 and £6,000. It will celebrate the restorative power of art through specially curated selections of works in addition to informative talks and interactive workshops. With studies showing that being surrounded by and viewing art can have huge emotional benefits, from decreasing stress to giving the brain a mini-workout, this show is well worth a visit. (affordableartfair.com)

Grand Designs Live
May 2-10
From £12
ExCeL, London
Running for nine days, this glitzy show offers visitors a unique opportunity to see all the latest trends for the home as well as many products not seen before. Based on the Channel 4 TV series and presented by Kevin McCloud, the event will be attended by around 500 exhibitors, across six different project zones: Build, Interiors, Gardens, Kitchens and Bathrooms, Technology and Design Arcade. (granddesignslive.com)

John Cullen Lighting
Luxury Lighting Workshop
May 12
£35
King's Road, London
This workshop has been designed to explain exactly how to select the best LEDs, the lighting techniques that can be used to make the home feel more luxurious, how to layer with light, and control it to ensure a creative versatile lighting scheme to suit today's living. Presented by leading lighting expert Sally Storey (Creative Director) and her team of designers, the workshop will be held at John Cullen's London showroom. Within this unique space, the latest products will be showcased in a range of room sets and a garden using the latest control technology. (johncullenlighting.com)

Spring Decorative Antiques & Textiles Fair
May 14-18
Battersea Park, London
This is a fantastic opportunity to source antique and 20th-century garden furniture and accessories, alongside the typically wide range of period interior design and art presented by more than 150 dealers with inspiration and flair. The foyer stand, An Ornamental Menagerie, takes a light-hearted look at designs, objects and works of art featuring creatures great and small, familiar and exotic. (decorativefair.com)

The National Self Build & Renovation Show
May 16-17
NSBRC, Swindon
Based at the home of self build, custom build and renovation, this is an event not to be missed by anyone serious about building their own house or planning major renovations. With over 200 exhibitors, live demonstrations and free seminars, there are also opportunities to meet architects and designers. (nsbrc.co.uk)

Clerkenwell Design Week
May 19-21
London
Clerkenwell is home to more creative businesses and architects per square mile than anywhere else on the planet, making it truly one of the most important design hubs in the world. To celebrate this rich and diverse community, Clerkenwell Design Week has created a showcase of leading UK and international brands and companies presented in a series of showroom events, exhibitions and special installations that take place across the area. This award-winning gathering has firmly established itself as the UK's leading independent design festival and annually attracts the international design community to this small area of London for three days of exciting events. (clerkenwelldesignweek.com)

Training Academies

These organisations run regular courses aimed at hands-on selfbuilders.

Able Skills
Dartford, Kent
Five-day courses in plumbing, plastering, bricklaying, tiling, dry-lining, electrical and kitchen fitting. (0808 100 3245, ableskills.co.uk)

Access Training Academies
Cardiff, Bristol, London & Edenbridge
A wide range of accredited training courses for beginners and seasoned professionals alike – whether you want to become a professional electrician, earn your Gas Safe certificate, or simply learn some basic DIY skills. (0800 345 7492, accesstraininguk.co.uk)

Builder Training
Farnham, Surrey
Courses include tiling, carpentry, basic plumbing, bathroom installation, bricklaying and blocklaying. Dates are arranged depending on demand and there are never more than three or four people on each course. They also teach one-on-one and can customise courses to suit your needs. (07780 977767, basicplumbingcourse.com)

Builder Training Centre
Croydon, Surrey
Run over five days, or two weekends, learn bricklaying (mixing mortar, building walls and damp-proofing), plastering, tiling, plumbing and carpentry. (0800 389 2775, thebtc.co.uk)

Tradeskills4U
Crawley, West Sussex
Plastering, tiling, electrics, plumbing and bricklaying are taught with courses of varying lengths, including a DIY course specifically for women. (0800 856 4448, tradeskills4u.co.uk)

Homebuilding & Renovating Show Glasgow
May 30-31
From £8
Glasgow
The world of housebuilding and renovating doesn't stand still for long. That's why this show is full of information on the latest trends, technologies and tips for getting the most out of your project. At Scotland's biggest self-build and renovating event, there are thousands of ideas from suppliers based across the country – all in one space, with seminars, masterclasses and the Advice Centre. (glasgow.homebuildingshow.co.uk)

Finance

A guide to self-build mortgage lenders

The table below, while not exhaustive, is a guide to the lenders that offer self-build mortgages and the range of products available.

In association with BUILDSTORE MORTGAGE SERVICES

LENDER'S NAME	Lend on land	% of end value of property advanced	Number of stage payments	Minimum works completed for 1st stage payment	Mortgage types available	National or local	Telephone
GUARANTEED ADVANCE STAGE PAYMENT MORTGAGES							
Bath BS* (Accelerator)	95% (OPP)	80%	Six	DPP & Building Regs granted	4.44%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Buckinghamshire BS* (Accelerator)	80% (OPP)	80%	Six	DPP & Building Regs granted	4.99%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Darlington BS* (Accelerator)	85% (OPP)	80%	Six	DPP & Building Regs granted	4.84%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Furness BS* (Accelerator)	80% (OPP)	80%	Six	DPP & Building Regs granted	4.15%	England/Wales/Scot	0345 223 4647
Mansfield BS* (Accelerator)	85% (OPP)	80%	Six	DPP & Building Regs granted	4.99%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Newcastle BS* (Accelerator)	85% (OPP)	85%	Six	DPP & Building Regs granted	5.29%	England/Wales/Scot	0345 223 4647
Tipton & Coseley BS* (Accelerator)	85% (OPP)	75%	Six	DPP & Building Regs granted	4.99%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Vernon BS* (Accelerator)	85% (OPP)	80%	Six	DPP & Building Regs granted	5.50%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
ARREARS STAGE PAYMENT MORTGAGES							
Beverley BS	N/A	80%	Four	Wall plate	4.99%	England/Wales	01482 881 510
Buckinghamshire BS*	85% (OPP)	85%	Six	Foundations	4.84%	England/Wales/Scot	0345 223 4647
Chorley BS*	85% (OPP)	80%	Six	Foundations	4.64%	England/Wales/Scot	0345 223 4647
Cumberland BS	75%	85%	Flexible	Flexible	Call	Branch only	01228 403 141
Darlington BS*	85% (OPP)	80%	Six	Foundations	4.64%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Earl Shilton BS	50%	75%	Flexible	Flexible	4.99%	England/Wales	01455 844422
Ecology BS	80%	80%	Flexible	Flexible	4.65%	National	0845 674 5566
Furness BS*	80% (OPP)	80%	Six	Foundations	3.99%	England/Wales/Scot	0345 223 4647
Hanley	60%	60%	Six	Foundations	3.84%	England/Wales/Scot	01782 255 000
Hinckley & Rugby*	85% (OPP)	75%	Six	Foundations	4.29%	England/Wales	01455 894 083
Ipswich BS*	80% (OPP)	80%	Six	Foundations	3.99%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Loughborough BS*	80% (OPP)	80%	Six	Foundations	4.25%	Central England	0345 223 4647
Mansfield BS*	80% (OPP)	80%	Six	Foundations	4.49%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Melton Mowbray	75%	50%	Flexible	Flexible	3.49%	England/Wales	01664 414 141
Newbury BS	66%	75%	Flexible	Foundations	4.45%	Postcode restricted	Local branch
Newcastle BS*	85% (OPP)	85%	Six	Foundations	5.99%	England/Wales/Scot	0345 223 4647
Nottingham BS*	80% (OPP)	80%	Six	Foundations	3.99%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Penrith BS	75%	75%	Six	Foundations	4.99%	Cumbria	01768 863675
Saffron BS	65%	75%	Flexible	Flexible	3.99%	England/Wales	01482 881510
Scottish BS	60%	80%	Six	Foundations	5.89%	Scotland	0131 313 7700
Stafford Railway BS*	85% (OPP)	75%	Six	Foundations	4.27%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Tipton & Coseley BS*	85% (OPP)	75%	Six	Foundations	4.49%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647
Vernon BS*	85% (OPP)	80%	Six	Foundations	4.74%	England/Wales	0161 429 6262
West Bromwich BS*	85% (OPP)	80%	Six	Foundations	4.29%	England/Wales	0345 223 4647

* exclusive from Buildstore

Funding a self build

Self-build mortgages are paid out on the completion of various stages of the build, typically between four and six.

This means that you need to be able to fund stages, either from your own resources or other borrowing, before you are reimbursed by the next payment from your main lender. In the case of a timber-frame house, where the frame might account for a third of your total budget – payable in one go – this is likely to require careful juggling of finances. Establish clearly with your lender when and how stage payments will be made so you don't find yourself running into cash-flow problems.

One solution is to raise a loan on your existing home, to be repaid when you sell it. There are also schemes, such as Buildstore's Accelerator Mortgage, which allow you to remain in your home until your new house is completed.

How much will it cost to build my home?

The biggest quandary for selfbuilders usually relates to the cost of their new home. Sadly there is no magic formula for calculating this – at least not without investing time and money in some exploratory work.

Build costs are often quoted in pounds per square metre, but this figure can vary so wildly (from below £1,000 to more than £3,000/sqm) it is almost meaningless. The figure is more useful for multiple-housebuilders or package companies which deliver similar-spec houses rather than for selfbuilders wishing to build a one-off home.

As houses are made up of thousands of components, working out exactly what is included in any price-per-square-metre quote can be confusing, to say the least. Ground conditions can also add significantly to overall build costs, regardless of the size, quality or complexity of the house itself. Then there are labour costs which vary from region to region.

It is probably wiser to approach cost from a different angle – work out your total budget, then explore how much house your money can buy.

Design

Generally speaking, the simpler the house shape, the cheaper it will be to build. So squares and rectangles are cheaper than curves, L, T and other shapes. Using standard dimensions for walls, ceilings and doors will also save money.

Architects are trained to come up with designs that work hard for your money – but don't forget that you will need to account for their fees in your budget. These will vary, depending on their reputation and level of involvement.

On top of these fees, you will also need to make provision for the costs of planning permission, along with any associated costs such as site and environmental surveys, as well as Building Regulations.

Budget

A plot will usually be the biggest outlay for a self-build project. Where once it amounted to around a third of the total budget, in the South East and other prime areas nowadays it can be as much as half or even more.

Unless you are doing a lot of the work yourself, labour costs will be the next biggest outlay (usually around 25 per cent), followed by materials (20 per cent). You will also be wise to take out insurance and a structural warranty, which will use around another one per cent chunk of your budget.

The cost of connecting to utilities can often be overlooked in the excitement of securing a plot. Connection charges for new homes in built-up areas are usually in the low thousands, though expect to pay much more for isolated properties. In some cases this can run into tens of thousands. There can also be the additional cost of easement fees where pipes or cables need to cross neighbouring properties.

Finally, remember to add a contingency to your budget. Ten per cent is a much-quoted figure, but 15 per cent is not uncommon if you want to be on the safe side. Any surplus can always be splashed out on the finishing touches at the end.

Credit cards can also come in handy for any short-term cash flow emergencies so ensure that you have your maximum credit allowance before embarking on your project.

THE ESSENTIALS

SITE INSURANCE

As soon as you buy a plot or a renovation project you become liable for any injuries to members of the public on your site and by law you must have adequate insurance. It is also unlikely that your mortgage lender will release any money without proof of site insurance.

It should cover the following:

- Public and employer's liability.
- Building works and materials.
- Plant tools and equipment.
- Site huts and temporary buildings (including caravans).
- Existing structure (on conversions, renovations and extensions).
- Personal accident cover.
- Legal expenses.

RECLAIMING VAT

Most VAT paid out on a new build can be reclaimed, under rules designed to put selfbuilders on a level playing field with developers. Details are set out in VAT notice 431NB, VAT refunds for 'do-it-yourself' builders and converters, a copy of which can be downloaded from hmrc.gov.uk.

The scheme only applies to those building for their own domestic use and occupation and claims must be made within three months of completion. There is only one chance to claim, so it needs to be right first time. Claims can be made for most of the goods and materials incorporated into the building or the site which were bought from a VAT-registered supplier.

As new builds are zero-rated, VAT-registered builders or subcontractors should not charge VAT on any labour-only or supply-and-fix contracts. Although the builder or subcontractor will have to pay VAT when they purchase materials, they will be able to reclaim it themselves and shouldn't try to pass it on.

Selfbuilders have to pay VAT on any materials they buy on their own account. This is recoverable at the end of the project. VAT recovery is quite simple but it does have to be carried out thoroughly, and it is essential that the selfbuilder keeps a record of all payments made, together with all invoices. It is important to note that the VAT claim is made in one go at the end of the project and there is no second bite of the cherry!

Typical costs of a 200 sqm timber-framed home

Professional fees, including design surveys, permissions, warranties etc	£25,000
Utility connections (water, electric, gas)	£6,000
Scaffolding	£5,000
Site clearance and preparation, drainage etc	£10,000
Foundations and blockwork up to DPC	£12,000
Insulated concrete slab and floor screed	£14,000
Timber-frame structure	£55,000
Roof covering, soffit and fascia	£7,500
Gutters and downpipes	£2,500
Brick cladding	£17,500
Joinery (doors, skirting, architrave, wardrobes etc)	£10,000
Kitchen supply and fix	£10,000
Stairs	£2,500
Drylining plus skim plaster	£13,000
Roof insulation	£3,500
Floor and wall tiling	£4,000
External timber doors and windows	£14,000
Decoration	£5,000
Plumbing and heating	£20,000
Electrics	£15,000
TOTAL	**£251,500**
Turnkey build	**£370,000**

Potential to build house on commercial site

Elizabeth and Martin Haddon own a house and vehicle repair garage but have always wanted to self build. Now Elizabeth's parents plan to move back to the property, do they have the scope to realise their ambition?

The property

The property is within a loose hamlet which is spread out along a couple of roads. The hamlet itself lies just outside a large town with a population of about 18,000 people. A new housing estate being built on the edge of the town is within 600m of the property and the town centre is less than two kilometres away as the crow flies. The town has a full range of shops and facilities, including a railway station. The property is on the west side of one of the main roads out of the town.

Elizabeth and Martin's house is close to the main road, set at a right angle to it. The access drive runs past the house to a complex of former farm buildings, occupied now for vehicle repair and servicing. There's a range of building sizes and construction but most are relatively modern, rather than traditional. The concrete bases of demolished cowsheds remain in place at the north-western edge of the buildings group. There's also a very large Nissen hut on the western edge of the property.

The house is brick built with a half-hipped tile roof, which has dormer windows front and back, and a detached brick garage at the front. The house is set more or less centrally within a good-sized rectangular plot. To the north, south and west are open fields, also owned by Elizabeth and Martin. Beyond the field on either side of the property are some houses fronting the road. However, most homes in the hamlet are on the other side of the road. On that side, opposite the property, is a continuous strip of frontage houses. At the access point is a wide grass verge to the south and a hedge and trees hard on the edge of the road to the north. The road into town does not have a pavement or street lighting.

The property has been in the family for about 30 years. When they bought it, it was a derelict dairy farm with a 1940s bungalow. Over the years, various improvements have been made to the house, including converting a garage into part of the living accommodation and adding a floor with dormer windows to create a four-bedroom house.

Planning permission was given to use some of the farm buildings for car servicing and repairs and the family relocated its business, which Elizabeth now runs, to the property. Other buildings had to be removed, including the cowsheds at the north-west corner. Some stables remained in the middle of the buildings, although these could be used only for storage rather than repairs. They were also allowed to retain and use the large Nissen hut.

Elizabeth and Martin live in the house with their two children. Elizabeth's parents live in Scotland but plan to come back to the area and would like to return to the family home. For Elizabeth and Martin, building their own home is a long-held dream. They don't think they could buy a plot in the area and build the sort of house they want within their available budget. So building somewhere on the property would be a good solution from their point of view. Their ideal home would be a four-bedroom bungalow with a mezzanine. Elizabeth and Martin have images of the sort of home they have in mind. It's a rectangular, modern design featuring two mono-pitch roof slopes, vertical timber cladding and a good amount of glazing in the long sides, with an open-plan living area inside.

Planning background

Elizabeth and Martin were looking at the houses provided by one of the self-

build package companies. Speaking to a planning adviser at that company, they were told there would be a slim chance of getting planning permission and to get a good back story and local support. On approaching the parish council, they discovered their local councillor had retired and no representative was in place at the time.

Elizabeth and Martin had better luck with neighbours, though. All support their proposals. One of the neighbours got planning permission for a new house by trading floor space. Some neighbours, who had been through the planning process, suggested undertaking a pre-application consultation and avoiding spending money early on because of all the expense that would come later.

Taking this on board, Elizabeth and Martin decided not to spend a lot of time or money on pursuing a project which was never going to get off the ground. They found a couple of designs online, instead of employing an architect, and put together pre-application consultation documents. This comprised a written statement setting out the background to the proposal and its advantages, and their views on some of the main planning considerations. They included two designs and a couple of maps of the property, showing their favoured spot to build – in the north-west corner where cowsheds had been demolished.

Elizabeth and Martin attended a meeting with a planning officer at the council's offices. Within five minutes the officer had said 'no' but they persevered and tried various suggestions to get around the various obstacles. That included the idea to trade the floor area of the large Nissen hut for a house but the conversation took a different direction and they didn't end up getting an answer to that question.

Subsequently, the officer wrote confirming her views. She said the property is outside settlement policy boundaries, as set out in the Local Plan, and so is subject to countryside policies which contain a presumption against development in the countryside, unless there's a genuine and proven need for it. The officer mentioned the requirements for agricultural workers' dwellings and for conversion of redundant agricultural buildings under permitted development.

Planning history

Unfortunately, the council's website doesn't have a map search facility but I find the records for the property easily enough through an address search. The online records only go back so far so aren't complete. There's a permission relating to one of the vehicle workshops but not the original permission for the change of use of the site. The records show permissions on the house – the addition of a first floor and a detached garage with playroom over.

I also have a quick look for applications for dwellings in the two roads which run through the hamlet to see if there are any permissions for new houses. Some cases come up. There have been a couple of one-for-one replacements, which isn't surprising. A few more interesting applications come to light, though. At a yard to the rear of some frontage houses, about 650m north of Elizabeth and Martin's property, planning permission to replace industrial buildings with three houses was refused in 2012. At the same site, an application for two

detached dwellings was withdrawn before a decision was made in 2016. There's nothing to suggest why the latter was pulled but the usual reason is that permission was going to be refused.

The officer's report on the former said that that industrial site wasn't ideally suited to the area, close to houses, but its use for office or light industry hadn't been fully explored. The report went on to say that, even if the loss of employment had been accepted, planning policy didn't allow residential development in an unsustainable rural location.

Contrasting with those applications was a permission granted on a similar site about 425m north of Elizabeth and Martin's property. In that case, permission was given for one house to replace three commercial storage buildings and three chicken sheds, all of which were vacant. The officer's report said that proposal was contrary to a raft of planning policies but in line with another one, because the applicant had shown that the buildings were no longer viable or attractive for commercial use and so residential redevelopment was, on balance, considered acceptable in that instance. Other issues weighed up included design, trees, landscape, highways and contamination.

Planning policy

The Local Plan comprises saved policies from a mid-2000 Local Plan and a five-year-old core strategy. The polices in these documents include 'general restraint' to protect the countryside where the only development allowed is that with a need for a countryside location. The reuse of employment land can be permitted where it's not suitable for that use and an alternative use complies with other planning policies.

There are tight criteria for housing outside settlement boundaries. Redevelopment of industrial sites is possible where the present use harms the area or the site has restricted scope because of its size, shape, location or access or it isn't viable and no offer is received in response to marketing.

The policies allow replacement houses with a sliding scale for what size the new house could be. The council is producing a new Local Plan currently expected to come into force next year. Its policies seem to be broadly similar to those of the current plans.

Roy Speer is co-author of How to Get Planning Permission, How to Find and Buy a Building Plot, and Complete Planning Permission. For free preliminary planning advice contact Roy at roy@speerdade.co.uk.

Doctor's diagnosis

There are a few possibilities to consider which might meet Elizabeth and Martin's objectives. Just applying for a second house somewhere on the property doesn't, at first sight, seem like a good bet, because of the restrictive countryside policies.

An exceptional house is a theoretical option but the bar is high, so the odds aren't strong and such applications tend to be costly. Some of the commercial buildings could be demolished as a trade-off for building a new house. The Nissen hut would be a prime candidate for replacement owing to its size, location and appearance. I expect a house would need to be located elsewhere than the site of one of the existing buildings, to ensure occupants didn't suffer noise and disturbance from the car repair use.

Elizabeth and Martin's favoured spot on the edge of the buildings area, from where there would be views of the countryside beyond, would be worth considering. There are policies which might allow re-developing a commercial building, although they do contain hoops to jump through, which would need to be considered.

As is often the way, the indications from previous applications to do the same thing at other nearby sites have been contradictory but at least one succeeded. It's a shame the planning officer didn't address this possibility in the pre-application consultation.

I suggest Elizabeth and Martin try asking the officer for an answer to that question, within the scope of the enquiry they made last year. If there was any chink of light, they could explore it in more detail. The Nissen hut doesn't look to me like a strong candidate for conversion. It's close to the vehicle workshops, might not provide a desirable arrangement of living accommodation and an engineer's report would be required to establish that it is capable of conversion.

Demolition and replacement of the existing house, to incorporate annexe accommodation for Elizabeth's parents, could be a possibility. However, even if the present house, part of it dating from the 1940s, isn't the most energy efficient, it's still a sound and decent house. Re-development would be unlikely to stack up financially, although that wouldn't prevent it happening from a planning perspective.

Another option would be to station a caravan in the garden of the house, either for Elizabeth and Martin and their children or for Elizabeth's parents. I'm not talking here about a metal box on wheels. It's astonishing the sort of structure that's capable of coming within the definition of a caravan. It would be difficult, at first sight, to distinguish such units from good-quality buildings, built to high insulation standards and with a variety of designs possible. They don't have to be small either.

This could work in this instance because one extended family would continue to occupy the property and a caravan isn't a building requiring planning permission. If Elizabeth and Martin wish to go down this route, I recommend they apply for a lawful development certificate to test formally with the council whether planning permission would be required. Elizabeth and Martin have at least a couple of routes to explore further and another conversation with the planning officer would be a starting point.

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Barns on the farm

These traditional farm buildings offer an exciting conversion opportunity for an aspiring selfbuilder.

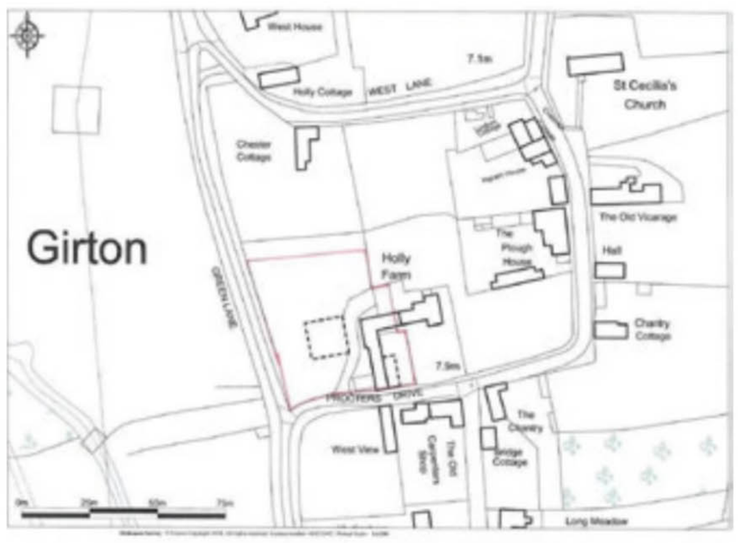
The red-brick barns are traditional in appearance.

Situated in the village of Girton, just north of Newark in Nottinghamshire, the site is home to a pair of derelict buildings ripe for transformation. Set in around 0.55 acres, Holly Barn comprises a range of traditional red-brick and pantile farm buildings, with an Atcost concrete frame agricultural building also situated within the grounds, measuring 13.5m x 13.5m.

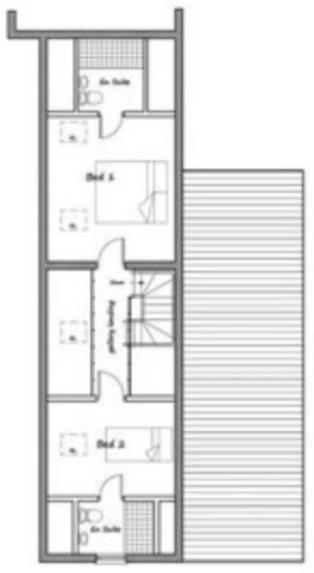
In October 2017, Newark and Sherwood District Council granted conditional planning permission to Holly Farm under reference 17/01005/FUL, allowing the conversion of the existing barn into a single dwelling, with incidental garden space and improvements to an ancillary vehicular access.

When converted, the proposed detached property will provide around 2,368 sq ft of internal accommodation spread over two storeys. Downstairs, approved plans include an entrance hall, reception room, dining/kitchen area, study, boot and utility room,

A 13.5m x 13.5m Atcost concrete frame lies within the grounds.



Internally, the barn needs extensive renovation works.



First floor

The village of Girton is tranquil, formed of narrow lanes and quaint cottages.

and a garden room leading out onto a large yard. There are three bedrooms on the ground floor, along with two further double bedrooms upstairs, both of which will be en suite. Externally, there is parking for two vehicles.

The village of Girton is tranquil, formed of narrow lanes and quaint cottages, with the tiny stone-built St Cecilia's church as its focal point. The barns for sale stand on relatively high ground on High Street, which leads down to join the A1133 Newark to Gainsborough road. Girton is around seven miles north of Newark-on-Trent, and a range of amenities can be located in the nearby village of Collingham, two miles to the south. Here, locals benefit from a Co-op, convenience store, medical centre, pharmacy, dentist, newsagent, butcher and primary school.

Railway services from Collingham to Newark, Lincoln and Nottingham are regular, while trains to London's King's Cross take 75 minutes from Newark Northgate.

The site is for sale with the Newark office of Richard Watkinson & Partners, with a guide price of £165,000. (richardwatkinson.co.uk)

Outdoor space will be accessible from the proposed garden room.

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The following pages contain a sample of the plots, renovations and conversion opportunities which are available on PlotBrowser.com this month. To search for more plots across the UK, and receive free notifications of new plots in your county, sign up today at **www.plotbrowser.com**.

WILDEN, BEDFORDSHIRE

Renhold Road – Building plot extending to approx 0.098 acres with outline planning consent for the erection of a detached dwelling. Being sold with additional land in all totalling circa 2.2 acres. Planning authority: Bedford Borough Council, APP/K0235/W/17/3191070. Offers invited.
Compass, 01234 351 577, mf@compasspropertygroup.co.uk

BEDFORDSHIRE

SHARNBROOK

The Manor House, Unit 2 Home Close – Substantial detached house (former farmhouse) with planning permission for conversion to two dwellings. A rare opportunity to acquire part to create a spacious four-bedroom property of circa 3,200 sq ft. Vendors to retain right side of dwelling. Originally constructed around 1815. Planning authority: Bedford Borough Council. Price on application. Compass Land & Development, 01234 351 577, dpd@compasspropertygroup.co.uk

SOULBURY

Land adjacent to Hillview Farm – A superb rural development site with detailed consent for two detached houses on a former farmyard located in a quiet country lane in Soulbury. Guide price £600,000. Planning authority: Aylesbury Vale District Council, 17/04204/ADP. The Wilkinson Partnership, 01525 382 065, j.white@qualityhomes.co.uk

BERKSHIRE

BEEDON, NEWBURY

Worlds End – Plot of land with full planning permission for a four-bedroom detached family home in a sought-after village with integral garage. Guide price: £250,000. Planning authority: West Berkshire Council. Cricketts , 01635 43333, sales@cricketts.co.uk

BEENHAM

Barn North of Hillfoot Court, Beenham Hill – Barn in an edge of village location with full planning permission for conversion into a single dwelling. Guide price: £150,000. Planning reference: 17/03400/FULD. Chancellors, 01635 869 440, thatcham.sales@chancellors.co.uk

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

CHATTERIS

Plot East of Pound Road – Sloping single building plot with outline consent for a two-bedroom detached house with parking. Guide price: £90,000. Planning authority: Fenland District Council, F/YR19/0102/O. Ellis Winters, 01354 694 900, info@elliswinters.co.uk

GREAT STUKELEY

Park View – Single building plot with full planning permission for a three-bedroom detached house of circa 1,205 sq ft with rear garage. Guide price: £110,000. Planning authority: Huntingdonshire District Council, 18/01707/FUL. Peter Lane & Partners, 01480 414 800, huntingdon@peterlane.co.uk

ISLEHAM, ELY

Serviced plot 2, Houghtons Lane – A plot measuring118 ft x 72 ft, forming part of a development of just five individual homes. The plot is approached over a private driveway and has outline permission for a four-bedroom detached house and double carport. Mains water, drainage and electricity will be connected. Guide price £220,000. Planning authority: East Cambridgeshire District Council, 19/01178/OUT. Cheffins, 01638 663 228, newmarket@cheffins.co.uk

RAMSEY ST MARYS

Daintree Road – Full planning permission for a three-bedroom detached house with integral garage. Planning authority: Huntingdonshire District Council, 18/00713/FUL. Price band: £50,001-£100,000. Private seller, 07840 718 912, john.scotchford@hotmail.com

CARMARTHENSHIRE

BETWS

Plot to the rear of Colonel Road – Single plot with full planning permission for a three-bedroom dormer property with double garage and storage area. OIRO £75,000. Planning authority: Carmarthenshire County Council, E/39616. John Francis, 01269 592 401, ammanford@johnfrancis.co.uk

GOT A PLOT TO SELL?

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PENIEL

Plot at Greensleeves – Plot of circa 2 acres with a separate 1.5 acre paddock available by separate negotiation. Full planning consent has been granted for a replacement four-bedroom detached house. OIRO £225,000. Planning authority: Carmarthenshire County Council, W/38656. John Francis, 01267 233 111, carmarthen@johnfrancis.co.uk

CHESHIRE

KINGSLEY

Two x four-bedroom detached plot – Beautiful plot for a pair of large four-bedroom homes in a very desirable Cheshire village location. Existing bungalow on site. Planning authority: Cheshire West and Chester Council, 17/05469/FUL. Price band: £300,001-£450,000. Private seller, 07775 615 177, andymcg99@gmail.com

LYMM

Plot at 14 Grammar School Road – Prime location plot of 0.32 acres with full demolition and planning permission granted to building a five-bedroom detached executive home with separate coach house and dual entry driveway. Ideally located within walking distance of Lymm village and amenities,

short commute to major motorway networks. OIRO £800,000. Planning authority: Warrington Borough Council, 2019/35350. Banner & Co, 01925 753 636, sales@njbanner.co.uk

MADELEY, CREWE
Railway Cottages, Moss Lane – A 0.21 acre site, cleared of buildings for sale with full planning for a pair of three-bedroom semi-detached houses and a single two-bedroom detached house. A guide price of £155,000 is sought for the entire site. The single plot with the detached house can be made available separately for £75,000, and the semi-detached plot for £95,000 for the pair. Planning authority: Newcastle-Under-Lyme District Council, 18/00259/FUL. Rory Mack Associates, 01782 715 725, bh@rorymack.co.uk

CORNWALL

CARBIS BAY
Little Trevarrack – Single building plot in a semi-rural area with outline consent for a residential dwelling with ample parking and a large garden. Guide price: £200,000. Planning authority: Cornwall Council, PA19/04667. Millerson, 01736 754 115, hayle@millerson.com

GORRAN HAVEN
Menehee, Wansford Meadow – Single building plot in a sought-after harbourside village with planning permission granted for a detached two-storey four-bedroom dwelling of around 1,880 sq ft with driveway and enclosed garden at the rear. Guide price: £175,000. Planning authority: Cornwall Council, PA19/08580. Philip Martin, 01872 242 244, sales@philip-martin.co.uk

LOOE
Pendrim Road – Plot with planning for a four-bedroom detached dwelling. OIEO £75,000. Planning authority: Cornwall Council, PA18/06354. Bradleys Estate Agents, 01503 264 888, looe@beagroup.co.uk

PENDEEN, PENZANCE
Plots at Wheabal – A choice of two plots, each with detailed consent for a detached three-bedroom houses with sea views. Guide price: £115,000. Planning authority: Cornwall Council, PA19/05509. Marshalls, 01736 360 203, feedback@marshallspz.co.uk

POLGOOTH, ST AUSTELL
Land East of Rose Cottage – Two semi-rural plots with countryside views to the rear and side and outline consent for a dwelling on each. Guide price: £295,000. Planning authority: Cornwall Council, PA/18/10954. May Whetter and Grose, 01726 73501, sales@maywhetter.co.uk

COUNTY DURHAM

BRANCEPETH, DURHAM
The Coach House – Grade II listed 19th-century stone built barn with planning permission to convert into a 2,020 sq ft three-bedroom coach house with internal garage. Guide price: £195,000. Planning authority: Durham County Council. Bradley Hall, 0191 383 9999, durham@bradleyhall.co.uk

STRATTON, BUDE, CORNWALL
Plot adj Myrtle Cottage, Pathfields – Level plot in a tucked away location with outline consent for a detached dwelling. Guide price: £165,000. Planning authority: Cornwall Council, PA19/06459.
Bond Oxborough Phillips, 01288 355 066, bude@bopproperty.com

BURNOPFIELD
Adj Crookfield Farm – Plot measuring circa 0.75 acres with full planning permission for the erection of two detached houses in an elevated position. Price on application. Planning authority: Durham County Council, DM/17/02386/OUT and DM/19/03918/FPA. J W Wood, 01207 235 221, stanley@jww.co.uk

NEW BRACEPETH, DURHAM
Plot to the south of Station Road – Single building plot with outline planning permission for the construction of a single detached dwelling. Guide price: £120,000. Planning authority: Durham County Council, DM/19/03749/OUT. George F White, 01833 690 390, barnardcastle@georgefwhite.co.uk

CUMBRIA

CARLISLE
Durdar Road – Two plots available, each with outline planning permission for a four-bedroom detached family home. Guide price: £100,000 per plot. Planning authority: Carlisle City Council, 17/1065. Homesearch Direct Ltd, 01228 515 515, enquiries@homesearch-direct.co.uk

STAINBURN, WORKINGTON
The Oaks – Single building plot on an exclusive residential development of three properties. Outline planning permission is in place for a five-bedroom contemporary home with parking, integral garage and gardens. Guide price: £150,000. Planning authority: Allerdale Borough Council, 2/2015/0728. Fine & Country, 01768 869 007, northlakes@fineandcountry.com

DERBYSHIRE

MELBOURNE
Plot adj The Crescent, Station Road – Single building plot with planning permission for the erection of a single-storey, two-bedroom dwelling of around 875 sq ft. Guide price: £125,000. Planning authority: South Derbyshire District Council, DMPA/2019/1127. Ashley Adams, 01332 865 568, melbourneinfo@ashleyadams.co.uk

STONEY MIDDLETON, HOPE VALLEY
The Old Village Store Building Plot, Main Road – Former village store with planning permission for replacement with a three-storey dwelling with two bedrooms together with a garage and garden. Guide price £75,000. Planning authority: Peak District National Park, NP/DDD/0618/0527. Bagshaws, 01629 812 777, bakewell@bagshaws.com

TURNDITCH
Ashbourne Road, Cowers Lane – Development site with outline consent for a 3,229 sq ft detached home with detached double garage. Guide price: £250,000. Planning authority: Amber Valley Borough Council, AVA/2019/0485. Hall & Benson, 01332 555 945, allestree@hallandbenson.co.uk

WINGERWORTH, CHESTERFIELD
Land behind Nethermoor Road – Plot of land with planning permission granted for a detached dwelling of around 2,800 sq ft. Guide price: £310,000. Planning authority: North East Derbyshire District Council, 19/00048/FL. Hunters, 01246 540 540, chesterfield@hunters.com

DEVON

CHARLES, NEAR BRAYFORD
Charles, Two plots – Outline planning for demolition and rebuild for two plots. Planning authority: North Devon Council. Price band: £150,001-£200,000. Private seller, 07570 791 768, damian_pope@hotmail.com

SIDMOUTH
Peaslands Road – Level building plot in a sought-after coastal town with planning consent for a two-storey two-bedroom dwelling with garden and off-road parking. Guide price: £160,000. Planning authority: East Devon District Council, 19/2142/FUL. Hall & Scott, 01404 812 000, ottery@hallandscott.co.uk

TIVERTON
Westleigh – Single building plot with full planning permission for a two-bedroom bungalow with driveway and parking. Guide price: £100,000. Planning authority: Mid Devon District Council, 19/01700/FULL. Seddons Estate Agents, 01884 253 500, tiverton@seddons.com

WEMBURY
Knighton Road – Plot of circa 475 sqm with full planning permission for a 71 sqm home with off-road parking for two vehicles. Guide price: £150,000. Planning authority: South Hams District Council, 191274. Luscombe Maye, 01752 880 044, yealmpton@luscombemaye.com

DORSET

WIMBORNE
Sunny Patch, Newtown – Single building plot with detailed planning consent for a four-bedroom detached house. Guide price: £330,000. Planning authority: East Dorset District Council.
Christopher Batten, 01202 841 171, properties@christopherbatten.com

WITCHAMPTON
Freehold building plot in the heart of this idyllic Dorset village. Currently on site there is a dilapidated cottage which will make way for a 1,600 sq ft four-bedroom stunning family home with open Plan kitchen/living room with separate family room. Planning authority: East Dorset District Council, 3/19/1846/FUL.
Price band: £300,001-£450,000.
Land & Plot Finder, 08431 781 288, andy@landandplotfinder.co.uk

EAST SUSSEX

SEDLESCOMBE, BATTLE
Hurst Lane – Plot of around 1 acre of mixed woodland with detailed planning permission for a three-bedroom bungalow with double garage and gated driveway. Guide price: £449,950. Planning authority: Rother District Council, RR/2005/2453/P. Rush Witt & Wilson, 01424 774 440, battle@rushwittwilson.co.uk

UPPER DICKER, HAILSHAM
Off Coldharbour Road – Single building plot with planning permission for a single-storey two-bedroom dwelling. OIEO £175,000. Planning authority: Wealden District Council, WD/2018/1345/F. Campbell's Estate Agents, 01424 774 774, info@campbellsproperty.co.uk

ESSEX

ROWHEDGE, COLCHESTER
Fingringhoe Road – Single building plot of around 0.57 acres with planning consent granted for a four-bedroom detached home with double garage and large private garden. Guide price: £300,000-£320,000. Planning authority: Colchester Borough Council, 190458. Stanfords, 01206 842 156, info@stanfords-colchester.co.uk

ST LAWRENCE
Main Road – Single building plot measuring 183' deep x 27" wide with outline planning permission for a three-bedroom chalet-style dwelling in a quaint waterside village. Guide price: £125,000. Planning authority: Maldon District

COLNE ENGAINE, COLCHESTER, ESSEX

Burtons Barn – Detached barn and associated outbuilding set in 0.5 acres of land. Full planning consent has been granted for its change of use into a three-bedroom dwelling, parking and garden. Guide price: £300,000. Planning authority: Braintree District Council, 19/01511/FUL.
Strutt & Parker, 01245 254 600, chelmsford@struttandparker.co.uk

Council, 18/01357/OUT.
Church & Hawes, 01621 782 652, burnham@churchandhawes.com

HEREFORDSHIRE

LLANGARRON

Oakland's Paddock – Four individual large plots for sale in the small village of Llangarron, ideally situated between the old market towns of Ross on Wye and Monmouth. The M50 starting from Ross on Wye only 15 minutes away. Planning authority: Herefordshire Council, P191288/F. Price band: £200,001-£250,000. Private seller, 01600 750 333, farrcottages@yahoo.com

LLANGARRON

Old Trecilla buildings – Two large building plots for sale in the small village of Llangarron. Approximately 5 miles to Ross on Wye and 6 miles to Monmouth. 15 minutes to the start of the M50 from Ross on Wye. Planning authority: Herefordshire Council, P191276/F. Price band: £150,001-£200,000. Private seller, 01600 750333, farrcottages@yahoo.com

HERTFORDSHIRE

TILEKILN GREEN, GREAT HALLINGBURY

Start Hill – A building plot for a single four- to five-bedroom detached dwelling of 2,335 sq ft, and a detached cart lodge with 505 sq ft and over 300 sq ft of space above. Guide price £325,000. Planning authority: Uttlesford District Council, UTT/19/0160/FUL & UTT/18/2888/FUL. Mullucks Wells, 01799 582 600, walden@mullucks.co.uk

KENT

BEXLEY

Plot 2 & Plot 3, Tile Kiln Lane – Two plots available separately, ready to be built on with the original property having been demolished and cleared. Planning permission granted to build five-bedroom detached properties of 259 sqm. Guide price £395,000 per plot. Planning authority: London Borough of Bexley, 19/01082/FUL. Robinson Jackson, 0208 298 7000, bexleyheath@robinson-jackson.com

HARTLEY

Plot 1 Church Road – Single building plot with planning permission granted for a four-bedroom 1,800 sq ft detached house with rear garden. Guide price: £350,000. Planning authority: Sevenoaks District Council, 18/00858/FUL. Clifton & Co Estate Agents, 01474 700 101, hartley@cliftonandco.com

WHITSTABLE

Cornwallis Circle – A plot of land in a sought-after central location for which planning has been granted for a detached two-storey dwelling. Guide price £217,500. Planning authority: Canterbury City Council, CA//18/00053. Kent Estate Agencies, 01227 274 220, tankerton@kent-estate-agencies.co.uk

LANCASHIRE

GRIMSARGH, PRESTON

Elston Lane – Two building plots available separately, each with full planning permission for a bespoke detached five-bedroom property of approx 4,430 sq ft. Prices from £300,000. Planning authority: Preston City Council, 06/2018/0921. Dewhurst Homes, 01772 788 811 , fulwood@dewhursthomes.co.uk

ST ANNES

Shepherd Road North – Plot of land with road frontage and planning consent for a two-storey detached house and integral garage, following the demolition of existing outbuildings. Guide price: £99,950. Planning authority: Fylde Borough Council. Hunters, 01253 362 640, blackpool@hunters.com

WARTON

Land off Harbour Lane – 0.9 acres suitable for self build scheme of four or five two-storey houses. Planning authority: Fylde Borough Council. Price band: £150,001-£200,000. Private seller, 07929 057 670, steve@dtjoseph.com

LEICESTERSHIRE

COTTINGHAM, MARKET HARBOROUGH

Barn rear 11A Water Lane – A barn ideal for conversion. There has been a historic application for the conversion from a barn to form a three- to four-bedroom residential dwelling. OIRO £250,000. Planning authority: Corby Borough Council. Moores, 01572 757 979, office@mooresestateagents.com

TUGBY

Plots off Hallaton Road – Several plots available with full consent for four- and five-bedroom detached homes. Prices range from £270,000-£380,000. Planning reference: APP/F2415/W/18/3195950. James Sellicks Estate Agents, 01858 410 008, mh@jamessellicks.com

LINCOLNSHIRE

DONINGTON

Quadring Road – 0.47 acres with outline consent for residential development with an indicative layout for three bungalows. Planning authority: South Holland District Council, H04-0997-19. Price band: £200,001-£250,000. Longstaff, 01775 765 536 / 01775 766 766, commercial@longstaff.com

HUMBERSTON

Plot 2, Tetney Road – One of three plots (Plot 1 sold) at Manor Farm, Plot 2 has planning permission for a pair of four bedroom, semi-detached dwellings. Guide price £200,000. Planning authority: North East Lincolnshire Council, DM/0199/16/FUL and DM/0200/16/LBC. Masons Rural & Equestrian, 01507 350 500, enquiries@masons-surveyors.co.uk

KIRTON HOLME, BOSTON

Beck Bank – Single building plot with full planning permission for a four-bedroom detached house and garage. Guide price: £139,950. Planning authority: Boston Borough Council.
Bruce Mather Ltd, 01205 365 032, sales@brucemather.co.uk

SUTTON ST EDMUND, SPALDING

Cross Road – Rural building plot with a frontage of 14m, a depth of 53m and a rear width of 14.5m. Outline consent is in place for a chalet-style dwelling with field views to the front. Guide price: £89,000. Planning authority: South Holland District Council, H19-0345-19. Maxey Grounds & Co, 01945 583 123, wisbech@maxeygrounds.co.uk

TONGUE END, SPALDING

The Old Mission, Counter Drain Drove – Semi-rural site with outline planning permission granted for two three-bedroom homes with linked garages. Offers over £130,000. Planning authority: South Holland District Council, H03-0773-19. William H Brown, 01775 711 711, spalding@williamhbrown.co.uk

WYBERTON, BOSTON

Tytton Lane East – Single plot with full planning permission for for a four-bedroom detached home, following the demolition of the existing bungalow. Guide price: £89,950. Planning authority: Boston Borough Council, B/19/0454. Sharman Burgess, 01205 361 161, sales@sharmanburgess.com

MERSEYSIDE

BROMBOROUGH

Uplands Road – Single building plot of around 440 sqm with planning permission granted for a two-storey single-storey dwelling with ample parking and southerly facing garden. Guide price: £125,000. Planning authority: Wirral Council, APP/19/01207. Brennan Ayre O'Neill, 0151 343 9060, Bromborough@b-a-o.com

IRBY, WIRRAL

Mill Hill Road – Single building plot with planning permission granted for a four-bedroom detached dwelling of circa 2,200 sq ft. Offers over £250,000. Planning authority: Wirral Council, APP/18/00859. Hewitt Adams, 0151 342 8200, hello@hewittadams.co.uk

FURNEUX PELHAM, BUNTINGFORD, HERTFORDSHIRE

Plot adj. Hillside – A 0.2 acre building plot with full planning permission for a three- to four-bedroom detached dwelling with a generous garden backing onto open countryside located in a quiet lane in the heart of picturesque village. Guide price £225,000. Planning authority: East Hertfordshire District Council, 3/18/1044/FUL.
Cheffins, 01799 523 656, saffron-walden@cheffins.co.uk

GRAFTY GREEN, KENT

Land at Kitsilano – Single building plot measuring 23m x 14m with full planning permission for a detached two-bedroom chalet bungalow. Guide price: £175,000. Planning authority: Maidstone Borough Council, 19/505066/FULL.
Philip Jarvis, 01622 858 241, homes@philipjarvis.co.uk

NORFOLK

ASHWICKEN
East Winch Road – Single building plot of arounds two thirds of an acre with full planning permission for a 3,400 sq ft four-bedroom three-storey detached home with double garage and rear garden. Guide price: £425,000. Planning authority: King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, 18/02084/F. Sowerbys, 01553 766 741, kingslynn@sowerbys.com

COSTESSEY
Northfields, Ringland Lane – Rural plot extending to one-and-a-half acres with full planning permission granted for a three-bedroom detached home and garage. OIEO £250,000. Planning authority: South Norfolk District Council, 2018/2037. Stobart & Hurrell, 01603 782 782, enquiries@stobarthurrell.co.uk

ELM
Meadowgate Lane – Opportunity to restore a Grade II listed coach house and build a four-bedroom home with courtyard garden, attached garage and off-road parking, set in the grounds of Oxburgh Hall. Guide price: £150,000. Planning authority: King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council. Fine & Country North & West Norfolk, 01553 769 100, wendy.graham@fineandcountry.com

HOPTON, GREAT YARMOUTH
Sidegate Road – Single building plot with outline planning permission granted for a contemporary three-bedroom detached house with garden and parking. Guide price: £90,000. Planning authority: Great Yarmouth Borough Council, 06/19/0190/0. Aldreds, 01493 664 600, yarmouth@aldreds.co.uk

TILNEY ST LAWRENCE, KINGS LYNN
Church Road – Detached period barn with planning permission for conversion into a three-bedroom home of circa 3,900 sq ft, set in grounds of around 1.5 acres with parking and turning area, courtyard garden, private rear garden and paddock area to the rear. Price on application. Planning authority: King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council, 15/01849/F. Belton Duffey, 01553 770 055, info@beltonduffey.com

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

MIDDLETON, NR MARKET HARBOROUGH
16 Main Street – A single building plot in the centre of the village with full planning consent for part demolition of the existing garage and reconstruction as a single five-bedroom, two-storey dwelling of approx 1,833 sq ft with associated parking and garden. OIEO £175,000. Planning authority: Corby Borough Council, 16/00417/DPA. Berrys, 01536 532 376, adam.farnsworth@berrys.uk.com

SILVERSTONE
Brackley Road – Single building plot with outline planning consent for a four-bedroom detached house of circa 1,650 sq ft with driveway and single detached garage. Guide price: £175,000. Planning authority: South Northamptonshire Council, S/2019/2352/FUL. Howkins & Harrison, 01327 397 979, towcester@howkinsandharrison.co.uk

NORTHUMBERLAND

CATTON
Land N. of Meadow Gate – 0.38 acres of land with uninterrupted views. Planning permission for a detached three reception room, four-bedroom, three-bathroom home with a two-car garage. Guide price £150,000. Planning authority: Northumberland County Council, 18/01156/FUL. Bradley Hall, 0191 284 2255, gosforth@bradleyhall.co.uk

HORNCLIFFE, BERWICK-UPON-TWEED
Plot at West End – Building plot of approx 385 sqm with full planning permission for a two-bedroom bungalow with integrated garage, set in a village location with open views of the surrounding countryside. Guide price: £65,000. Planning authority: Northumberland County Council, 18/00688/FUL. Tyne and Tweed, 01289 331 555, info@tyneandtweed.com

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

BINGHAM
Raymond Drive – L-shaped cul-de-sac plot of around 448 sqm with full planning permission granted for a 1,433 sq ft dormer-style dwelling. Guide price: £150,000. Planning authority: Rushcliffe Borough Council, 18/00677/FUL. Richard Watkinson & Partners, 01949 836 678, bingham@richardwatkinson.co.uk

GIRTON, NEWARK
High Street – Traditional farm buildings set in 0.55 acres with full planning permission for conversion into a five-bedroom dwelling of around 2,368 sq ft with garden space. There is a 13.5m x 13.5m Atcost concrete frame agricultural building on the site. Guide price: £165,000. Planning authority: Newark and Sherwood District Council, 17/01005/FUL. Richard Watkinson & Partners, 01636 611 811, newark@richardwatkinson.co.uk

KNEETON
Slacks Lane – Former farm cottage set in 0.11 acres in a Conservation Area with planning consent for conversion and a single-storey extension to form a three-bedroom property with views of the Trent Valley. Guide price: £220,000. Planning authority: Rushcliffe Borough Council, 19/02415/FUL. Richard Watkinson & Partners, 01636 611 811, newark@richardwatkinson.co.uk

WEST BRIDGFORD
Wilford Lane – Single building plot measuring 427 sqm with planning permission for a detached four-bedroom eco home with large garden store, undercroft parking and south-west facing garden. Guide price: £275,000. Planning authority: Rushcliffe Borough Council, 19/01899/FUL. Royston & Lund Estate Agents, 0115 981 1888, sales@royston-lund.co.uk

OXFORDSHIRE

POSTCOMBE
Highfield, Lower Road – Single building plot with full planning permission for a three-bedroom detached property of 1,315 sq ft. OIEO £250,000. Planning authority: South Oxfordshire District Council, P19/S4596/FUL. Bonners & Babingtons, 01844 354 554, chinnor@bb-estateagents.co.uk

STADHAMPTON, OXFORD
Watlington Road – Plot of land with planning permission granted for a three-bedroom detached house. Price on application. Planning authority: South Oxfordshire District Council, P17/S1993/FULP. Penny & Sinclair, 07894 701 012, lizanne@pennyandsinclair.co.uk

WHEATLEY
Littleworth Road – Two plots available separately, each with planning permission for a four-bedroom 1,800 sq ft dwelling with garage, driveway parking and front and rear gardens. Price per plot: £315,000. Scott Fraser, 01885 759 500, sales@scottfraser.co.uk

PEMBROKESHIRE

HAVERFORDWEST
Plot adj Arfon – Level building plot with detailed consent and Building Regs approved for a three-bedroom dwelling with off-road parking and front and rear gardens. Guide price: £80,000. Planning authority: Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, 10/0542/PA. J J Morris, 01348 873 836, fishguard@jjmorris.com

PENYBRYN, CARDIGAN
Plot 1 Broyan Lane, Broyan Road – One of three plots available with rural views and outline consent for a single dwelling. Guide price: £89,950. Planning authority: Pembrokeshire County Council, 06/1588/PA. J J Morris, 01348 873 836, fishguard@jjmorris.com

SHROPSHIRE

HOPTON WAFERS, NR CLEOBURY MORTIMER
Plot 1 Brookfield – Single building plot with planning permission for a four-bedroom detached house of over 1,800 sq ft with double garage. Guide price: £185,000. Planning authority:

CATON, LANCASHIRE

Fisher Car Park, Mill Lane – Single building plot in a semi-rural location with outline planning permission granted for a detached dwelling of 209 sqm. Guide price: £200,000. Planning authority: Lancaster City Council, 19/00292/OUT.
Matthews Benjamin, 01524 384 960, sales@matthewsbenjamin.co.uk

NARBOROUGH, KINGS LYNN, NORFOLK

Plot, Eastfields – A corner building plot with full planning permission granted for a detached three-bedroom chalet-style house. Guide price £165,000. Planning authority: Breckland District Council, 3PL/2019/0327/F.
Longsons, 01760 721 389, info@longsons.co.uk

Shropshire Council, 18/03718/FUL. Andrew Grant, 01905 734 734, worcester@andrew-grant.co.uk

PONTESBURY

Brook Villas – Single building plot of around 338 sqm with outline planning permission for a four-bedroom detached house. Guide price: £135,000. Planning authority: Shropshire Council, 14/04998/OUT. D B Roberts & Partners, 01743 357 032, shrewsbury@dbroberts.co.uk

TIBBERTON, NEWPORT

Plot adj Rose Green – Single building plot of approx 800 sqm in a central village location with outline consent and approval or reserved matters for the erection of a 3,000 sq ft detached property and detached garage. Guide price: £210,000. Planning authority: Telford & Wrekin Council, TWC/2017/0965 and TWC/2019/0597. Barbers, 01952 820 239, newport@barbers-online.co.uk

SOMERSET

NORTH NEWTON, BRIDGWATER

Land at Brook Turn – Single building plot with full planning permission for a detached dwelling with off-road parking and private garden. OIRO £160,000. Planning authority: Sedgemoor District Council, 37/19/00113. Tamlyns, 01278 454 500, bridgwater@tamlyns.co.uk

WELLINGTON

Brunton Barn, Middle Green Road – A part-converted traditional barn with consent for conversion to a four-bedroom detached dwelling, down a private drive, set in half an acre, on the edge of the Blackdown Hills, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The barn is an L-Shaped building of brick, block and stone elevations under a slate roof. Guide price £450,000 . Planning authority: Taunton Deane Borough Council, 44/18/0009/CQ. Stags, 01823 662 822, wellington@stags.co.uk

SOUTH YORKSHIRE

BARNSLEY

Rotherham Road – Plot of land with far-reaching views and planning permission for a three-bedroom bungalow. Guide price: £100,000. Planning authority: Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, 2018/0421. Hunters, 01226 447155, barnsley@hunters.com

BRINSWORTH, ROTHERHAM

Grange Farm Close – Plot measuring 52ft x 105ft with outline consent for residential development. Guide price: £60,000. Paul Fox, 01724 282 868, scunthorpe@paul-fox.com

WESTWOODSIDE

Plot A adj. Mill House, Tower Hill – A potential residential development opportunity with about 3.21 acres, for sale by private treaty. Planning authority: North Lincolnshire Council. Price band: £200,001-£250,000. Grice & Hunter, 01427 873 684, epworth@gricehunter.co.uk

STAFFORDSHIRE

BURSLEM

Land on Bycars Road – A level plot of land extending to 0.21 acres which has never been developed and now has outline planning permission to build three detached two-storey houses with front and rear gardens and off-road parking. Planning authority: Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 61773/OUT. Price band: £100,001-£150,000. Rory Mack Associates, 01782 715 725, bh@rorymack.co.uk

MOBBERLEY

Land off Smithy Lane – Plot in a sought-after area with outline consent for a detached residential home. Guide price: £125,000. Planning authority: Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, SMD/2019/0441. Kevin Ford & Co, 01538 751 133, natashaford@kevinfordandcoltd.co.uk

TAMWORTH

29 Comberford Road – A three-bedroom end-terrace cottage together with a building plot to the rear with planning permission for a three-bedroom detached dwelling. Guide price £379,950. Planning authority: Tamworth Borough Council, 0452/2019. Mark Evans & Co, 01827 311 300, info@markevanstamworth.com

SUFFOLK

NORTON

Plot 1 Ashfield Road – Fully serviced self build plot of around 0.22 acres with detailed planning permission granted for a detached two-storey four-bedroom dwelling of circa 1,905 sq ft with detached double garage. Guide price: £225,000. Planning authority: Mid Suffolk District Council, DC/19/03463. Lacy Scott & Knight, 01284 748 600, bury@lsk.co.uk

POSLINGFORD

Flax Farm Barn, Stansfield Road – Agricultural barn with Class Q permission for conversion into two four-bedroom properties, set in 0.4 acres with views over the Suffolk countryside. Guide price: £300,000. Planning authority: St Edmundsbury Borough Council, DC/19/0091/P3QPA. Lacy Scott & Knight, 01284 748 600, bury@lsk.co.uk

SUDBURY

Bulmer Road – A site with granted planning permission for a pair of semi-detached homes. Planning authority: Babergh District Council, DC/18/03814. Price band: £150,001-£200,000. William H Brown, 01787 37372, Sudbury@williamhbrown.co.uk

WINGFIELD

Church Road – 0.16 acre corner plot with planning consent for a five-bedroom detached house with scenic views. Guide price: £165,000. Planning authority: Mid Suffolk District Council, OL/195/04. Durrants, 01379 851 038, harleston@durrants.com

WOODBRIDGE

Prentices Lane – 0.977 acre building plot with full planning consent for two single-storey dwellings of around 2,045 sq ft with single garage. Guide price: £275,000. Planning authority: Suffolk Coastal District Council, DC/17/3002/FUL. Fenn Wright, 01394 333 346, woodbridge@fennwright.co.uk

WARWICKSHIRE

DUNCHURCH, RUGBY

Cawston Lane – Single plot in an idyllic sought-after location with full planning consent for a detached three-bedroom house and garage. Guide price: £150,000. Planning authority: Rugby Borough Council, R18/1356. Newman Estate Agents, 01788 820 000/ 01788 571 111, brian.williams@newman.uk.com

OXHILL

Plot adj Merrydown, Green Lane – Semi-rural plot with detailed planning consent for an architect-designed four-bedroom detached house of around 2,300 sq ft, set in an established garden with countryside views. Guide price: £275,000. Planning authority: Stratford-on-Avon District Council, 16/03303/FUL. Sheldon Bosley Knight, 01926 857 595, kenilworth@sheldonbosleyknight.co.uk

BICTON HEATH, SHREWSBURY, SHROPSHIRE

Racecourse Lane – Single building plot with full planning permission for a three-bedroom dwelling with parking and private garden, with potential to reconfigure to four bedrooms with an added garage. Planning authority: Shropshire Council, 19/03291/FUL. Price band: £100,001-£150,000.
Balfours, 01743 353 511, sales@balfours.co.uk

BEAUMONDE

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KALDEWEI

KALDEWEI presents a flexible solution suitable for both small bathrooms and spacious family bathrooms. Kaldewei's Cayono bath comes in five different sizes – 150 x 70cm, 160 x 70cm, 170 x 70cm, 170 x 75cm and 180 x 80cm. Thanks to its spacious interior, the Cayono provides ample room for a relaxing bath in any size. Its smooth base can optionally be provided with an anti-slip enamel finish for comfortable and safe showering. All Kaldewei steel enamel bathroom solutions are 100% recyclable and are supplied with a 30-year guarantee.

For further information please contact:
01480 498053 | **www.kaldewei.co.uk**

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THE SHOP FLOOR PROJECT is an award-winning online shop, founded in 2006 with the aim to design, develop and source collections traditional makers and manufactures from around the world. Inspired by the 'structure and chaos in nature', Megan Bogonovich explores the way living things develop and grow. Using an archive of hundreds of handmade moulds, she constructs these fascinating coral-like structures from fine porcelain before applying a multitude of glazes. Each piece is unique with its own ceramic DNA.

For more information please contact:
01229 584537 | **www.theshopfloorproject.com**

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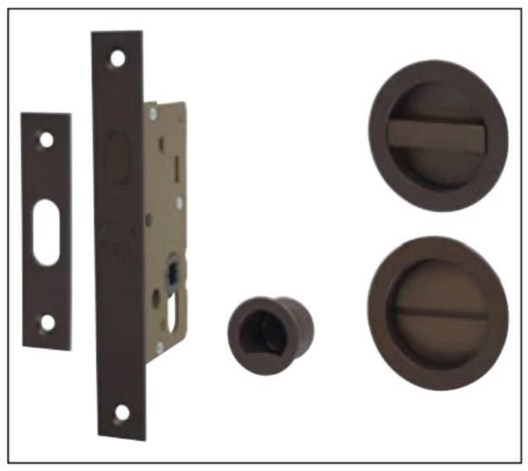

Sliding and pocket doors are becoming an increasingly popular choice for optimising floor space and adding a modern touch to any property. To achieve a stylish finish, check out the new M Marcus range of sliding door accessories available from **IRONMONGERY*DIRECT***. All products are designed and manufactured in Italy and come in satin brass, matt bronze and satin chrome finishes.

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LIVING IT UP supplies a range of unique contemporary furniture from design-led styles to comforting cosies to the whole of the UK. Their Charlie Armchair is a modern and relaxing chair with generously padded cushions. Choose from a range of colours to fit perfectly with your space, from spring green to ocean grey. While the Frances Armchair in Sedgwick Green is a modern chair with deep padded cushions and sleek finishes adding a touch of luxury to any home.

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For those with a home near the coast, Garador offers the perfect solution – the GaraRoll roller door.

Gararoll is constructed from rust-resistant aluminium laths, which roll up into a box at the head of the garage door opening. Unlike steel or timber, the aluminium laths resist corrosion by moisture and salt in the air. Gararoll also maximizes space both on the driveway and internally in the garage, especially useful if you want to park the car close up to the garage door or need access to the roof for loft storage.

Traffic White is a top colour favourite in coastal homes, but Garador's GaraRoll also comes in a wide range of colours and finishes.

Find out more by visiting
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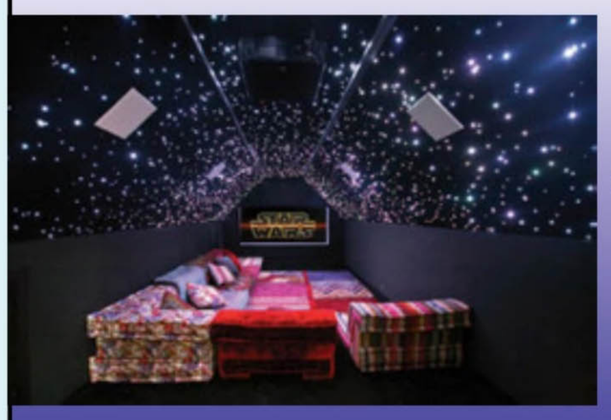

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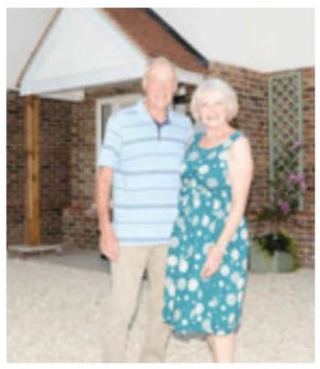
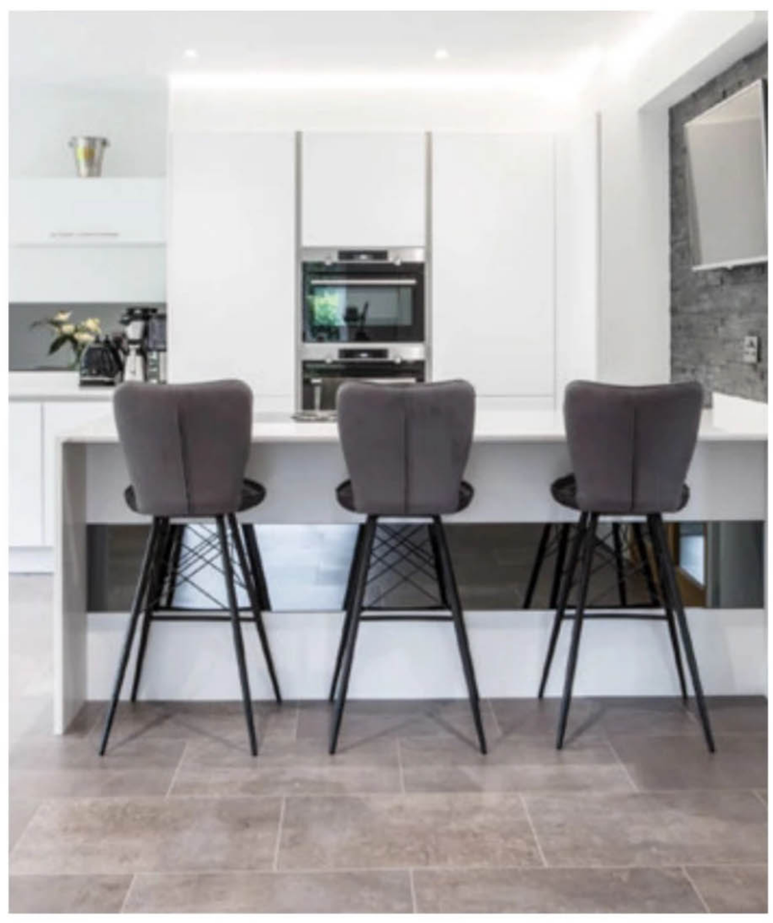


Traditional-style timber frame home

This traditional house in Dorset has white render and brick facades, spacious living areas and glazed doors to the garden.

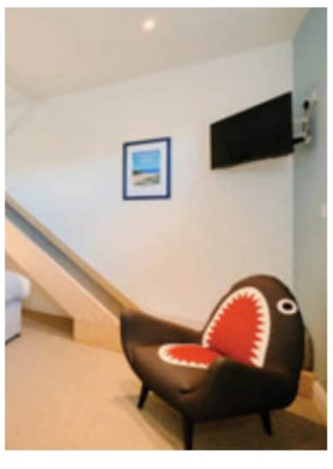
Built in just six months

This dormer bungalow features crisp white render with contrasting anthracite aluminium windows, a colour scheme that is continued on the interior.



Quirky fun house

Overlooking Mawgan Porth, this quirky new build blends seamlessly into the surrounding landscape, with its grass-covered roof, natural stonework and glass-edged terrace. An underground games room, cinema, 'hidden' bath, indoor climbing wall and slide make this a house for fun.



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SEVEN SAFEGUARDS FOR A HEALTHY HOME

Highly insulated houses have their hazards, argues **Gerald Cole.**

I'm writing this through streaming eyes and the occasional volcanic sneeze (do keep the page at a safe distance). Illness, as I'm being reminded, prompts us to hunker down and hope to recover rapidly in our favourite place of safety, which for most of us means home.

But, in reality, how safe is it? The easy answer is pretty damn safe. In fact, in historical terms, the health and safety levels of the modern home are within spitting distance of miraculous.

We have tiled roofs and double walls of brick and concrete to keep out the elements, waterproof membranes in the walls and floor to block rising damp, central heating, cavity insulation and double glazing to keep us warm, and disease-free water on tap.

So what's to worry about? Well, our basic needs may not have changed through history, but our environment has, sometimes dramatically. Today the biggest change involves, of course, the climate. Rising carbon dioxide levels are causing milder, wetter winters and hotter, dryer summers.

One response to this has been to cut the CO_2 produced by home heating by beefing up insulation levels. This certainly makes houses cheaper to run, and more comfortable. But new builds are also required to be ever more airtight – since the smallest draught can halve the effectiveness of insulation. Again, entirely practical. Except in a heatwave when overheating can become a serious danger, especially to the very young or the elderly.

An airtight home can also trap moisture, encouraging the growth of mould, which can seriously affect health. It joins a host of common pollutants such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs) offgassed by new carpets, furniture and building materials, alongside carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide from burning fires, gas hobs and ovens. And that's not to mention external pollutants, especially if you live close to a major road.

But this isn't meant to be a scare story. Solutions to these problems are numerous, and, like so much else in self build, are best applied at the design stage. Here, then, are seven hopefully useful suggestions to make your new home as safe as currently possible.

1 Fit a whole house mechanical ventilation and heat recovery system (MVHR). Here, a central double fan and heat exchanger are connected to separate systems of ducting. One system draws stale, moist air from kitchens, bathrooms and utility rooms and vents it outside, via the heat exchanger, which transfers its warmth to incoming fresh air. This is then distributed via the second system of ducts to living areas. Filters can be fitted to exclude outside pollutants.
Alternative: if your home isn't sufficiently airtight, fit a positive input ventilation system (PIV). A single continuously running fan, usually sited in a loft, draws in fresh air from outside, filters it and channels it to a single central outlet. The higher internal pressure created squeezes stale air out through trickle vents in windows and other leakage points.

2 Treat 'dot and dab' plasterboard with caution. Traditionally, external masonry walls are covered internally with two coats of plaster. A quicker, cheaper alternative is to fit sheets of plasterboard, secured by dabs of mortar. But if even tiny gaps are left in the underlying blockwork, moisture can enter behind the plasterboard, creating mould. External air can also circulate, bypassing the insulation and cooling the house.

3 Install underfloor heating. Conventional central heating radiators actually work by convection, warming the nearby air, which rises, cools and falls to be re-heated. These air currents spread dust and pollutants. Underfloor heating (UFH) works by radiant heat, directly heating the objects and people above it, minimising convection currents.
Alternative: fit radiant heat panels which use the same principle. They work with infrared and can be installed on walls or ceilings, or can even be disguised as mirrors or artworks.

4 Consider natural insulation. These include sheep's wool, hemp, flax, wood fibre and cork. All five are non-irritant in handling and hygroscopic, ie able to absorb and give up moisture and so regulate temperature. They're also breathable,

allowing moisture vapour to pass through without losing their insulation value. Sheep's wool can also absorb and neutralise toxins. Main drawbacks are: larger volumes are needed to match the insulation values of rigid, petroleum-based foams, and their higher cost.

5 Choose a room-sealed wood-burning stove. Wood-burning stoves, according to recent research, spray more particulates into the air than heavy duty lorries. New legislation will now ban the burning of coal or wet wood in domestic stoves. You can, however, still enjoy the benefits of a roaring fire by choosing a wood-burner with an external air supply. These are fed either from a duct in an adjacent external wall or a secondary duct in the existing exhaust flue. Look for a stove with a 'total' direct air connection – ie both combustion and exhaust are separate from the internal atmosphere. For an especially airtight home, opt for a 'leak-sealed' model.

6 Choose solid floors. Carpeting is enduringly popular for its warmth, comfort and colour range, but it also harbours dust, pollen, VOCs – either in its composition or backing – and a host of allergens. Solid floors are easier to keep clean, don't attract dust mites or mould and are much more efficient at transmitting the radiant heat of underfloor heating. Choices range from ultra-durable ceramics, slate and stone to wood, either natural or engineered, to linoleum, which is naturally antibacterial.

7 Cook electric. Specifically using an induction hob, which only heats a pot or pan directly, leaving the hob itself cool. Gas hobs and ovens can produce carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide, both harmful.

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