



Woodland wonder

Lesley and David Black realised a 40-year dream when they built their oak-framed home surrounded by mature trees and shrubs in Cornwall.

STORY: **LOUISE PARKIN** PICTURES: **OAKWRIGHTS/MARK WELSH**

In brief
Project Oak-framed and SIPs new build
Location St Ives, Cornwall
Cost £200,000
Spent £350,000
Worth £750,000



Completing a self build is not for the faint-hearted. Energy, determination, patience, bloody-mindedness, creativity and drive are usually required to take a project from conception to completion. And so the realisation of Lesley and David Black's dream to create a green oak frame home in Cornwall is particularly remarkable, given that Lesley is in her 70s and David in his 80s.

The couple semi-retired and moved to Cornwall from Kent 27 years ago, renovating and converting three barns into a home and two holiday lets. Lesley explains: "We bought the barns when we lived in Kent and spent weekends and holidays on site in a caravan. Eventually we moved down here permanently and lived in the barn until 2003."

They lived in a new house for nine years but had always admired the style of Kentish barns, and so in 2012 they decided it was time to build a home of their own. They sold up and lived in a campervan for two years, to ensure they were ready to move when a plot became available, and took out subscriptions to plot websites, but it was their persistent nagging of estate agents that ultimately bore fruit. "We found a plot but the agent advised us it was controversial

EXTERIOR
This oak-framed home also uses SIPs, with larch and render cladding and a slate roof, surrounded by mature gardens.



HOMES **New build**

because an interested developer had illegally removed some trees, which resulted in tree preservation orders and restrictions being put on the site which limited where we could build,” explains Lesley. “There are very few houses around here and the site was a woodland, so the locals were not in favour of anyone building on it. Fortunately the owner of the plot agreed to allow us six months to try and secure planning before the sale was completed.”

An independent arboreal consultant was employed to map every tree and root run, and a detailed garden and tree plan was submitted with their planning application.

David and Lesley chose architect Roger Robinson to help with the planning application, but Hereford company Oakwrights was selected to design the house and make the exposed oak frame.

“We knew of Oakwrights and had visited their show home. They provide exactly the kind of living space we wanted,” says David. He and Lesley talked to Oakwrights’ designer Sara Edwards, who came up with a design based on the Derndale from the company’s Woodhouse range. Planning conditions stipulated that the house must be single storey so the bedrooms were located in the roof space, with the frame modified to have a lower ridge height. This clever trick means the house appears to be two storeys and yet still complies with planning.

Sara produced a 3D design so that David and Lesley could visualise the space much easier. Once the frame and SIPs were manufactured, structural changes would no longer be possible so any tweaks and changes had to be made at this point.

“Although we had a clear picture of what



SETTING
Oak House is surrounded by woodland on all four sides, filled with mature trees and wild flowers, with several spots to sit and enjoy the abundant greenery.

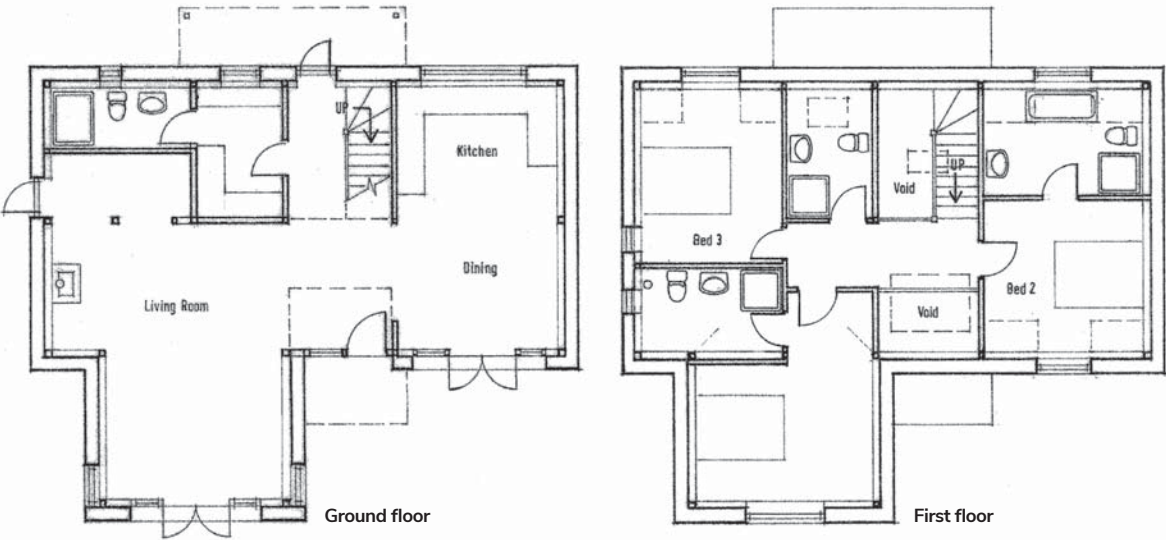
In detail

- PROJECT**
Architects Oakwrights: oakwrights.co.uk and Roger Robinson: rogerrobinson.co.uk
Builder David Burrows of MC Burrows Construction Ltd: 07707 206380
- STRUCTURE**
Brazilian slate roof Empire Roofing: empireroofingsw.co.uk
Larch cladding Oakwrights: oakwrights.co.uk
Guttering Lindab: lindab.com/uk
- FIXTURES AND FITTINGS**
Paint Farrow and Ball: farrow-ball.co.uk
- Underfloor heating** Uponor: uponor.co.uk
Oil-fired boiler Warmflow: warmflow.co.uk
Wood-burning stove Contura: contura.eu
Stove supply Cornwall Woodburners: cornwallwoodburners.co.uk
Bathroom fittings Ideal Standard: ideal-standard.co.uk
Kitchen Kettle Co Kitchens: kettleco.co.uk
Range cooker Kitchener from Rangemaster: rangemaster.co.uk



FLOORPLAN

The ground floor is mainly open plan, with the kitchen/diner to one side and the living room to the other. Upstairs there are three bedrooms, one with an en suite, and a family bathroom.





we wanted, Sara came up with ideas that we would never have thought of, and the house is enhanced because of them,” says Lesley.

Three quotes were sought and a builder was selected, chosen because of his cheerful countenance and easy manner. “We were determined to enjoy the process and not get stressed, and a key part of this was choosing people that we felt we could work with,” Lesley explains. “We chose David Burrows because although he wasn’t the cheapest, he was clearly an easy person to get on with, and we also loved the fact that he is a carpenter. Although he had never worked on an oak-framed home before, he understood wood, and I think that is evident from the level of craftsmanship throughout the house.”

David Burrows carried out the groundworks and laid the foundations, making way for Oakwrights to deliver and assemble the frame. Within just 13 days the structure was erected, with SIPs as infill panels, along with a three-bay open-fronted oak-framed garage. At this point the builder took over again, with Lesley also actively involved, keeping an eye on progress as well as ordering materials.

“The builder David and I shared the project management, while my David mainly played golf,” laughs Lesley. “He had done lots of building work before, particularly on the barns, but we thought it didn’t need two of us breathing down the builder’s neck.”

Both keen gardeners, David and Lesley turned their attention to the land around the perimeter during the build, landscaping and planting shrubs. The woodland garden is filled with mature trees and wild flowers, with several secluded spots designed for eating, relaxing and making the most of the outdoor space.

Mains water runs directly past the site, but due



“We loved barn living and this has the same feel but with all the modern advantages.”

HOMES New build



to new regulations, this could not be accessed so a connection had to be brought 170m from the main road, causing disruption to neighbouring houses and rupturing a neighbour’s water pipe in the process.

There were further delays when the deadline for delivery of the timber windows was missed by seven weeks. Work carried on where possible but progress was impeded by the scaffolding, which had to remain in place until the windows were installed.

The exterior of the home is clad in slow-grown larch up to the eaves, with render to the lower wall sections. Brazilian slate is used on the roof to help visually tie in the home with local buildings, with a small cat-slide section to cover the porch. “There is only a handful of houses around here, so there’s no set style of house really, but we wanted it to look like it belonged so we chose a traditional roof covering,” says Lesley.

The remote location meant that a septic tank and oil-fired boiler were required, with bottled gas used to power the range cooker. Lesley and David also chose to have a wood-burning stove, powder coating the

STOVE

Chosen for decorative purposes rather than warmth, the stove’s flue has been painted to match the guttering.

UPSTAIRS

Vaulted ceilings mean airy spaciousness for the bedrooms, which are cosy thanks to wooden furniture and carpets.



INTERIOR

The warmth of the exposed oak frame is enhanced by the engineered oak flooring which is laid throughout the ground floor.

KITCHEN

The Shaker-style kitchen has a matt granite worktop on the island unit, while oak tops are used on the run of units against the wall.





“Building with green oak has its downsides – lots of movement in the oak, groaning in the middle of the night, and cracking as it dries out, but all this adds to the character.”

LESLEY AND DAVID'S TOP TIP

flue to match the galvanised aluminium drainpipes and guttering. “The house is incredibly well insulated and it's really warm. We often don't need the heating on even in winter, but we wanted a wood-burning stove for decorative reasons; they are so lovely to look at and they make for a cosy home in the winter!” Lesley explains.

As the build neared completion and funds were running low, Lesley and David moved into their new home, just seven months after breaking ground. To save money, the couple decided to complete the interiors themselves.

They lived without a kitchen for six months while they took their time to choose the right one. In the meantime they hung the doors, applied skirtings and completed decorating the interiors. The kitchen/diner is part of a larger broken-plan living area and features ivory Shaker doors, a ceramic sink and an island topped with matt granite work surfaces, while oak tops line the wall-side base units.

With no wall cupboards, Kettle Co Kitchens have added interest with some clever carpentry touches. “Because it's open plan we wanted it to tie in with the rest of the space, so we kept all the cupboards at a low level,” Lesley explains. The dining room has french doors leading into the garden, as does the living area, connecting the house with the mature garden that surrounds the house on all four sides.

A double-height entrance hall with glass balustrade adds drama, and complements the impressive oak frame which is a defining feature of the home. King post trusses in the vaulted ceilings are on show in the galleried landing as well as the bedrooms, and there are posts and beams in every room, some of which were tailored to allow for large items of furniture that Lesley and David were determined to keep. There are three bedrooms and two bathrooms upstairs, one of which is an en suite, and a further shower room on the ground floor.



Undeterred by their roller-coaster experiences, David and Lesley have not ruled out another self build – but not yet. “We loved building this house, but have no plans to do it again for a while – we want to enjoy Oak House for a while first,” says Lesley. Who knows, the couple may be in their 80s and 90s by then.

BATHROOM

Bathroom products were sourced online to find the best deals.

Final word

What was the high point?

From the local golf course we could see the crane lifting the whole frame into place. It went up so quickly, and watching its progress was definitely the highlight for us.

And the low point?

A massive downpour just after the frame went up meant the house was like a swimming pool, and the tannin that came out of the wood was surprising – it looked like teal! We had to pump the water out.

What was your greatest extravagance?

We tried not to be extravagant in our choices, but focused instead on attention to detail. For example, we had the wood-burner flue powder coated to match the aluminium drainpipes and guttering.

And your best buy?

The Rangemaster range cooker. But



we had plenty of time to choose and source what we wanted so we got pretty good deals on everything. We really shopped around.

What do you like best about your home?

The lightness – it lifts you. It's comfy, cosy, substantial and tactile. It's a very warm home, very easy to live in.