



# Homes & Gardens Today

**25 years  
of kitchens**

**Lights, camera, auction**

The beautiful interior of a private house designed by Nottingham architect Julian Owen who is featured earlier in the magazine on page 24. Picture: Nigel Rigden

# Design challenge

In January two Nottinghamshire men - an architect and a violin-maker were awarded MBEs in the New Year Honours List. Keith Armstrong talks to them about their award-winning careers

## The Architect

On the face of it the problem seemed insoluble. How to design a convincing 825sq. ft. two-storey extension for an early 19th century cottage at Tollerton, without breaching a single requirement of today's 14-volume 'library' of Building Regulations.

Such challenges are all part of the working day for award-winning architect Julian Owen of Beeston, who was granted his MBE for his pioneering work in making architects more accessible to private individuals wishing to build or extend their own homes.

Ever since Julian Owen Associates was launched in 1992, every job, large or small, has been given a number, so Julian is able to say with confidence that so far his practice has been involved with over 600 projects, embracing not only private homes, but also many commercial properties, too.

So just how was that 1993 cottage extension achieved, to provide the owners, Dr and Mrs Salisbury, with a third ensuite bedroom, dining room, kitchen extension, a utility room, and a downstairs washroom and lavatory?

Using reclaimed bricks from an early 19th century colliery building helped to blend the new with the old, while introducing 'snap-headers' into the brick courses, created the illusion that the cavity walls were solid, like those of the original cottage. A mock dovecot in the gable end met the building regulation for a fully-ventilated roof space. Another problem was that the original cottage floor was almost at ground level, whereas modern building regulations require two brick courses above ground level for the damp coursing.

"No way were the replica Yorkshire horizontal sliding sash windows going to line up with the originals, so I decided to let the new wing be clearly seen as a sympathetic extension," said Julian, who was to allow the pantile roof to contrast unashamably with the rosemary tiled roof of the original cottage. These were only a few of the difficulties he had to overcome, but they serve to show how seemingly insurmountable problems can be solved by an architect with imagination. Julian won an architectural award from the local Rushcliffe Borough Council for this particular period extension.

Julian received his architect's training at the University of Nottingham between 1980 and 87, and went on to work for



Architect Julian Owen in the atrium of Lenton Lodge

a number of local architectural practices engaged on large commercial developments. But he quickly tired of being what he says was 'a small cog in a big machine', and the idea of starting up his own practice was born. He was later joined by fellow architect Paul Hunt and Mike Lowther, a building technologist.

"What I like about the type of work we do now is that there is always something new to learn, and you never get bored," said Julian. "I also enjoy the personal contact I now have with my clients, while having a fully equipped office extension attached to the house means I can spend more time with my wife and two small daughters."

Julian went on to say that the practice prefers to deal only with contractors who are able to achieve the necessary high standards they demand from their builders, especially when it comes to recreating or restoring the architectural features of a bygone age.

One historical building whose restoration was to win Julian The City Of Nottingham Lord Mayor's Award in 1999 is the imposing three-storey Lenton Lodge on Derby Road. The 30-room Elizabethan-style lodge had been built in 1823 as the main entrance to Wollaton Hall, then home to the Middleton family. Having stood empty and derelict for a number of years, the leasehold was finally acquired from the City Council by a wealthy businessman, who wanted to restore the Lodge for his private residence.

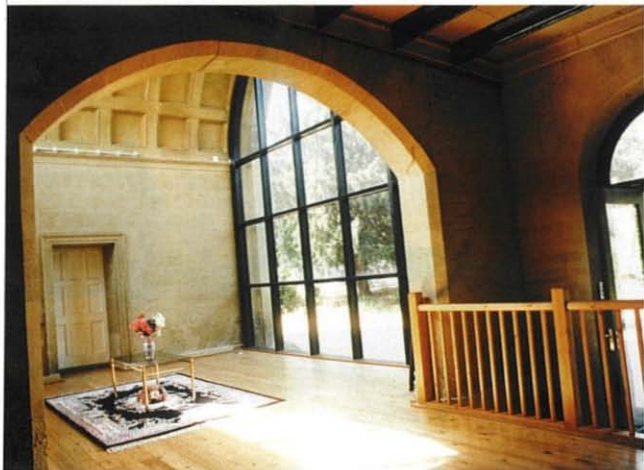
"I realised that the building as it stood wouldn't convert successfully into living accommodation, because it was essentially split in two by the large central archway," said



Cottage extension at Tollerton



Lenton Lodge conversion



An interior view of Lenton Lodge



Restoration of Keeper's Cottage, Rufford Park

Julian. "So, with the permission of English Heritage and the City Council, we glazed-in the archway above and behind the gates, to create a large atrium, with a raised and insulated floor. The gates were always destined to remain closed, as the underground machinery for opening and closing them had rusted up many years ago.

"With all our projects we like to see ourselves as enablers, in that we don't have a set house style like so many other architects do," said Julian.

"We design or adapt to every style you can think of... Georgian, Victorian, neo-vernacular, contemporary, hybrid or whatever. We also try to get inside the heads of our clients, so that we can achieve what they have visualised. Some architects for example will shy away from designing a mock-Tudor house, whereas I would accept that job, and give the client the best mock-Tudor house anyone has ever done.

"The Association of Self-Build Architects (ASBA), the national network I founded with a colleague, Adrian Spawforth, in 1993, takes exhibition stands in various parts of the country, with the aim of making architects more accessible to the general public. Some people feel quite daunted by the prospect of walking into an architect's office,

whereas on an exhibition stand they can chat informally about their requirements to architects in senior positions, and pick up some helpful literature. I also give lectures and organise seminars to help companies and private individuals to fully understand the design process."

When Julian received his letter from the Prime Minister's office last November, telling him he was to be awarded an MBE, he and his wife Jill at first dismissed it as a practical joke: the prime suspect was Julian's elder brother Tim, who had just been awarded an MVO at the palace for his services to the Queen. Julian is at a loss to know who put his own name forward. But he is too modest to attribute it to his ability at coming up with some very original solutions when looking for the middle ground between the planners, local authorities, English Heritage and his clients. Keeping all of them happy by ventilating the roof space of a cottage extension with a mock dove-cote, is something he takes in his stride!

Julian Owen Associates issues a 17-page information pack entitled *Building Your Own Home*, which covers everything from finding a plot to appointing a contractor. The practice has its own website: [www.julianowen.co.uk](http://www.julianowen.co.uk). Email enquiries@julianowen.co.uk ♦