

### Foreword

There can be no doubt that the British public is becoming ever more design and style conscious – and nowhere is this more true than in the home. Marry this with the British obsession with homeownership and you have the recipe for the phenomenon that is self-build. Only a few years ago, self-build was still widely seen as an activity exclusively for the DIY fanatic willing to spend a few years living in a caravan on a muddy building site. Today you can hardly turn on a television or read a newspaper without reading about self-build and it seems that almost everyone has an idea of what their dream home would be like, should they ever get the chance to build it.

Property makeover shows have taught us all how to transform our existing living space and increasingly how to adapt and alter the layout. Ultimately, however, the constraints and limitations of our aging and outdated housing stock leads to the gradual realisation that the only way to achieve what we want without serious compromise, is to build from scratch.

Testament to the growth in individual homebuilding is the success of *Homebuilding & Renovating magazine*, of which I have been editor for ten years. Copy sales have increased more than fourfold since 1994 and the magazine now sells over 40,000 copies a month and is the best selling self-build magazine in the UK.

*Self Build: design and build your own home* has been brilliantly conceived to convince the would-be home builder that high quality self build is perfectly within their reach. Its author, Julian Owen, is an experienced architect who has worked with self-builders for over 13 years and knows better than most that good design does not need to be compromised by more pragmatic but equally important concerns. Indeed, over the years he has built up a successful practice designing and managing the building of custom-made self build homes all over the country. He is a founding member of ASBA, Associated Self Build Architects, an affiliation of architects specializing in helping people to build their own homes, speaks regularly at shows and seminars, and in 2003 he was awarded an MBE for services to architecture.

Part of his mission is to dispel the myth that self build or renovation has to mean rolling up your sleeves and getting up-close and personal with a cement mixer. Another part of it is to prove the maxim that if you can afford to buy an existing house in a particular location, you can afford to build an equivalent but better home in the same location. *Self Build: design and build your own home* more than demonstrates these lessons. Its information is laid out in straightforward step-by-step sections, written in a direct and easy-to-read style that belies the complexity of the subject, and the content is packed full of the insights, advice and warnings of someone who has seen it all.

There are plenty of information resources for anyone thinking of self building or renovating but none to date has given design quality quite such a high billing. Published by the Royal Institute of British Architects' publishing arm, I am very pleased to be able to recommend this important new addition to the literature for all those self builders who believe that good design can unlock the potential of great living.

**Michael Holmes**

**Editor in Chief, *Homebuilding and Renovating* magazine**

# Self Build:

## Design and Build Your Own Home

### Making the Decision

#### The Design and Construction Process

##### Some Frequently Asked Questions

- I don't want to do the building work myself - am I a 'self builder'?
- Why Do It?
- Why Should You Do It?
- Can I afford it?
- Am I the sort of person who can do this?
- How long will it take?
- If it's so great, why isn't everyone doing it?
- Where can I find out more?

##### Magazines

##### Books

##### Exhibitions

##### Television

##### Key People

### Project Preparation

#### Preparing a Budget

##### Into the unknown

##### Where Will the Money Go?

- Developer v house builder costs
- Building costs

##### What will Affect the Cost of Your House?

- House size v quality of specification
- Effect of cost/sq ft on building size
- Where you build
- Your input
- Site conditions and constraints
- Cost-effective v cheap
- Finance costs
- Management
- Building for profit or for a better life?

##### How to Keep on Budget

- Be realistic, get realistic advice
- Monitor and discuss
- Control small decisions
- Contingency
- Professional team
- Good design
- Preparation, preparation, preparation
- Tender correctly
- Changes of mind
- Temporary accommodation costs
- Check site thoroughly
- Never pay in advance
- Time is money
- Keep good records

#### Obtaining Finance

##### Do You Qualify?

- Getting the Best Out of Your Mortgage

##### Stage Payments

- What to Check When Investigating a Mortgage

#### Dealing With the Taxman

##### VAT

##### Capital Gains Tax

##### Council Tax

##### Stamp Duty

#### Preparing a Brief

##### What Information Ought to be Covered by a Design Brief?

##### Appearance

##### Construction Method

- Prefabrication
- Timber Frame or Brick and Block?
- Masonry Construction
- Standard Timber Frame
- Thin-Joint Block
- Post-and-Beam Timber Frame
- Oak Frame
- Structurally Insulated Panels (SIPs)
- Steel Frame
- Expanded Polystyrene Filled with Mass Concrete (PIFs)
- Rammed Earth, Cob and Earth Bricks
- Straw Bales

##### Procurement Route

- DIY Self Build
- Self Manage

- Project Management
- Some of the things that a project manager may – or may not – do for you
- Main Contractor
- Design-Build

#### Lifestyle

- Daily Routine
- Rooms, Their Uses and Connections
- Room Information Sheet
- Whose Room is It?
- Connected to Which Other Spaces?
- Furniture
- Electrics and Lighting

#### Features and Materials

#### Sustainability and Energy Efficiency

#### How long will you live there?

#### Summary

#### Finding a Site

#### Keep an Open Mind

#### Desk Search

- Maps
- Local Plan
- Planning Departments/Planning Register
- Land Listing Agencies
- Magazines
- Local Papers
- English Partnerships
- Websites

#### Networking

- Friends and Family
- Self-Build Collectives
- Self-Build Clubs and Chatrooms

#### The Professionals

- Estate Agents/Auctions
- Architects
- Solicitors
- Builders
- Land Finders
- Self-Build Development Companies
- The 'Land with Prospects' Trap

#### Proactive

- Scouting for a Site
- What to Look For
- Major Landowners/Estate Departments
- Farmers
- Post Office
- Advertising
- Finder's Fee

### Design and Planning

#### Assessing a Site

##### Initial Appraisal

##### The First Visit

##### Detailed Site Investigation

##### Site Surveys

- Land Surveyor
- Architect
- The Solicitor
- The Planning Officer
- The Building Control Officer

##### Planning Issues

- Planning Approval
- The Local Plan
- Relationship to adjoining buildings – privacy and amenity
- Building Lines
- Relationship to adjoining Buildings – Context and Precedent
- Land Use
- Green belts
- Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings
- Conservation Areas
- Listed Buildings
- Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas
- Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)
- National Parks
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Protected Species
- Highways
- Controversy

##### Climate and Environmental Features

- The Sun
- Exposure
- Levels
- Access
- Flooding
- Noise
- Environmental Pollution
- Trees and Natural Vegetation
- Radon
- Coastal Erosion

##### Ground Conditions

- Subsoil Type
- Trial Holes
- Adjacent Buildings
- Clay
- Clay and Trees
- Mining Subsidence
- Filled Ground
- Contaminated Land
- Demolished Buildings
- Sulphates

##### Services

- Statutory Authorities
- Mains Drainage
- Soakaways and Septic Tanks
- Water
- Electricity
- Gas
- Oil

##### Legal Issues

- Solicitors
- Ownership and Boundaries
- Ransom Strips
- Covenants, Easements and Wayleaves
- Footpaths
- Party Walls
- Adverse Possession

# Self Build:

## Design and Build Your Own Home

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|---|
| <b>Locality and History</b> .....                                       |
| History .....   |
| Architectural Character .....   |
| Privacy .....   |
| Road Names .....  |
| Nearby Features .....   |
| Neighbours .....  |
| Security .....  |
| <b>Valuations</b> .....   |
| Maximum Development Potential .....                                     |
| Estate Agents and Valuers .....   |
| Site Assessment Checklist .....   |
| <b>Buying a Plot</b> .....  |
| <b>Who Owns the Land?</b> .....   |
| <b>Valuing the Plot</b> .....   |
| <b>Methods of Selling Land</b> .....                                    |
| Inviting Offers .....   |
| Informal Tenders .....  |
| Auctions .....  |
| Talking Up the Price .....  |
| Options .....   |
| Conditional Contracts .....   |
| Scotland .....  |
| <b>Finding a Designer</b> .....   |
| <b>The Design Process</b> .....   |
| <b>Working With a Designer</b> .....                                    |
| Architects .....  |
| Technologists .....   |
| Surveyors .....   |
| Contractors .....   |
| Package Company .....   |
| Unqualified Designers .....   |
| <b>Finding Designers</b> .....  |
| Personal Recommendation .....   |
| The Royal Institute<br>of British Architects .....                      |
| ASBA Architects .....   |
| Yellow Pages and Yell.Com .....   |
| Other Projects In Progress .....  |
| Local Authorities .....   |
| Magazines and Shows .....   |
| Others .....  |
| <b>Choosing the Right One</b> .....                                     |
| Interviews .....  |
| Formal Qualifications .....   |
| Experience .....  |
| Attitude .....  |
| The Size of the Practice .....  |
| Completed Work .....  |
| Feasibility Studies .....   |
| Indemnity Insurance .....   |
| Near where you live, or near the site? .....                            |
| Changing Designers .....  |
| <b>Appointing An Architect</b> .....                                    |
| Paying a Designer .....   |
| Checklist Menu of Services Offered by<br>Architects and Designers ..... |
| Questions to Ask Your<br>Architect/Designer .....                       |
| <b>Appointment Contract</b> .....                                       |
| <b>Designing Your House</b> .....                                       |
| <b>Preparing for the<br/>First Design Meeting</b> .....                 |
| Budget .....  |
| Site .....  |
| Your Requirements .....   |
| <b>Aspects of Design</b> .....  |
| The Concept .....   |

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| Style Types .....   |
| <b>The Site</b> .....   |
| Circulation .....   |
| Roof space .....  |
| Basements .....   |
| Windows and Natural Light .....                                 |
| The Future .....  |
| The Healthy House .....   |
| Artificial Light .....  |
| Noise .....   |
| Safety/Fire .....   |
| Security .....  |
| Storage .....   |
| <b>Designing the Rooms</b> .....                                |
| Hall .....  |
| Staircase .....   |
| Living Room or Lounge .....                                     |
| Family Room .....   |
| Kitchen .....   |
| Utility Rooms .....   |
| Dining Room .....   |
| Study/Home Office .....   |
| WC .....  |
| Conservatories and Sun Rooms .....                              |
| Garage .....  |
| Master Bedroom .....  |
| Other Bedrooms .....  |
| En Suite Bathrooms .....  |
| Bathroom .....  |
| <b>Summary</b> .....  |
| <b>What to Get Right in<br/>the Design Process</b> .....        |
| <b>Getting Planning Permission</b> .....                        |
| <b>Why you must get it right</b> .....                          |
| <b>Timing</b> .....   |
| <b>Inside the Mind of a Planner</b> .....                       |
| Planning history of the site .....                              |
| Planning Policy .....   |
| Impact on Surroundings .....                                    |
| Size, Shape, Massing .....                                      |
| Neighbours .....  |
| Precedent .....   |
| <b>Initial Consultations<br/>and Meetings</b> .....             |
| <b>Strategy and Compromise</b> .....                            |
| <b>Problems with Planning<br/>Departments</b> .....             |
| <b>Making a Planning Application</b> .....                      |
| Types of Planning Application .....                             |
| Checklist for a Planning Application .....                      |
| The Drawings .....  |
| Extra Information .....   |
| OS and accuracy .....   |
| Filling in the Planning Form .....                              |
| <b>What happens once an<br/>Application is Submitted?</b> ..... |
| Acknowledgement .....   |
| Consultations .....   |
| Keeping in touch .....  |
| Representations .....   |
| Officer's report .....  |
| Local councillors .....   |
| Planning Committee meetings .....                               |
| Decision .....  |
| <b>Conditions</b> .....   |
| <b>Appeals</b> .....  |
| <b>Summary</b> .....  |

## Building Regulations and Tenders

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| <b>Submitting a Building<br/>Regulations Application</b> .....               |
| <b>What are the<br/>Building Regulations?</b> .....                          |
| <b>Notice and Full Plans</b> .....   |
| <b>Types of Building<br/>Control Service</b> .....                           |
| <b>England and Wales v Scotland</b> .....                                    |
| <b>Approved Documents (ADs)</b> .....  |
| <b>Making a Building<br/>Regulations Application</b> .....                   |
| Drawings and Specifications .....  |
| Structural Calculations .....  |
| Filling in the Form .....  |
| Working With Building<br>Control Officers .....                              |
| Site Inspections .....   |
| <b>What Can Go Wrong?</b> .....  |
| Failure at Full Plans stage .....  |
| Failure to comply on site .....  |
| <b>Speeding up the Process</b> .....   |
| <b>Summary</b> .....   |
| <b>Preparing a Tender Package</b> .....                                      |
| <b>What is a Tender Package?</b> .....                                       |
| <b>Sources of Information</b> .....  |
| <b>What Goes into a Detailed Tender<br/>Package?</b> .....                   |
| Some Typical Items to be Included in a<br>Detailed Specification .....       |
| <b>Budget Check</b> .....  |
| <b>Finding Building Contractors</b> .....                                    |
| <b>How to Find Builders</b> .....  |
| <b>Checking Out Building Contractors –<br/>First and Second Stages</b> ..... |
| First stage: a phone call .....  |
| Second stage: research and visiting .....                                    |
| How to Spot a 'Cowboy' .....   |
| <b>Self-Managing Subcontractors</b> .....                                    |
| <b>Getting a Price for the Work</b> .....                                    |
| A Typical Tender Package .....   |
| <b>Opening the Tenders</b> .....   |
| <b>Checking Out Building Contractors –<br/>Third Stage</b> .....             |
| Third stage: after tenders .....   |
| <b>What to Do If You<br/>Go Over Budget</b> .....                            |
| Over-specification .....   |
| Wrong Contractors .....  |
| Inflation .....  |
| Building Too Large .....   |
| Where to Save Money .....  |

## Construction

|  |
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| <b>Agreeing the Building<br/>Contract</b> .....        |
| The Key Terms of a<br>Building Contract .....          |
| <b>Preparing for<br/>Work to Start</b> .....           |
| <b>Where will you live?</b> .....                      |
| Start a Site File .....                                |
| <b>Pre-Contract Meeting</b> .....                      |
| Standard Agenda for<br>Pre-Contract Meeting .....      |
| <b>Building Your Home</b> .....                        |
| <b>Starting to Build</b> .....                         |
| Five Golden Rules for<br>a Building Project .....      |
| <b>Certificates</b> .....                              |
| Architects' Interim Certificates .....                 |
| Inspection/Valuation Certificates .....                |
| Practical Completion Certificates .....                |
| Final Certificate .....                                |
| Other Forms of Certification .....                     |
| The Ideal Combination .....                            |
| <b>The Architect's<br/>Role on Site</b> .....          |
| <b>What if Something<br/>Goes Wrong on Site?</b> ..... |
| The Contractor .....                                   |
| Your Professional Advisors .....                       |
| <b>Reaching Completion</b> .....                       |
| Snagging Checklist .....                               |
| <b>After Completion</b> .....                          |

## Case Studies

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| <b>House for<br/>Mr and Mrs Jackson, Richmond,<br/>North Yorkshire</b> .....           |
| xxx  |
| <b>House for<br/>Mr and Mrs Nicholson,<br/>Kirkliston, Lothian,<br/>Scotland</b> ..... |
| xxx  |
| <b>House for<br/>Mr and Mrs Bowles, Ely,<br/>Cambridgeshire</b> .....                  |
| xxx  |
| <b>House for<br/>Mr and Mrs Baker, Devon</b> .....                                     |
| xxx  |
| <b>House for<br/>Mr and Mrs Cook,<br/>East Sussex</b> .....                            |
| xxx  |

## Appendix Recommended Reading

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|---|
| <b>Feet/Metres Conversion</b> .....         |
| <b>Some Common Building<br/>Terms</b> ..... |
| <b>Recommended Reading</b> .....            |