

Case Studies

Devon/East Sussex



Architect and builder have worked together with their client to create a genuinely traditional building.

A key priority was to create a building that not only looks traditional, but has also been constructed using traditional building techniques. The architect and craftsmen were local, and the oak that makes up the main structure was all grown and harvested within ten miles of the site. ASBA member David Randell had already designed traditional oak houses, as well as more modern timber-framed constructions, and was a natural choice as architect. David was given a free hand with the design, and came up with a scheme that makes the house look as if it has always been there. A father-and-son team of carpenters was engaged, initially just to put up the frame for a fixed price – but they did such a good job that they were asked to stay, on a dayworks basis (i.e. they were paid for their time). Traditional oak details were incorporated, right down to the windows, internal doors and wall panelling.

House for Mr and Mrs Cook, East Sussex

Architect: Julian Owen Associates, East Midlands

Architect's Service: Design, Planning application, Building Regulations application, tender drawings, contract management, certificates

Build Method: Main contractor

Construction: Brick and blockwork

Time to find plot: 4 years

Time from acquiring site to building completion: 20 months

Build Programme: 8 months

Mr and Mrs Cook approached their project with a wealth of experience, gained from renovating the various homes that they had lived in. They had long wanted to build from scratch, but had never quite found the right place to do this, despite a determined search. So they were bitterly disappointed, when, having finally located their ideal plot, they discovered that an offer from someone else had just been accepted for it. They left their details with the agent, who later got in touch when that sale fell through.

They contacted two ASBA architects, one of them based near to the site. They had seen a project in a magazine by the other one, Julian Owen Associates, that they particularly liked and, although the practice was based some distance away, met Julian Owen on site to discuss the project. They got on well and commissioned the practice. The Cooks had already assembled a formidable stack of photos, illustrations and notes, which got the briefing process off to a good start, but the biggest influence on the design was the site. It has a steep slope, and affords spectacular views across the nearby Ashdown Forest. The builders of an adjacent house had gone to a great deal of trouble and expense to cut into the slope to form a level base from which to build. Julian suggested an alternative strategy

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The benefits of a sloping site have been combined with the requirements of the clients to create an individual design.

– to use the slope as an asset and build several stepped floor levels, with a semi-basement and a projecting balcony to maximise the view. Apart from the split level inside, there is also a gallery that joins the two bedrooms in the roof space, giving views either side to the lounge and hall below.

The planning approval process was fairly straightforward, but as construction began on site the planning department tried to stop the work, complaining that the roof ridge was too high. However, the approved plans indicated no levels or datum points, and so they withdrew their argument, accepting that in the circumstances they could not impose a height limit. The original scheme was costed out by a quantity surveyor at planning stage, but once tenders were received it was clear that the estimate was too optimistic. A cost-reduction exercise was carried out in conjunction with the lowest-tendering contractor to bring down the price by 20 per cent. Some of the more ambitious design ideas were lost, such as a frameless double-height glazing panel, and the standard of finishes was also reduced, but the spirit of the building was kept intact. When the finished house was valued, it was approximately 25 per cent more than the total development cost.



The final building is a mix of contemporary style and traditional materials. The level changes, combined with large open-plan spaces and lots of natural light, give a modern feel to the interior.