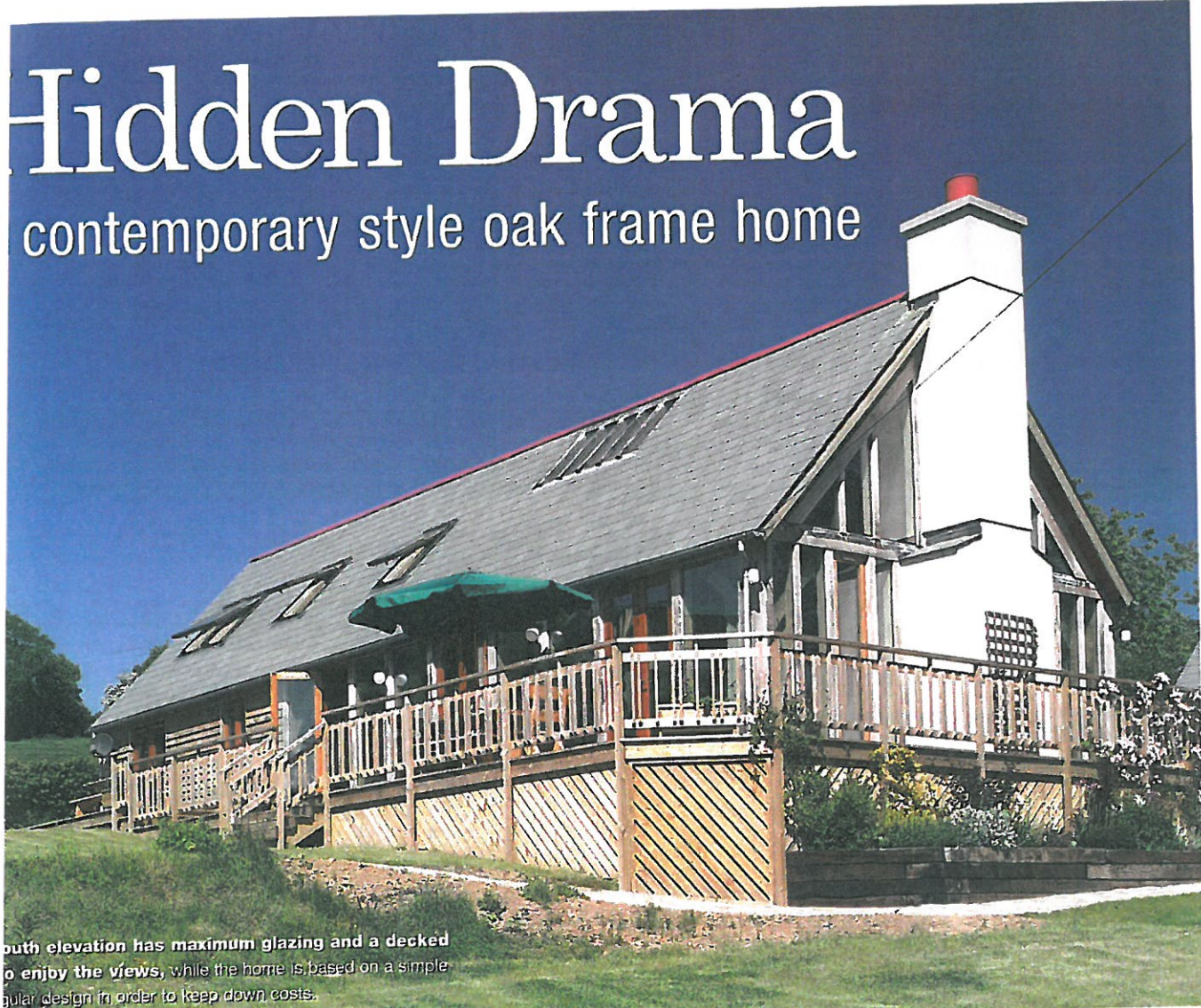


Hidden Drama

contemporary style oak frame home



South elevation has maximum glazing and a decked area to enjoy the views, while the home is based on a simple regular design in order to keep down costs.



Words: Clive Fewins
Photography: Nigel Rigden

Andy and Wanda Blake have built a small oak frame home that contains dramatic interior spaces.

Andy and Wanda Blake's 150m² oak framed house on a sloping site in rural east Devon is their first self-build, but they can't wait to do another. They bought the three acre plot, with its dilapidated 1930s bungalow, for £250,000, in March 2000, expecting to extend the bungalow, add a storey and transform it into a New England Colonial style house. However, when a friend in the building trade took a good look, he had no doubt in advising them that the most sensible course from all points of view would be to demolish and start again.

In late April 2002 they watched builder, Andy Proctor, and his two-man, team demolish the building in just 20 minutes. A few days before Christmas in the same year they moved into their new linear barn style house, which has an open plan ground floor – apart from the two bedrooms on that



en Drama

level – a glass walled main living room with a gallery above housing their home office, and a master bedroom tucked away at the far end at the top of the sloping site.

It had taken 12 months of living in the bungalow to finally decide that the plan to extend was impracticable. But after that, deciding on what style of new home to opt for was easy. One day Wanda, who had always relished the prospect of project managing a self-build, was invited into the home of the lady she buys her eggs from and instantly realised that this was exactly the style of house that would suit their lifestyle.

“I knew immediately that Andy, who was abroad on business a great deal at the time, would like it too,” says Wanda. “We had looked at several different kinds of kit house in oak frame, but this was a bespoke design by Roderick James Architects and I could see immediately that it had a certain something that I felt the other homes would never have.”

The Blakes paid a visit to Roderick in his home office near Totnes and then were assigned to project architect Mike Hope. They were keen to have as much oak as possible in their one-and-a-half storey house and that it should contain the maximum amount of glass between the oak studs on the sides facing south and east. Because their budget was limited, they agreed with Mike that the house should basically be a linear barn with a glazed catslide over the entrance to the north.



we love all the glass — we would almost infinitely choose oak frame again”

dramatic vaulted ▶ **in living space enjoys** **the amounts of glazing** on the south and east facing oak frame infills. Andy and Wanda find that one of the sides of such a space is cleaning the rooflights.

The drama of the building is in the materials – the oak frame with its mass of glazed panels, slate roof and large chimney that dominates the end with its full height glazing – and the sloping site with its panoramic views towards the Blackdown Hills.

The decked gallery on the south and east sides has steps down to the lawn and reminds Andy and Wanda of their travels: until they came to settle here they had lived all over the world for the past 23 years.

“Mike was extremely conscientious and we think he did an excellent job with what was basically a very simple design,” says Wanda. “He was also very helpful when we realised we were going to have to cut something out when our budget was overrunning and we were anxious to fund the project from our own resources without borrowing.

“The planners in east Devon were also very sympathetic. The planning stage only took so long ▶



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because of us changing our minds over the knock down and rebuild. The only argument of any kind was over the size of the garage. We realised early on that there would be very little storage in the house as it is all exposed to the roof and there is no loft, so we were keen to have as much storage as possible in the roof of the garage. We were eventually allowed the garage, but it was cut down in length from three bays to two and there is no water supply or mains drainage as the planners did not want the roof space to be used as an extra bedroom.

"We were extremely lucky to find our builder, Andy Proctor, whom we discovered through a friend. He had not done any Roderick James oak frames before, but liaised very well with the team from Carpenter Oak Ltd, who also supplied and erected the oak frame. The build was remarkably smooth on the whole."

One of the economies was that the fourth bay, on the uphill western end of the house, is not timber framed, but is of dual-skinned blockwork. However, the softwood roof joists are still exposed in the master bedroom above and likewise the ceiling joists in the two bedrooms below. Other economies were the softwood flooring upstairs and cutting out the Aga. Nevertheless, the Blakes still found that the original estimate by the quantity surveyor of a £168,850 build cost was pretty well spot on. The final figure, including the kitchen but excluding the garage, was £184,000 of which they paid the builder £131,000.

Although the Blakes used up all their budget and quite a lot more, they are still hoping to find the money to extend. If they do this it will be to add a downstairs master bedroom at the top of the slope on the northern side of the house with windows facing towards the road. The alternative, now they have caught the self-build bug, is to try to cash in on their existing house and obtain planning consent to build lower down on their three acre plot. "We have inquired about this and at present I rather think it is wishful thinking," says Andy.

Wanda explains: "If we extend we shall have to pay VAT this time, but once we moved in we realised the restrictions of the rooms upstairs on the plans – you lose three feet on either side. We thought the house would be big enough for the two of us but really it is rather small. We are keen on the idea of an upstairs office where the master bedroom is now, so that we could turn the gallery – currently our home office – into a snug and a TV room."

If they were to start again the Blakes feel there are several things they would have done differently during the build. "We now know that we will always want at least one smaller window in French door



"This style of house is difficult to keep clean... but it is aesthetically very pleasing."

▲ Positives and negatives
 The oak frame has been left exposed and while the Blakes enjoy the instant character it gives the house, they do find that it can lead to increased nuisance from flies.

units," says Wanda. "The aim would be to have fresh air coming in without opening the French doors. You can't really leave them wide open at night and feel secure. We love all the glass, but it does seem to provide a huge attraction for flies. Although I think we would almost definitely choose oak frame again, we would want some way of cutting down the fly problem, and also, with the benefit of hindsight, a means of cleaning the taller set of rooflights. It would also have suited us better to have the boot room and utility room as one. This style of house is extremely difficult to keep clean, but on the other hand it is ▶



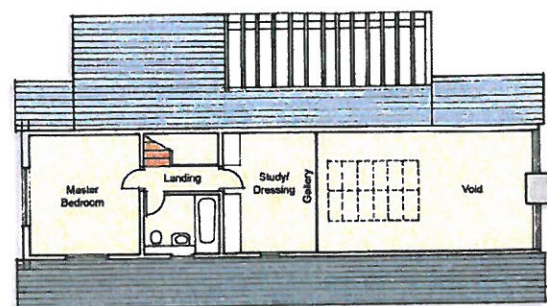
The subtly sloping site gives the interior of the house interesting changes in levels.

aesthetically very pleasing. We love the red boarded ceiling, the gallery, the beautiful position and the feel of living amongst the Devon hills. There is so much glass that the colours of the countryside adorn the house."

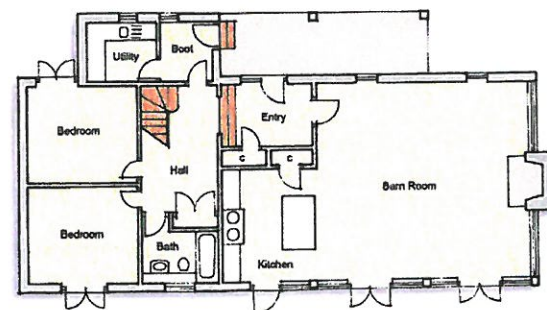
"The other thing that we have learned from this self-build is all about budget restraints. We should really not have been afraid to spend to our maximum," says Andy. "The house and just one of our three acres has recently been valued at £500,000, so we are comfortable in the knowledge that we should not lose money if we decided to sell. Our advice to others is, don't be afraid to spend to the maximum, provided you are certain you are getting good value for money." ■

USEFUL CONTACTS: **Architect** – Mike Hope at Roderick James Architects: 01803 868000; **Engineers** – Case Consultants: 01803 200175; **Main contractor** – A J Proctor: 01297 32380; **Timber frame and erection** – Carpenter Oak Ltd: 01803 732900; **Kitchen** – Colystock Kitchens: 01404 861271; **Decking** – Decks-R-U: 01626 899022; **Rooflights** – Velux: 01592 772211

FLOORPLAN: The ground floor space is largely open plan in the dramatic double height areas, while two bedrooms downstairs provide flexibility for future requirements.



First Floor



Ground Floor

Fact File

NAMES: Andy and Wanda Blake
PROFESSIONS: Business consultant and homemaker
AREA: East Devon
HOUSE TYPE: Three bedroom detached
HOUSE SIZE: 150m²
BUILD ROUTE: Main contractor
CONSTRUCTION: Oak frame with blockwork supporting softwood frame in one bay
WARRANTY: None
SAP RATING: 90
FINANCE: Private

BUILD TIME: April – Dec '02
LAND COST: £250,000
BUILD COST: £184,000
TOTAL COST: £434,000
HOUSE VALUE: £500,000 (based on house plus one of the three acres)
COST/m²: £1,226

Cost Breakdown:
 Timber frame £28,000
 Main contractor £131,000
 Fees £9,000
 Kitchen £5,500
 Misc £10,500
TOTAL **£184,000**

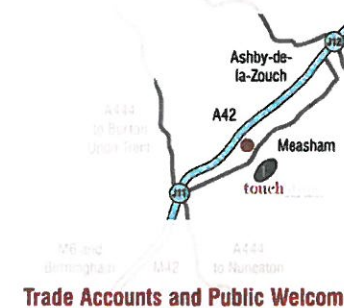
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