

GRAND



Starting a new life in Cornwall is a dream for many people and starting life in a bespoke self built house is high on the bucket (and spade) list for any family

PHOTOS:
Anthony Greenwood

adventure



The drama of the cantilevered structure continues as you enter the house over a bridge

For lovers of architecture it will come as no surprise that Sylvania House is the new star attraction to the village of Feock.

Sitting at the head of Pill Creek on the edge of the village, Sylvania sits alongside an array of architectural gems –including the 1960s Grade II Listed Creek Veau by Team 4, and the recently completed and RIBA award-winning house at Gillanglaze by John Pardey Architects, and Pillwood House by John Miller and Su Rogers.

So when it came to creating this five bedroom family home, the architects sought to respect this strong architectural tradition by challenging the preconceptions of what a house should look like and proposing a striking and dramatic cantilevered structure high in the canopy of the trees - and it has quickly become a star - featuring in the latest issue of *Grand Designs*.

“We bought the plot that Sylvania stands on in Feock about four years ago, after thinking

long and hard about whether we should buy a house, or build one,” explains Nita Owers who moved into the house a year ago with her husband John, two children and Betty, the sprocker. “We chose the latter, because of an ambition to build our own house and realise a vision.

‘Pill Creek is a very tranquil and magical place. We loved the beauty of the setting and the fact that it already has a history of brave architecture. I found it on a holiday down here with the children’

“We bought the land in 2016 and the idea of leaving London and moving the family here for a more outdoors, calmer way of life slowly evolved. We have two children; a 17 year old son and a 12 year old daughter. Our son enjoys surfing and being on the water and our daughter enjoys horse riding, so they were actually keen to try it out.

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the beauty of the setting and the fact that it already has a history of brave architecture. I found it on a holiday down here with the children. After considering buying a smaller house as a holiday home, the idea of building something very bespoke and individual is something we’ve been thinking of doing for a long time. This site gave us the opportunity for it to become reality. But it also meant that after building something so special, it became impossible not to live in it full time.

The family chose on Truro-based KAST Architects (kastarchitects.com) to design their new home and building began in September 2017. The resulting building has been designed as two distinct elements, with the upper level housing the main living accommodation set at 90 degrees to the lower level sleeping accommodation.

The main entrance to the house is at the upper level, which given the topography of the site is set at the same level as Pill Lane. A



Sylvania is inspired by the work of modernist architect Frank Lloyd Wright



This stunning cantilevered house is all about the views

parking area for two cars leads to a bridge which spans across to the building. The elevations to the parking area and the road are left deliberately blank to maintain privacy, and as a contrast to the glazed elevations to the south east which maximise the views down to the creek.

Once inside the house, the kitchen is off to one side, while the dining area benefits from access to a decked roof terrace. The lounge offers stunning views across the valley.

Bedrooms are located on the lower floor, along with bathing facilities. Access is gained to a south facing terrace, where the cantilevered first storey provides a sheltered outdoor dining space.

One of the most immediate wow factors of the property is the V support under the cantilever which was the family's biggest extravagance. The building design was inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright who was renowned for his use of cantilever buildings most famously his Fallingwater House built over a waterfall in California in 1937.

"It was a really brave decision to go along with it, as it replaced a previous design. It was inspired by a house projecting out over a canyon that I'd researched in Japan. My favourite feature is the house sign, made from live edge ash and resin. I found the makers, ROOSO Designs from Devon, at a homes show in Truro."

"There were lows," admits Nita. "This is an area of outstanding beauty, and that presents problems, when trying to build a challenging design. We are also in a TPO1 area, which meant that the original position of the house on the site had to be moved, as it was too close to the trees. We had a lot of objections, and this did slow up the process, but we're so glad that we did move it, as our trees make the setting and the house look like it's always been here. The schedule also slipped, which meant that we had to live in temporary accommodation for four months. We lived in four different houses and the children found this very disruptive and unsettling. We also ran out of money, unsurprisingly, and lived in a mud bath for four months until the lawn went down."

In the end the position of the building was chosen to balance the site topography, views and privacy. Care was taken to locate the building outside of the tree root protection zone of a line of poplar trees to the west, and a Japanese Maple to the east.

Materials were selected to work in harmony with the sylvan setting. The lower storey is clad in Trebarwith stone to provide a solid base onto which the larch clad first storey is placed. Local contractors and materials were also a key element to the build.

“It’s striking, yet modest,” says Nita of the finished result. “The cantilever appears to float through the trees, giving the impression of a massive tree house.”

Inside the house is calm and understated. “I love Scandinavian design and have incorporated it throughout the house, including the palette of colours you see Scandinavian design houses use a lot. I like its freshness and

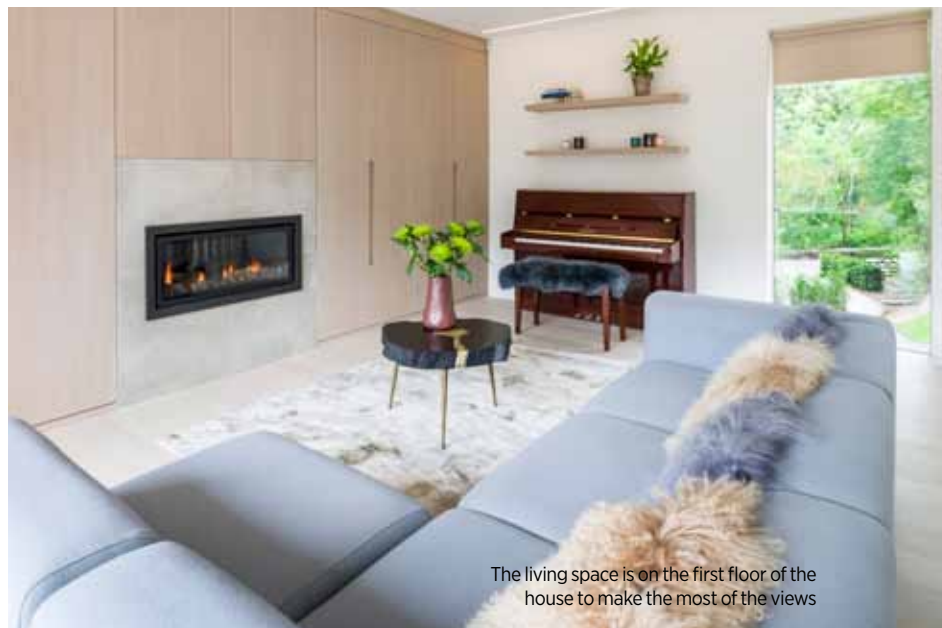
‘It’s striking, yet modest. The cantilever appears to float through the trees, giving the impression of a massive tree house’

calming effect. I really wanted to reflect this in the house. The interiors are light and very simple. They are so easy to live with and do not detract from the design of the house.”

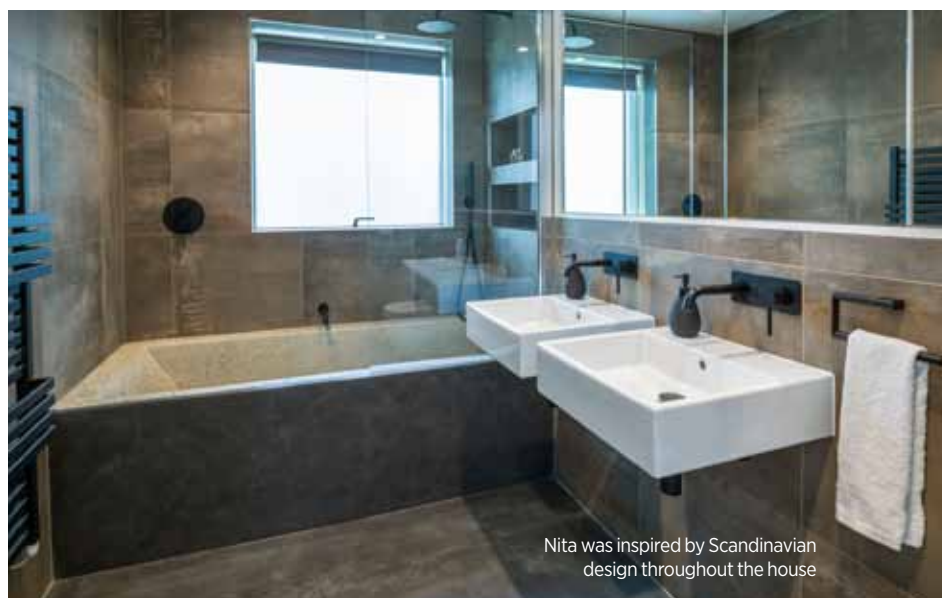
The upstairs furniture is sourced from Denmark and a few galleries in Cornwall. “We have a some really beautiful lights from Tom Dixon and Stuart Lamble,” she says. “The children designed their own rooms. My son has wallpaper in his room one wall, which was created from a print of one of the landmarks from where we lived. Our bedroom is a bit richer in colour and has verdigris wallpaper, as I love the copper effect in it.”

And the wow factor remains. “If you develop a good design, it is amazing just how much people care about the end product. We still can’t believe just how much our children and our neighbours love the house.”

And while Syvannia is designed as a ‘forever home’ Nita admits never say never. “This is our first major project, but probably won’t be our last.” ♦



The living space is on the first floor of the house to make the most of the views



Nita was inspired by Scandinavian design throughout the house



Nita and John let their two children design their own rooms