

WOODLAND WONDER

Occupying an idyllic setting in Cornwall, this black timber-clad energy-efficient barn has been built in the garden of Matt and Sally Bull's house.

STORY: LOUISE PARKIN PICTURES: SAMYE ASHER



In brief

PROJECT Oak-framed new build
LOCATION Cornwall
COST Already owned
SPENT Undisclosed
WORTH Unknown



Sally and Matt Bull's new woodland home is a world apart from where they lived before, despite being only a matter of metres away. Their charming yet draughty former home comprised a third of a Georgian manor house and was full of original features, large windows and huge spaces ideal for entertaining. The house was expensive to heat and maintain, however, and was just too big for a small family. "It is a beautiful house, with huge rooms and tall ceilings, flooded with light and fantastic for hosting large family gatherings, but it needed lots of work and investment to maintain, and most of the time it was just the four of us and the dog. We just weren't using it to its full potential," explains Matt, a GP.

Creating a plot in a wooded section of the one-acre garden was initially devised to provide an injection of capital to spend on further renovations. A conventional five-bedroom home was designed for the shady site which was put on the market, but the sale stalled at the final hurdle and fell through.

"We never planned to build here ourselves, because we thought the site would be too shaded. There are around 30 mature trees surrounding the house, including a row of trees and rhododendrons screening the site from our old house. Eventually though, we realised that by building something completely new, we would be able to achieve a warm and cosy house with the right amount of space for our family," says Sally, a teacher.

Fairfield Barn sits close to Tehidy country park, a 250-acre site of peaceful woods and lakes in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Surrounded by Cornish hedges – granite walls with earth in the centre – and a public footpath stretching along the southern boundary, the site is laden with mature trees, most of which are protected by tree preservation orders and root protection zones, meaning that only a narrow strip of the third-of-an-acre site was suitable for building on.

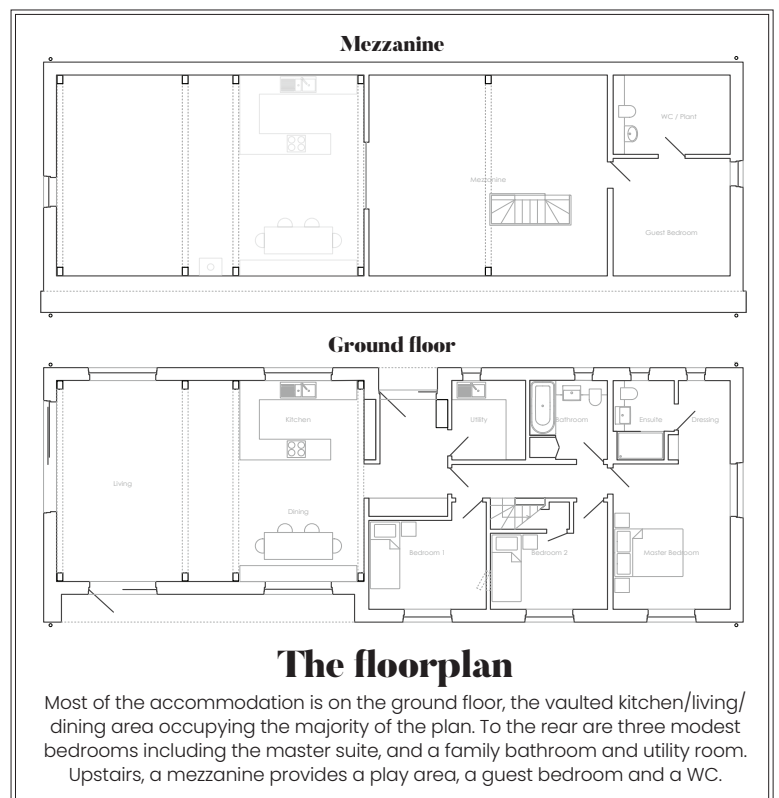


PROJECT
Scissor oak trusses and 300mm timber panels made by Post & Beam create the structure of this timber-clad Cornish barn home.



Keen to employ local firms, the couple contacted Truro-based Kast Architects, whose ideas appealed to the Bulls. Architect Nicholas James sent the family images of other modern barns and this helped convince them to create a simple black form divided internally into two distinct areas at either end.

"We had seen some wonderful oak-framed buildings in Cornwall, including Nancarrow Farm and the gallery at Tremenheere Sculpture Gardens, and when we started investigating it turned out that Tom Jubb and Tim Simpson at Post & Beam had built both of these. We had also gone on a foraging course at the Fat Hen Cookery School in Mousehole, and their barn featured a wonderful open-plan kitchen and dining area with a mezzanine that we thought we'd like to replicate," explains Matt.





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Located just a couple of miles from the north Cornish coast, Fairfield Barn has been designed to be as discreet as possible and to have little visual impact on the neighbours. A simple domestic form echoes the local rural vernacular barns, belying the variety and intrigue of the internal spaces. Clad primarily in black-stained Thermopine timber and a black-profiled metal-sheet roof, the house nestles quietly within its sylvan setting.

Planning proved straightforward, albeit with restrictions to the roof height, and on any window overlooking the neighbours’ gardens. All trees had to be preserved, including those without tree preservation orders. There had been a number of objections to the application, but it was passed – helped by the fact that there was already planning permission for a larger house on the plot.

A yellow door punctuates the north elevation and breaks up the black facade, leading to a generous lobby space that feeds to a double-height kitchen, dining and living area where Post & Beam’s chunky oak scissor trusses are fully exposed. Roof lights invite plenty of daylight into the bright interior, and large sliding doors located to the west and south provide access to the garden. Sunny spots move around the garden as the day progresses, the sun shining through the trees.

The other end of the house has two single bedrooms, a family bathroom and a master bedroom suite, plus a utility room, with a discreet staircase up to a mezzanine overlooking the main living space. This area is used as a child’s play space and family snug, and behind this is a further guest bedroom and WC.

The design process was a close collaboration between the Bulls, Kast Architects and Post & Beam. Dan Pye and



LIVING AREA
The large open space features four roof lights that drop daylight in from above, despite the shade from 30 mature trees.

his team at Norsk Carpentry were commissioned to help erect the timber frame, staying on to complete the rest of the build, carry out the interior fit out, install doors and windows, apply the black larch hit-and-miss cladding and complete the metal roof. Dan also ordered materials and recommended subcontractors, while Sally and Matt arranged payments direct with the builders’ merchant, meaning there were no hidden costs.

“The relationships we had with Kast Architects, Post & Beam and Norsk Carpentry were amazing. They all knew each other and worked so well together, and it went really smoothly – we couldn’t have been happier,” says Sally. “Dan





took over the whole project once the structure was in place, and we trusted him completely. We felt almost lazy, because he was so brilliant at organising everything – he and his team built the kitchen, did the tiling, made door frames from birch ply, and they even did the decorating. We could not have asked for a better experience.”

To achieve the visual simplicity of the oak frame, complex detailing was required using hidden steelwork. Post & Beam fabricated the oak frame offsite, and assembled it on the ground before raising it into position with a crane. Insulated timber cassettes 300mm thick, also manufactured in Post & Beam’s workshop, were used to complete the building envelope on both roof and walls.

“The simple oak frame means there are fewer oak members, and so we used what are essentially massive stainless steel brackets to provide additional structural support,” says Post & Beam’s oak frame designer Tom Jubb. The Post & Beam team also built the timber cassettes made up of softwood timber studs containing rockwool insulation.

Work began on site in January 2019 and was completed January 2020, and Matt and Sally with their daughters Connie (10) and Betsy (seven), were able to remain in their home until the project was completed, monitoring progress from close quarters. “It was thrilling watching the building come alive. It took around two weeks for the structure to take shape, and Connie and Betsy loved watching the frame arrive and being lifted into place with the enormous crane!” says Sally.

KITCHEN
Ready-made units have been faced with birch ply, topped with stainless steel worktops, with a bank of wall units and a suspended lighting track.



Internally, the roof is clad with whitewashed sarking boards which also clad the stairs, with floorboards of pale engineered oak, and white walls. Interesting detail is created with large plants, colourful furniture and bright rugs with bold accents in light fittings, bar stools and doors.

“The project was a joy to work on,” says builder Dan Pye. “Sally and Matt have good taste, and they had some interesting ideas. They were clear with creative decisions, but they also gave us quite a bit of creative freedom too. They were daring in their design choices, and I confess at times I was unsure that some of their chosen finishes would work, such as the green and pink doors, but credit to them, once they were painted they looked really good. The whole thing just works.”



BEDROOMS & BATHROOMS
Rooms in this end of the house are purposefully compact in their dimensions, with unified wooden floors throughout the ground floor except bathrooms, which are tiled.



In detail

PROJECT
Architect Kast Architects:
kastarchitects.com
Builder Norsk Carpentry:
norskcarpentry.com
Groundworks Jamie
James, James Contracting:
jamescontracting.co.uk
Plumbing MV Clatworthy:
mvclatworthy.co.uk
Electrical works Dan Jarret
at Lumens: lumens.org.uk

STRUCTURE
Oak frame Post & Beam:
post-beam.co.uk

**Metal corrugated
roofing sheets** Cladco:
cladco.co.uk
**Engineered oak
floorboards**
Absolute Flooring:
absoluteflooringsw.com
Black Thermopine cladding
Russwood: russwood.co.uk

FIXTURES & FITTINGS
Windows Rationel:
rationel.co.uk
Roof lights Velux: velux.co.uk
Kitchen carcasses
Howdens: howdens.com



OUTSIDE

The shady site proffers a number of sunny spots throughout the day.

MEZZANINE

A discreet staircase leads to a tucked-away play room and guest bedroom.



Birch ply has been used extensively in the home's interior, unifying the spaces throughout – everything from door liners, architrave and storage, to the kitchen, which uses Howdens units that have been faced with birch ply, revealing the edging.

A ground source heat pump serves the underfloor heating system which runs throughout the house. Two boreholes 82m deep were excavated in the front garden, and the heat pump creates a comfortable home that also pays back £2,000 per year through the Renewable Heat Incentive. "It's so much more comfortable than our previous home, which was heated by oil and cost a fortune," recalls Matt.

A number of seating and dining areas in the garden will take advantage of the different sunny spots created throughout the day, allowing the Bull family to enjoy their garden as much as they love their new peaceful home.



Final word

What was the low point of the project?

Having the objections to planning and upsetting the neighbours.

And the high point?

We loved seeing the developments every day and the high-quality craftsmanship that went into making our home so special and unique.

What did you enjoy most about the experience?

Understanding how our wonderful home has been made from the ground up – we have created a house that perfectly meets our needs as a family.

What do you like most about your house?

The warmth! The oak beams and vaulted ceiling with white-washed sarking board cladding. The contrast between the dark exterior and the bright open-plan interior space. The whole house is really functional and easy to live in; for example the kitchen is compact and user friendly and the upstairs boiler room doubles up as a drying space which gets a lot



of use with frequent beach trips and muddy bike rides (this wasn't really planned). We took what we learnt – what we liked and did not like – from our previous house and had the chance to make the new one really work for us.

Anything you would do differently?

We should have completed the decking at the same time as the build so we could have reclaimed the VAT.

Any future improvements/additions to the house planned?

Lots of garden landscaping and possibly a covered deck.