

IN BRIEF

LOCATION Cornwall

TYPE OF PROPERTY

Cantered new-build house

BEDROOMS 4/5

PROJECT STARTED Design started September 2015; work on site started October 2017

PROJECT FINISHED

House completed December 2018; external works completed March 2019

BUILD COST £3,275 per sqm

Above and beyond

Cantilevering the living space out into the treetops pushed an

ordinary design into becoming something extraordinary

WORDS JESSICA CARGILL THOMPSON PHOTOGRAPHY ANTHONY GREENWOOD

This upside-down house dedicates the upper level to open-plan, indoor-outdoor living, with cosy bedrooms downstairs. Floor-to-ceiling glazing is recessed by almost a metre so that the doors can be slid back even when it's raining.

LEFT A benefit of the cantilever design is the sheltered outdoor terraces, a boon in this mild but rainy climate. Hard landscaping by MeiLoci uses plenty of slate, an inescapably Cornish material

RIGHT From the car port the main living area is reached across a timber walkway. A bespoke sign made by Roosoo in wood and resin names the house in tribute to Nita's late mother, Sylvia, as well as giving a nod to its main material, silvering Siberian larch



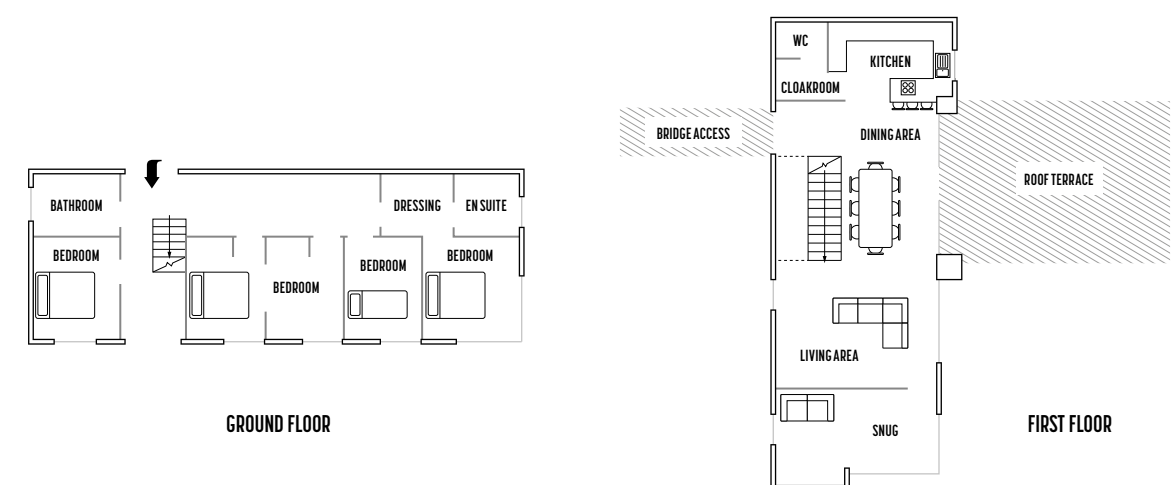
With a background as an opera producer, it was inevitable that Nita Owers was never going to settle for anything less than dramatic. Her cantilevered house is not only a striking new addition to Cornwall's Fal Estuary, it also prompted her family's spontaneous decision to move wholesale from north London.

Nita, now a teacher, and John, who works in development finance, both in their early 50s, initially saw their Cornish foray as a holiday home for them and their two teenage children; when they started looking

in 2015, they hadn't even set out to build something themselves. Years of holidays in the area, stretching back to Nita's childhood in south Wales, had nurtured their love of Cornwall, but it soon became apparent that to do something that would excite them, a radical shift in approach, budget and lifestyle would be needed.

'I looked at a few houses outside Truro and none of them really wowed me,' says Nita. 'I noticed a half-acre plot in an estate agent's window. It had planning permission for a standard four-bedroom house so I thought, well, if it's got permission for that, we could do our own design.' »

FLOOR PLANS



‘A cantilever was going to be a whole different ballgame. Do we settle for something less adventurous, or do we go for it?’

A small budget meant initial designs were modest – a two-storey house that sat along the challenging sloped site. ‘It was nice; I liked the natural materials. But it just wasn’t very interesting,’ remembers Nita. ‘A cantilever was going to be a whole different ballgame. That’s when the decisions started to come. Do we settle for something less adventurous, or do we go for it?’

At that point, the project switched up several gears from a second home to a complete relocation, and the steel-framed cantilever idea was put into action, proving its worth as a comprehensive design solution, not just as a piece of visual drama.

The house sits at the head of a creek. By lifting the living space up to the first-floor level and then pushing it out over the garden and into the treetops, the architect captured the view down to the water and created a sense of living among the branches. Twisting the two sections – lower bedroom level and upper living level – to 90° also helped break up the mass of the building and reduce its impact.

‘Despite being a very dramatic architectural gesture, it’s quite a subtle building in that you can’t see the whole house from one angle; it’s always shrouded by trees or by the site in some way,’ says David Jones, project »



Limewashed oak flooring keeps the living area bright and fresh. Recessed light strips in the ceiling provide subtle downlighting. The sofa is from Hay, the rug is by Linie Design at Heal's, and the Allium floor lamp is by Stuart Lamble Designs

LEFT When the trees lose their leaves, the view from the snug will reach right down to the creek. The chair is from Hay and the Emiko side table is by Lene Bjerre

GD HOMES CORNWALL

architect from Truro-based Kast Architects. The cantilever also allowed the upper floor to turn its back on the neighbouring road, providing privacy for the family.

A statement steel V support maximises the projection of the upper level, set for dynamic effect, and at Nita's insistence, at the maximum incline that the structural engineer would sanction. Touching the ground lightly, its form also keeps the building's foundations away from the roots of nearby trees.

What caused a furore at the planning stage was not the look of the house itself but the proposal to cut down a line of poplar trees to accommodate it. Just after plans

had been submitted, they were placed under a tree protection order (TPO).

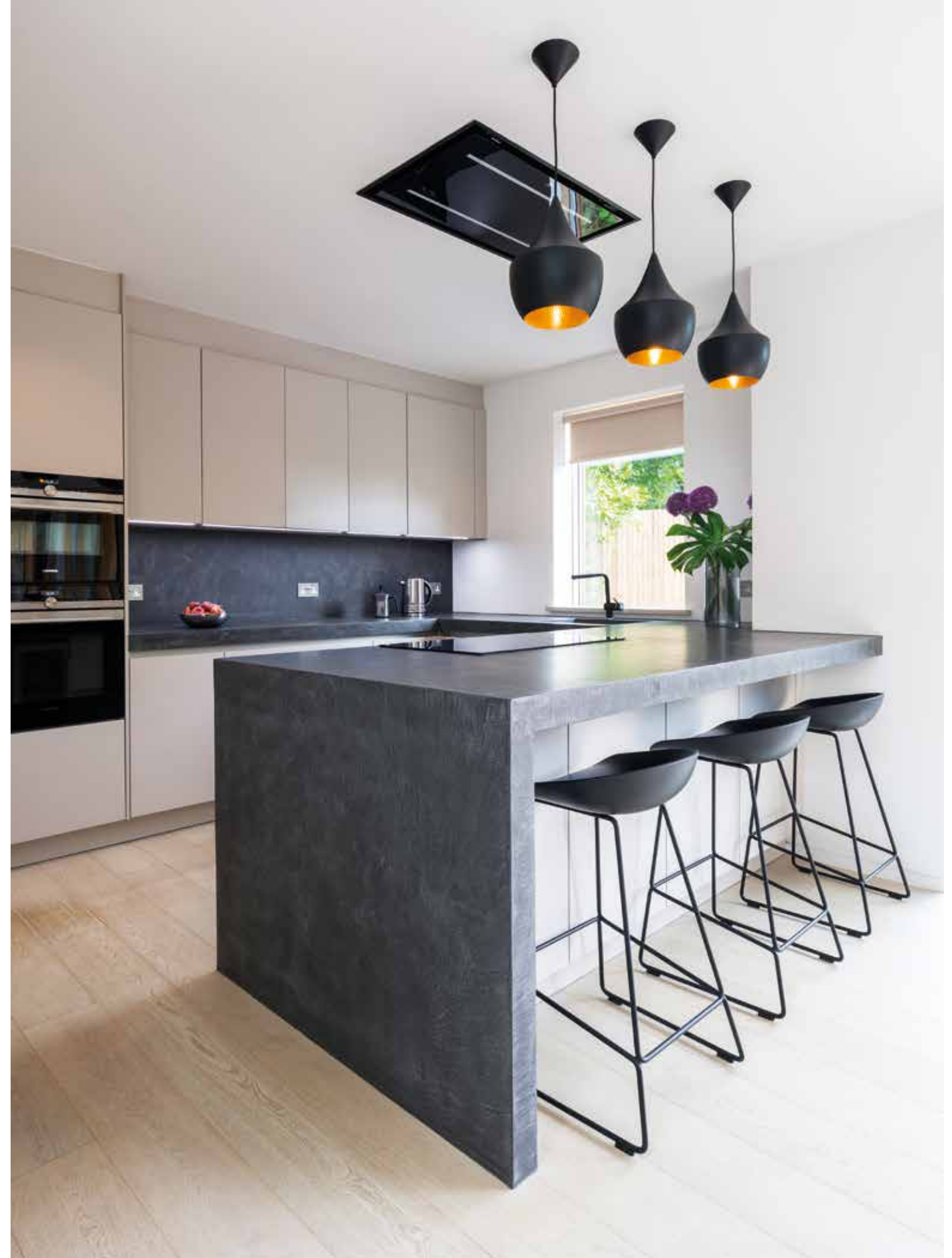
'It was such a fiasco,' says Nita, able to laugh about it in hindsight. 'I went onto the Cornwall county website and there were 65 objections and a stream of comments from all over the country – not about the design, but about the trees. It was clear they really mattered to people. It's an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the last thing we wanted to do was take any of that away.'

The planning application was withdrawn and the architect repositioned the building on the site, with the trees left untouched. »



RIGHT The couple wanted the dining table to look like it had been sliced from a tree, and found this design at Konk!. The pendant light is one of the few pieces from the family's previous home in London

FAR RIGHT Fat Beat pendant lights by Tom Dixon hang above the concrete breakfast bar. Bar-stools are from Hay and the kitchen is by Future Kitchens





ABOVE The dining area spills out onto a generous roof terrace. The table is by Fermob, the chairs are by Vondom and sofa is from the Modern Furniture Company

RIGHT The staircase uses the same handrail design as the entrance walkway, flowing through the house. Exposed joists across the roof light echo the slots of the staircase. Oversized Voronoi II bulbs by Tala are strung from the beams

Once construction finally started on site, David and Kast's director Nick James managed the build, with site manager Graham Slyfield of Newquay-based Davey Construction supervising day-to-day business and keeping the neighbours on board. John and Nita kept in touch from London by phone and email, taking turns to go down for monthly site meetings.

The materials have been kept simple and local: Trebarwith stone from Cornwall anchoring the base, and Siberian larch that will silver over time, giving a weightlessness to the upper tier. Interior and exterior spaces flow in and out of each other and the upright timbers of the walkway rail repeat down through the staircase, essentially the point on which the whole house pivots.

Inside, coastal blues, greys and sandy colours predominate. Like the exterior, upstairs is light and open with limewashed oak floors, while downstairs it is cosier, with a dark polished-concrete floor.

The family finally took up residence in December 2018 after what Nita philosophically accepts were inevitable delays waiting for work to be completed, but not before they'd already let their London house and moved the children to local schools. 'Those last months were the hardest to manage,' she says. 'We moved five times in five months. It was awful, and really stressful. The retaining wall took much longer than we thought, which meant they were doing the polished concrete in the autumn, and you need it to be dry for that.'

Sitting in the snug at the end of the cantilever, amid the branches, Nita says she feels like she's in a treehouse. 'It's so quiet here,' she says. 'It reminds me of the Shire, from *The Lord of the Rings*. It's got a fairytale quality to it.'

The neighbours have also embraced it. 'They've said it looks fantastic in the setting,' adds Nita. 'Which is so nice. They're actually proud of it. And I'm so glad we didn't cut those poplars down – they're absolutely beautiful.' GD

Interior and exterior spaces flow in and out of each other and the upright timbers of the walkway rail repeat down through the staircase





The dark polished concrete floor makes the downstairs bedroom level more intimate. Air source heat pumps supply the underfloor heating and hot water. A storage wall built by Winfreys of Helston hides utilities

RIGHT The concrete bath was cast in situ by contractor Davey Construction. Inferno Mud tiles from Smart Tiles have the look of rusted steel, continuing the home's industrial feel

BELOW RIGHT A teal colour scheme in the master bedroom is picked up in verdigris-effect wallpaper behind the bed. Melt pendant light by Tom Dixon; Chevron oak bedside table from Cox & Cox



SUPPLIERS

PROJECT TEAM

Architect Kast Architects (kastarchitects.com)
Structural engineer Entos Consulting (entosconsulting.co.uk)
Contractor Davey Construction (daveyconstruction.co.uk)
Landscaping Meiloci (meiloci.co.uk)
Interior design, electricals and carpentry 3idog (3idog.com)
Quantity surveyor Ed Crossley & Associates (eca-qs.com)
Tree consultant Evolve (evolvetreecare.co.uk)
Polished concrete Steve Peck Tiling (01409 259 303)
Electrics Tom Jones Electrical (07896 989 167)
STRUCTURE
Windows Velfac (velfac.co.uk)
Staircase Adam King Joinery (07891 854 111)
Roof light EOS Rooflights (eosrooflights.co.uk)
Single-ply roof membrane Danosa (danosa.com)
Lawn Bosbigal (bosbigal.co.uk)

FIXTURES & FITTINGS

Fitted kitchen Future Kitchens (future-kitchens.net)
Linus kitchen tap Blanco Linus (blanco.com)
Cabinets and shelves Winfreys of Helston (winfreys.co)

Bathroom tiles Smart Tiles (smart-tiles.co.uk)
Bathroom taps and shower Lusso Stone (lussostone.com)
Fireplace Gazco (stovox.com)

FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES

Furniture supplier Momentum (momentumcardiff.com)
Sofa, dining chairs, chair, desk and bar-stools Hay (hay.dk)
Emiko coffee table Lene Bjerre (lenebjerre.com)
Dining table Konk! (konkfurniture.com)
Curtains and blinds Thea Marshall (instagram.com/thea_marshall)
Rugs Linie Design at Heal's (heals.com)
Floor lamp Stuart Lambie Designs (stuartlambiedesigns.com)
Lights Tom Dixon (tomdixon.net); Tala (tala.co.uk)
Main bedroom bed Feather & Black (featherandblack.com)
Bedside table Cox & Cox (coxandcox.co.uk)
Outdoor planters Primrose (primrose.co.uk)
Fermob terrace table Made in Design (madeindesign.co.uk)
Terrace sofa The Modern Furniture Company (themodernfurniturecompany.com)
Vondom chairs Harrogate Interiors (harrogateinteriors.co.uk)
House sign Roos Designs (roosdesigns.co.uk)





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Nita sowed a natural wildflower meadow around the edge of the lawn to increase biodiversity. At night, the steel V support and underside of the cantilever are illuminated by lights hidden among the flowers