

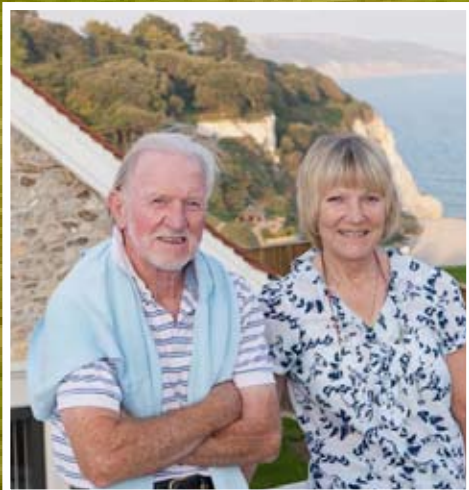
A Ian and Margaret Hobson's impressive new home is clad in local stone and stands on a breathtaking cliff-top site overlooking south Devon's Jurassic Coast.

STONE'S *throw*

STORY: ELEANOR WILDE
PICTURES: STEVE TAYLOR



Local stone has been used to clad the Hobsons' 300m² house, which has been built with low maintenance materials, including aluminium-framed doors and windows which are well suited to the marine environment. The powder-coated aluminium framed conservatory has a tiled floor over underfloor heating and enjoys far reaching views across the sea to Portland Bill.



Ian and Margaret Hobson stood on the beach in Seaton and looked up to admire a white painted house, situated high above them on the cliff. When the couple realised that it was for sale they immediately offered the asking price before even setting foot inside the detached three-bedroom house, lured by its amazing seaside location and generous gardens.

"It looked huge when we saw it from the beach but was actually extremely long and thin, which meant that we could only comfortably seat four people in the lounge," explains Ian, who paid £350,000 for the property.

The 1950s structure was also suffering from

rising damp and various other problems. Several architects came up with suggestions for extending and remodelling the brick building but, after living there for several years, Ian and Margaret finally concluded that the practical solution would be to knock it down and start again.

Once a number of Leylandii trees had been cleared from the garden it became evident that the half acre plot was actually large enough to accommodate two new houses side by side – one for the couple's own retirement and the other to sell on.

"This is a highly sensitive Conservation Area in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, so we knew that gaining planning permission



“We ended up going to five architects before we finally got what we wanted.”

could be tricky,” continues Ian. “Our first design was positioned further back on the slope to incorporate a basement, but the planners felt that a three-storey house would dominate the village setting. We ended up going to five architects before we finally got what we wanted – one actually tried to charge us £2,000 for producing a design which looked like a curved spaceship and was totally the opposite to our brief!”

Carl Leroy-Smith of Deer Park Alpha was the sixth architect to work on the Hobsons’ project, and listened carefully to their ideas.

The couple had collected pictures and magazine cuttings, which Carl skilfully

interpreted and developed to produce traditional looking two-storey detached houses, faced externally in Devon Chirt flint.

“Margaret was born in Beer and wanted to make sure that the exteriors of the new houses fitted in with old stone properties in the area,” says Ian, “but the interiors are more contemporary and were inspired by American ‘Saxon’ homes, with high ceilings and open-plan kitchen/living rooms.”

Eventually, after a tortuous two year planning process, permission was granted for the four-bedroom properties and Ian and Margaret were able to appoint a professional project manager to run the contract.



Wrought iron stair balustrades create an unusual feature and are naturally lit from above by a skylight. At night, shadows are projected onto the walls. It took five men to carry the hand-carved Portland stone fireplace which has been fitted in the open plan living room.



Their builder, Nick Medforth, was selected after the Hobsons admired the quality of some stonework he had built locally.

By this time their original architect had relocated to Plymouth and felt that long-distance site visits would prove both impractical and expensive. Instead, local project architect Michael de Friez was employed to oversee the build, which involved demolishing the existing house on the site once Ian and Margaret had moved into rented accommodation.

"Michael felt that the design cried out for a conservatory to take in the sea views,"

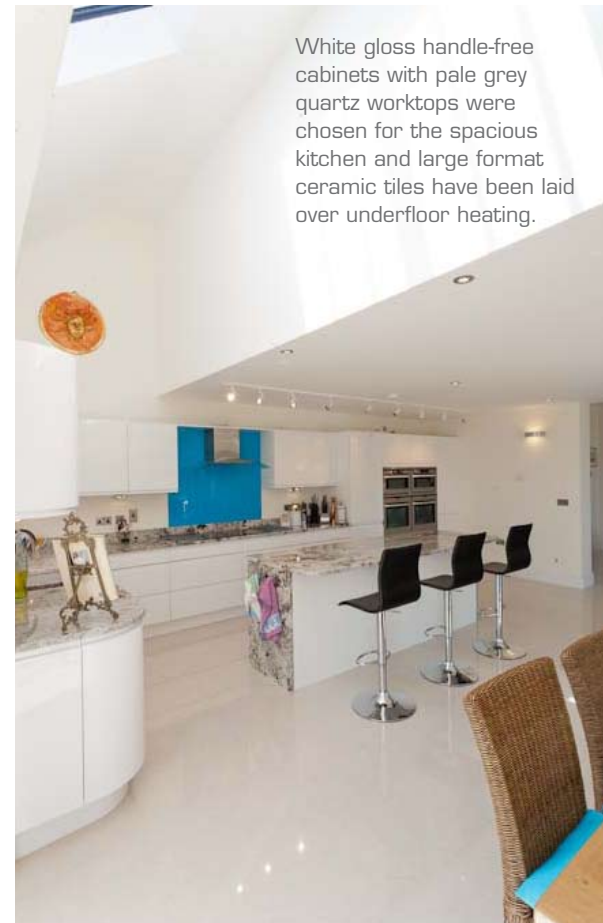
says Margaret. "We totally agreed, but the original planning officer had told us a conservatory would be out of the question, so we compromised by introducing roof glazing in the kitchen and study, and building a four-sided glazed atrium above the stairwell, which brings light into the centre of the house."

Michael de Friez approached the newly appointed planning officer, who was amazed that conservatories were not included in the original designs and readily agreed for glazed structures to be added to the rear of both new homes. These late additions occurred once foundations for the traditional brick and block

houses had already been built on the sloping site, resulting in a slight drop in level between the living rooms and the aluminium-framed conservatories.

"It was annoying, because if we'd been allowed to include them from the start then everything would have been on one level," says Ian, "but we spend so much time sitting in our conservatory and enjoying the sea and countryside views that it's only a very minor detail."

The sloping nature of the site meant that substantial retaining walls were required, and poor weather blighted the build which caused



White gloss handle-free cabinets with pale grey quartz worktops were chosen for the spacious kitchen and large format ceramic tiles have been laid over underfloor heating.

“We didn’t scrimp on anything and travelled all over the UK to find exactly what we wanted.”

delays. The Hobsons visited local quarries to select their facing stone, and chose Broadhayes Stone after attending the SelfBuild & Design show in Exeter where the company was exhibiting. Their Devon Chirt flint requires a bed depth of 150mm, and was beautifully laid by specialist stonemasons from Chard.

“We considered using stone blocks, but you can always see the join, so we decided it was worth paying for the real thing,” says Ian. “We went all over the country looking for stone quoins and dressings for the walls, and would have preferred a brown-gold roof tile to complement the stonework, but the planners insisted on red tiles instead.”

High quality, low maintenance materials were selected for both houses, which were built simultaneously and are virtually identical in style and layout, making it extremely difficult for Ian and Margaret to decide which property they were going to occupy.

“We ended up specifying the same flooring and finishes for both, and only decided at the very last minute that we would take the slightly larger house,” says Ian. “Then we were in the fortunate position of being able to choose our own neighbours for the house next door.”

Concealed solar panels on the south elevations provide hot water to the houses,

which have underfloor heating, and professional lighting designer was employed to devise interior and exterior lighting schemes – including up-lights which illuminate the stone walls.

“We didn’t scrimp on anything and travelled all over the UK to find exactly what we wanted – including driving to Birmingham to see samples of the quartz kitchen worktops,” says Ian. “One of our favourite features is the ornate oak and iron staircase and curved ‘balcony’ landing, which were inspired by balustrades we’d seen in America.”

The couple unsuccessfully trawled the →



captions



internet to locate a UK staircase supplier, but eventually purchased the balustrades from Poland. Despite assurances to the contrary the finished staircases did not comply with UK building regulations, and the building control officer condemned the structures while they were being installed.

"Everything had to be taken out and our architect and structural engineer then designed steel supporting beams for the concrete balconies," Ian recalls. "We started again, with a local company producing the steelwork, and we're very happy with the end result. When the stair lights are on they project shadows of the ironwork scrolls onto the walls."

Almost two years after leaving their old

house in August 2009 Ian, Margaret and Margaret's mother were able to move into their new home on the site.

"Somebody mentioned that we could enjoy views from every angle, apart from the kitchen island," says Ian. "We solved that by fitting an azure blue glass panel which reflects views of the beach and cliffs even when you're sitting with your back to the sea."

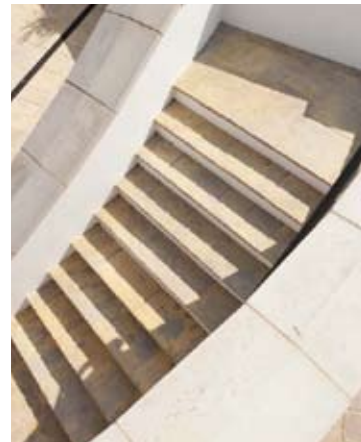
Such attention to detail means that both houses do full justice to their magnificent setting. House martins now nest in the eaves, and the gardens have been beautifully landscaped and planted. Stone benches, illuminated stone steps, olive trees and poppies create a Mediterranean feel, and over one

thousand plants now adorn the retaining wall.

"We'd renovated our previous home and business – a 34-room residential home, which had been a derelict shell – but this was our first new build project," says Margaret. "Building two houses at the same time certainly wasn't easy, but we had a fantastic team of people working on the site. Living on a cliff overlooking the sea could feel rather exposed, but our new home is so warm and well built that we love being able to hear the sound of the waves crashing onto the beach below."



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FLOORPLAN

Ground floor

1st floor

Ian and Margaret's TOP TIP

Tell your architect exactly what you want and then fight the planners to make sure you get it!



FINAL THOUGHTS

What was the high point of the project?

There were many high points throughout the build – from getting planning permission to putting the roof on. Our builder was first class and a real perfectionist, which made everything much easier.

...and the low point?

Anything to do with planning was an absolute pain – the planners always seem to have a hidden agenda.

What was your biggest extravagance?

The retaining walls cost around £80,000.

Your favourite feature?

Our conservatory almost didn't get built but is one of our favourite rooms in the house.

CONTACTS

Stone Broadhayes Stone: www.broadhayesstone.com

Design Deer Park Alpha: www.deerparkalpha.org

Project management Building Project Solutions (SW) Ltd:
www.buildingprojectsolutions.co.uk

Project architect Jackdaw Studios: www.jackdawstudio.co.uk

Building contractor Nick Medforth: 07831 279672

Kitchen Mayflower Kitchens and Bathrooms: www.mayflowergroupuk.co.uk

Sanitaryware Laufen: www.laufen.com