



CASE STUDY

BUILDING A FUTURE

First-time selfbuilders Adrian and Sara James have built an imposing new timber-framed house designed for their retirement.



In brief

Project New build
Location Surrey
Property cost £1.2m in 2014
Spent £600,000
Worth £2.2m

Story: **Debbie Jeffery** Photography: **Potton**

Sara James had always wanted to live in a particular road in Reigate since she was a child growing up in the area. Her patience finally paid off when after two years of waiting and approaching residents a 1960s bungalow came onto the market. Sara's husband, Adrian, was far from impressed however, as the property had no architectural merit and plenty of structural defects.

"I couldn't see myself living there in a million years," he recalls. "The bungalow had been poorly extended in the 1970s, but Sara wanted to buy

it immediately because she'd always dreamed of living in the road. The compromise was to buy the property, demolish the bungalow and build a new house for our retirement. Building a house had never even crossed our minds before."

The quarter-acre plot is located on a peaceful, tree-lined street in an Area of Special Residential Character, within walking distance of the town centre and the North Downs. Sara and Adrian began to consider what style of house they wanted to build on the site, and Adrian clearly recalled a trip to the Ideal Home exhibition when he was a child.

**ADRIAN AND SARA'S TOP TIP**

“Be on site as much as possible – it really makes a huge difference to the build speed and **you will feel fully involved** in the process.”

EXTERIOR

The new Potton house replaces a tired 1960s bungalow on an enviable plot, and was designed to reflect the character of the area. The Georgian-style exterior features sash windows, an entrance portico, clay roof tiles and rendered walls.

In detail

PROJECT

Design Potton/Richard Hall:
Potton.co.uk

STRUCTURE

Timber frame, staircase, internal doors, skirtings, insulation Potton: potton.co.uk
Windows Bereco: bereco.co.uk
Brick, quoin and roof tile supply Brickability: brickability.co.uk
Carpentry Timber Constructions Limited: timberconstructions.co.uk
Electrics Electrical Building Solutions Limited: ebs-ltd.biz
Plumbing PJH Plumbing Ltd: pjhplumbingltd.co.uk
Drylining J. T. Bevann: jtbevann.co.uk

Render EMR Renders Ltd: emrwallcoatings.co.uk

Foundation design Stephen Johnston Consulting Engineers Ltd: stephenjohnsonconsultingengineers.com

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Bathroom design Ripples: ripplesbathrooms.com
Sanitaryware Laufen: laufen.co.uk
Kitchen Cambridge Kitchens & Bathrooms: cambridgekitchens.co.uk
Underfloor heating Nu-Heat: nu-heat.co.uk
Fireplaces Anglia Fireplaces: fireplaces.co.uk
Floor tiles Tile Emporium, Reigate: thestonetileemporium.com

THE FLOORPLAN

A large sitting room, hallway, dining room and study make up the front section of the ground floor, with a plant room, wet room, utility and larder between this and the kitchen to the rear. Single storey family and garden rooms overlook the rear garden, and upstairs there are four bedrooms, a family bathroom, a master en suite and dressing room on the first floor. Downstairs, the extension creates an open-plan living room and kitchen, leading into the dining area in the older part of the house.



“I remember seeing a Potton house at the exhibition, and loved the combination of traditional features and mod cons,” he says. “From memory I think the show house was a Gransden, with an inglenook fireplace and exposed beams, and as a child I particularly liked the gadget that allowed you to fill the bath in the en suite from your bed. Subsequently, we lived in an Arrington Potton house for 10 years, so we’re well acquainted with their homes.”

Sara and Adrian visited the Potton show centre, and loved the symmetrical appearance, bright interiors and tall windows of the Georgian-inspired Milchester. “Being able to walk around the house really helped when

it came to our own design – from layout and room sizes through to the location of electrical points,” says Sara. “We needed to ensure that the external design reflected the character of the area, and overlooking was also a potential issue as the neighbouring house to the south is at a lower level to our plot.”

Working with Potton architect Richard Hall, the couple configured a design to suit their needs and those of the plot. These drawings formed the basis of their planning application and the Building Regulations submission.

Adrian and Sara also attended a number of Potton seminars and self-build exhibitions, which helped to build up their knowledge



of the process and inform their decisions on features and technologies to include in their new home.

“Building a house is a huge investment, and we wanted to research everything thoroughly, so going to the seminars gave us a good idea of what we could do in terms of insulation and energy efficiency,” says Adrian. “As it’s a retirement home we wanted to reduce our outgoings, and the more we could shave off our energy bills the better.”

Adrian and Sara arranged pre-application meetings with the local planning authority as well as their neighbours to discuss their ideas, and amended their draft plans to address any concerns. Fortunately, the neighbours on both sides were extremely supportive.

“Before I retired I was a planning consultant – although my experience was mainly with larger commercial buildings and housing estates,” says Adrian. “Making an application for our own house was a far more stressful experience, as I knew that if I got it wrong Sara would not have been happy.”

“Our application was dealt with in the statutory eight-week period, though, and the only real amendment was

Kitchen

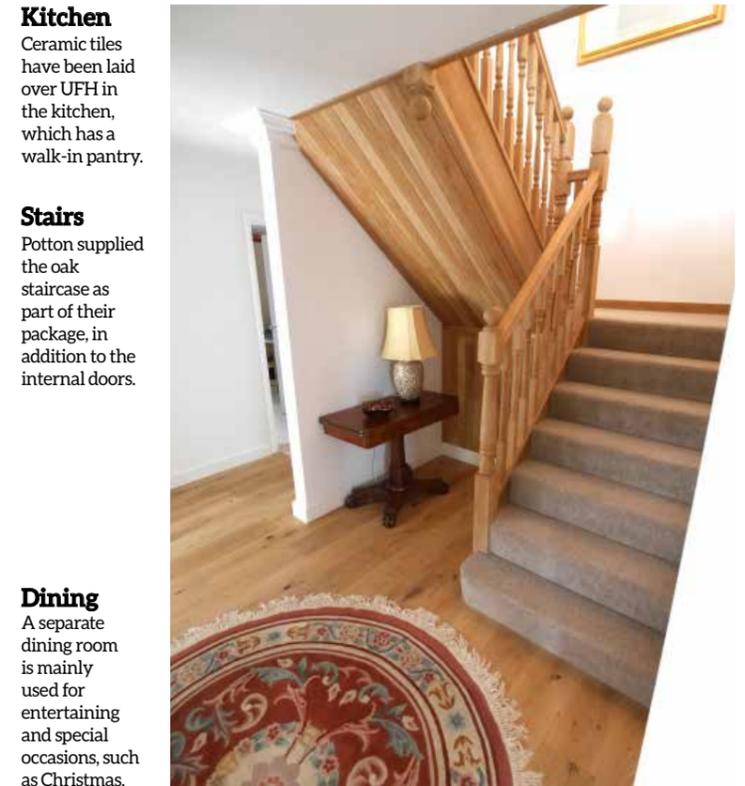
Ceramic tiles have been laid over UFH in the kitchen, which has a walk-in pantry.

Stairs

Potton supplied the oak staircase as part of their package, in addition to the internal doors.

Dining

A separate dining room is mainly used for entertaining and special occasions, such as Christmas.



“Our build was a steep learning curve, and we had our fair share of ups and downs.”



that the planners preferred clay tiles to slates for the roof. They also wanted to see the window design and material samples for bricks, tiles and render,” says Adrian.

The bungalow was demolished in August 2015, and the building work started in the October, using Potton-approved subcontractors. For the first six months of the project Sara and Adrian continued to live in their previous home in Cambridge, and commuted to the site at weekends. During this period they relied on an independent project manager to oversee the build on their behalf, but soon realised that this was not working out.

“We would visit the site and very little appeared to have been done, so when I retired in March 2016 we decided to rent a flat in Reigate close to our plot and take over managing the project ourselves,” Adrian explains. “It was a difficult decision, as we had no previous building experience, but just being on site every day meant that we were able to chase up subcontractors and make instant decisions. With the help of Potton’s project manager, we felt that we could do a better job of the day-to-day management ourselves, and never regretted that decision.”



Deep, 1.8m reinforced concrete foundations were required for the new house, and these were completed by a subcontractor before Potton delivered and erected the timber frame over a period of two weeks. Sara and Adrian chose the Kingspan Kooltherm insulation package for their home, which is finished externally in a through-coloured render that requires virtually no maintenance.

Clay roof tiles, Portland stone quoins, a brick chimney stack and an imposing entrance portico all add to the distinctive Georgian feel of the house, which features triple-glazed timber sash windows. The structure is extremely airtight, and is heated by underfloor heating throughout, with a mechanical ventilation and heat recovery system also installed. Four photovoltaic panels provide electricity for the property which qualifies for quarterly Feed-In Tariff payments.

Internally, the couple have reconfigured the Milchester show home layout to meet their own requirements, and have enlarged the sitting room. To future-proof the house they have incorporated a ground-floor wet room, and a study which can easily be converted into a bedroom on this level if required.

Much of their time is spent to the rear of the property, where a spacious kitchen opens into a family room and a garden room overlooking the patio and newly-landscaped garden through glazed doors.

Potton supplied the internal doors, the staircase and skirtings for the interiors, and advised the couple throughout the build. "To be able to draw on Potton's wealth of knowledge and experience was invaluable," says Sara. "We moved into the house in November 2016, when it was more or less complete, with some work – particularly to the garden – continuing into the New Year."



Lounge

A wood-burning fire was installed in the separate sitting room, where glazed internal doors ensure that light reaches all areas of the ground floor.

Garden room

The glazed garden room features a roof lantern, and overlooks the raised terrace and south-facing garden.

Bathroom

Three spacious bedrooms and a single bedroom are on the first floor, together with a family bathroom and two en suites.



As Adrian and Sara plan to stay in their new home for the foreseeable future they chose hard wearing, low maintenance fixtures and fittings. Tiled floors have been laid in the kitchen and garden room, with timber in the hallway and carpets elsewhere. The carpet required a specialist underlay to ensure they conduct heat efficiently from the underfloor heating system.

"We hope never to leave this house, but we're already looking for a plot where we can build another house to sell on as an investment," says Adrian. "Our build was a steep learning curve, and we had our fair share of ups and downs, but it seems a shame not to make use of our knowledge – and another building project will certainly keep us busy in our retirement."

The final word

What was the high point?

When the scaffolding came down to reveal all was a high point, and once the power was connected and the lights could be turned on was another.

...and the low point?

Wet weather caused delays with the roofing, and meant that the house was flooded, but it dried out fine with no lasting damage.

The best buy?

Our pantry with its sliding door, which helps to keep kitchen clutter at bay.

...and the biggest extravagance?



We didn't scrimp on the build or landscaping because this is somewhere we plan to stay, and we splurged on the wood-burning fires. The one in the lounge has a fan incorporated into it so that it blows warm air into the room, which virtually heats the entire house.

Garden

The newly landscaped garden has a raised terrace area.