



**REAR**  
Set at an angle, the kitchen/living/dining room has wide glazing that slides open, with a Juliet balcony above.

### In brief

**Project** Timber frame new build  
**Location** Ongar, Essex  
**Cost** £400,000  
**Spent** £750,000  
**Worth** £1.2m

# A fresh approach



Christine and Andrew MacDonald have replaced a tired bungalow with an architect-designed dream home next door to their existing property.

STORY: **LOUISE PARKIN** PICTURES: **STEVE HUGHES**

**A**fter 25 years living in their family home, Andrew and Christine MacDonald began to think about moving to a smaller, more efficient house that was easier to maintain, but they had never really considered building their own home. One day the perfect opportunity came up when the bungalow next door was put up for sale. “Our three children had all left home, and we realised we didn’t need a five-bedroom house any more,” Andrew explains. “When the house next door went on the market, it was up for £400,000 and at first I couldn’t see how building on it would stack up financially. It was Christine who convinced me that it was a good idea, and that made me look past the money.” The MacDonalds loved the location of their home and building on the site of the bungalow next door meant they could get the home they wanted without leaving their neighbourhood.



**FRONT**  
White render and hanging slate tiles adorn the front of this contemporary timber-framed home.

The plot is in an elevated position at the edge of an Essex village with unobstructed panoramic views. The sale was agreed very quickly on a handshake, as Andrew explains: “We had known our neighbour for a long time, and we were quite close. I even suggested she apply for planning permission for a replacement home and helped her with the application, months before we thought about buying it ourselves. She was keen to sell to us, and from our perspective it was a simple choice because we knew we liked the location and we could design the house we wanted.”





## In detail

### PROJECT

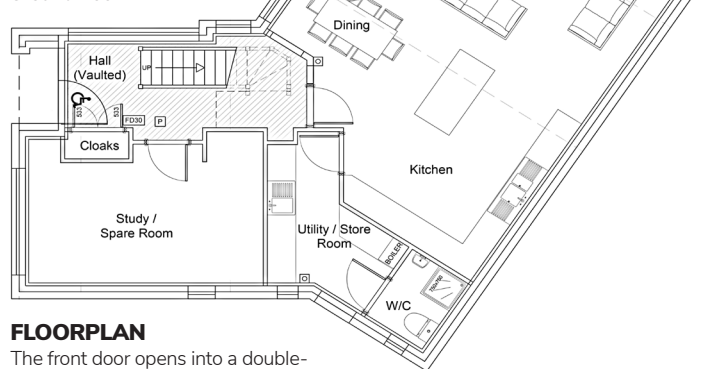
**Builder** GPML Construction:  
0800 046 0266, gpmlgroup.co.uk  
**Structural engineer** Elliot Wood  
Consultants: 020 7499 5888  
**Roofer** MT Roofing: 01322 911651  
**Timber frame** Potton: potton.co.uk  
**Garage door** Access Garage  
Doors: 01708 227042  
**Gates** 1st Ace Security:  
020 8290 5050, 1stacesecurity.co.uk  
**Render** K Rend: k-rend.co.uk  
**Photovoltaics** Enhabit: 020  
8380 8908, enhabit.uk.com  
**Boiler** Intergas combi boiler:  
intergasheating.co.uk  
**Kitchen** John Luke Kitchens: 020  
8364 7888, johnluke.co.uk  
**Bathrooms** Frontline Bathrooms:  
frontlinebathrooms.co.uk  
**Staircase** Canal Engineering:  
0115 986 6321  
**Internal stone cladding** Carbon  
gold quartz from Z clad: zclad.co.uk  
**Internal doors** Moore and Moore  
Doors: mooremooresdoors.co.uk  
**Windows** ALUK: uk.aluk.com  
**Large sliding door** Dutemann:  
dutemann.co.uk  
**Floor tiles** Concept Tiles:  
concepttiles.co.uk

### LANDSCAPING

A large patio has been created ideal for entertaining, enjoying stunning views.



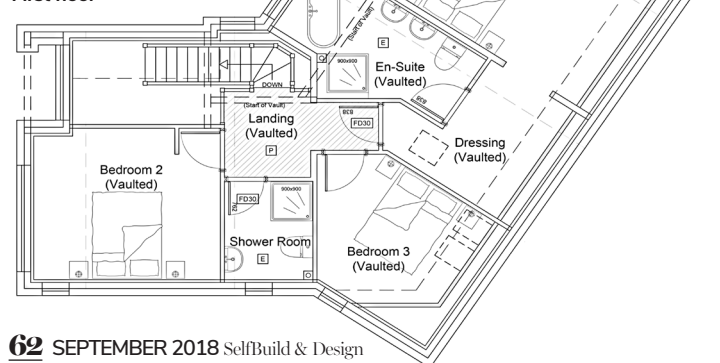
### Ground floor



### FLOORPLAN

The front door opens into a double-height hallway which opens onto an open-plan living/dining/kitchen. There is a study which doubles as a ground-floor bedroom to the front of the house. Upstairs are three bedrooms with vaulted ceilings and two bathrooms including an en suite.

### First floor



Preliminary talks with an architect proved unsatisfactory when it was suggested that a dormer bungalow would be the safest approach to secure planning permission for the Green Belt site. The MacDonalds were keen to push for something altogether more cutting edge.

"A dormer bungalow was not our vision of an architect-designed dream house," says Andrew, a retired company director. "We searched the internet and found a local architect who had a very contemporary portfolio. He was young and enthusiastic, and he visited the plot and said that the house should maximise the views and surrounding countryside. We agreed."

The architect also suggested that a number of existing ramshackle sheds and workshops could be demolished and traded off with the planners for an extra storey on the house.

The success of the design hinges on the angle of the footprint on the plot, positioned to take advantage of the five-mile view over open countryside and the valley beyond. A timber frame with slate roof would be used to form a three-bedroom house full of interesting angles, large windows and open spaces.

Very few amendments were required before the designs were submitted for planning permission, a process which took several months because of a second application to slightly change the shape of the structure.

"A corner to the rear was cut out. I could see that if we used that as part of the floorplan we would gain quite a bit of extra space, so we put in another application," explains Christine. "It slowed things down, but it was the right decision."

The project struck rocky ground when the estimated costs by the architect proved too conservative when compared with the quotes from the builders they suggested, and so Andrew and Christine decided to search for another way to get their house built.

"The architect's imagination, skill and energy were well worth the money, but his estimation of costs was well off the mark," explains Andrew, about the quotes which were 30 per cent more than expected.

The MacDonalds decided to approach Potton to see if they could design a timber frame from the existing





**KITCHEN/  
LIVING**  
A large  
L-shaped  
room  
combines the  
main living  
areas into one  
large space  
which opens  
out onto the  
garden.



architect's drawings. Potton agreed, and what's more they had a portfolio of trusted contractors in the area.

"There are lots of Potton houses around here which are well built, and I felt like I could trust them," says Andrew. The couple were introduced to GPML Construction, an approved Potton contractor, which Andrew says was "fantastic from the outset".

Work began with the demolition of the existing bungalow, which was damp and dilapidated, and the outbuildings were taken down too, the debris removed in skips. Christine and Andrew remained living in their 300-year-old home next door for the duration of the project, spending every day on site and making bacon sandwiches and tea for the workforce.

"The build dominated our lives and was exhausting at times," recalls Christine. "The amount of thought and energy required shouldn't be underestimated!" Andrew agrees: "It was an emotive process and

there were many highs and lows. We are glad we did this in our 50s rather than our 60s!"

Lee Phelps, principal builder for GPML, was heavily involved in the design, suggesting tweaks that enhanced elements of the house. He says: "For once our client was happy to let our design flair show through, which was refreshing. Some elements, such as the internal slate and the boundary wall, have really brought the house to life."

Such changes, while eating into the budget, were gratefully accepted by the MacDonalds who were keen to achieve the best house possible. "Lee and his team were brilliant. He suggested that a wall instead of the planned fence would do the house far more justice. He came up with the design, gave us a reasonable price, and built it. And we couldn't be happier. At no point did I feel that we were being charged unnecessarily."

The timber frame is clad externally with K Rend through-coloured silicone render, with plenty of double-







glazed aluminium windows, including a six-metre aperture spanning the rear of the house which slides open to provide a close connection with the garden.

The front door opens into a double-height entrance hall that has a feature wall clad in slate, a chandelier and an open-tread staircase in oak, glass and stainless steel. Manufactured by Canal Engineering, the staircase cost £30,000 and is a key feature of the design.

Most of the ground floor is taken up with the living/diner/kitchen which forms an L shape and is where the MacDonalds spend most of their time. The utility room doubles as a plant and tech room, and a separate snug/TV room can also be used as a ground-floor bedroom when elderly relatives visit, for whom there is also a ground-floor shower room. The kitchen has a generous three-metre island with a white quartz worktop incorporating a hob, with a flush fitted extractor above. One wall has a driftwood finish and light grey high-gloss cabinets, while porcelain floor tiles throughout the ground floor are designed to mimic the appearance of concrete.

Lutron blinds have been installed throughout, including three two-metre blinds for the largest window. They



**BEDROOMS**  
Each bedroom has a vaulted ceiling giving them a feeling of spaciousness.

**BATHROOM**  
Interesting angles have been created in the contemporary bathroom, which has breathtaking views from a large fixed pane window.



**STAIRS**  
Oak treads have been cut into the glass balustrade.



are operated by wall switches and can be closed and opened with a single switch if required.

Upstairs are three bedrooms, including the master suite which has an en suite bathroom. The other two bedrooms share a family bathroom that has an impressive view.

Solar photovoltaic panels supplement the power requirements, and while the MacDonalds' former house had an oil-fired boiler, Calor gas provides the heating and hot water, chosen because it meets SAP requirements.

The MacDonalds only moved into their new home when the entire project was finished, including all external landscaping and decorating, and there was nothing more to do. "Everything was new, clean and easy," says Andrew. "Now all we need to do is the planting and add interest in the garden."

With no plans to build again, the MacDonalds are happy with their new home, and the views are even better than those enjoyed from their previous home. "We put everything into this project – so much energy and thought – and there's no way we could ever do it again! And we love it. We've built our dream."

**GARDEN**  
The next project for the MacDonalds is to complete the garden, which is already landscaped and has a feature wall.



**Final word**

**What was the high point?**  
One of the last items to be fitted was the staircase – this was a definite high point.

**And the low point?**  
A skip lorry went into a ditch and almost overturned. It needed two vehicles to get it out, ripping out the newly installed broadband cables in the process. We weren't very happy that evening.

**Your greatest extravagance?**  
The Lutron blinds were expensive but they are amazing.

**And your best buy?**  
The bespoke TV panel.

**What do you like most about your house?**  
The sense of open space and light.

**Anything you'd do differently?**  
We'd specify bath fittings and finishes before construction starts. Time flies and then pressure to make decisions increases.

**And your top tip?**  
Try to enjoy the process – it's a steep learning curve.