

# A labour of love

Terry and Isabel Cross realised their self build dream with this barn-style timber frame home in Cambridgeshire.

STORY: LOUISE PARKIN PHOTOGRAPHY: POTTON



## IN BRIEF

**PROJECT** Timber frame new build

**LOCATION:**

Cambridgeshire

**TOTAL SPENT** £550,000

**WORTH** £600,000



When Isabel and Terry Cross were offered a piece of land by a neighbour, the couple jumped at the chance, immediately recognising the potential to realise a long-held ambition to build their own home.

Terry and Isabel are in their 60s, and with both of their sons having moved out, with children of their own, the couple were looking for a new home that suited their needs. “We read all the self build magazines, and had our hearts set on timber frame. We looked at a few different timber frame companies, eventually choosing Potton, for their reputation as well as their location,” explains Terry.

The half-acre plot in a Conservation Area is a former paddock close to the Crosses’ previous home in a Cambridgeshire village, and they were keen to stay nearby having lived in the area for more than 20 years. It was only when they attended every academy course at Potton’s show centre and met other would-be selfbuilders that they realised how difficult plot finding could be. “We thought at the time how lucky we were, as others were looking for land with outline permission. We had to go through the planning process ourselves. As it transpired we possibly had the longer journey,” recalls Terry.

“It was reassuring to find other practical and enthusiastic people and that they were no more experienced than us,” says Isabel.

The planning application was made by architect Adrian Bussetil, and conditions from the planning office were difficult and protracted. The site is within the village boundary, but because of its Conservation Area status, in addition to the usual surveys, biodiversity and arboricultural reports an archaeological dig was also required. “We got conflicting advice from individual officers, and so in the end we involved our local councillor to mediate, as there were no local objections at all. This brought a swift resolution, but



“It’s been a labour of love, and we have had a personal investment in our home.”



**EXTERIOR**  
Bricks, soft green cladding and clay tile roof have been used to build this four-bedroom barn-style home.

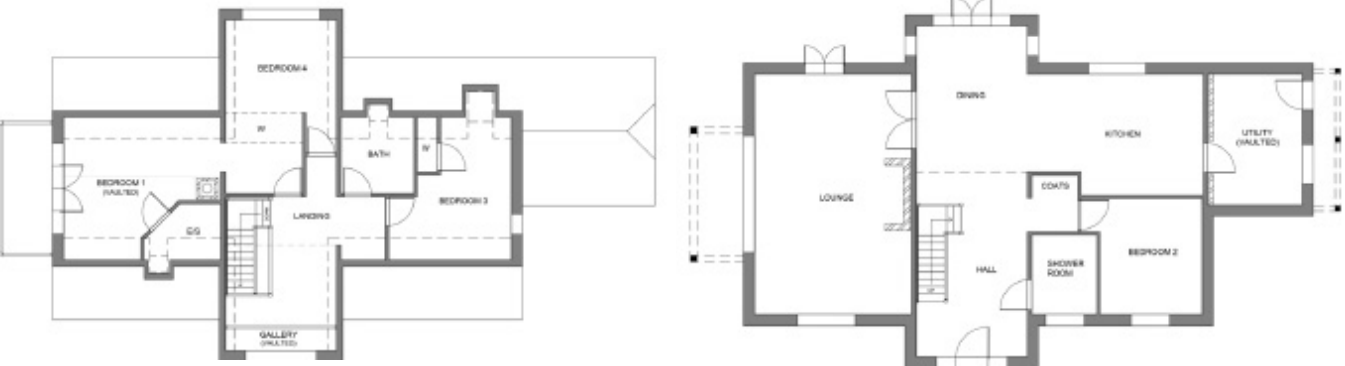


## IN DETAIL

- PROJECT**  
**Design** Adrian Buttesil: [planningandarchitecture.co.uk](http://planningandarchitecture.co.uk)  
**Project management** Delta: [deltaprojectmanagement.co.uk](http://deltaprojectmanagement.co.uk)  
**Plumbing** Proheat: [Proheat.co.uk](http://Proheat.co.uk)  
**Roofer** Manor Roofing: [manor.roofing@idnet.co.uk](mailto:manor.roofing@idnet.co.uk)
- STRUCTURE**  
**Timber frame and insulation** Potton: [potton.co.uk](http://potton.co.uk)  
**Bricks** Hoskins Cottage blend, Cambridgeshire Bricks: [cambstileandbrick.co.uk](http://cambstileandbrick.co.uk)  
**Oak floor:** [barhamabdsons.com](http://barhamabdsons.com)  
**Cladding** HardiPlank: [jameshardie.co.uk](http://jameshardie.co.uk)
- Roof tiles** Imerys Pamphelin: [imerys-roof-tiles.com](http://imerys-roof-tiles.com)  
**Insulation** Kingspan Kooltherm: [kingspan.com](http://kingspan.com)
- FIXTURES & FITTINGS**  
**Woodburner** Woodwarm: [woodwarmstoves.co.uk](http://woodwarmstoves.co.uk)  
**Underfloor heating** Nu-Heat: [nu-heat.co.uk](http://nu-heat.co.uk)  
**Toilets** Laufen: [laufen.co.uk](http://laufen.co.uk)  
**Kitchen** Naked Kitchens, Fakenham: [nakedkitchens.com](http://nakedkitchens.com)  
**Windows** K Glass, Byng and Sons: [byngjoinery.eintro.uk](http://byngjoinery.eintro.uk)  
**Ground source heat pump** NIBE: [nibe.eu](http://nibe.eu)  
**Appliances** Siemens: [siemens.co.uk](http://siemens.co.uk)

## The floorplan

The ground floor comprises a large lounge, kitchen/diner, guest bedroom with en suite and a utility/plant room. Upstairs is a spacious galleried landing, three more bedrooms, one en suite and a family bathroom.







#### HALLWAY

Terry Cross is a carpenter who makes rocking horses. He used his skills to create an elegant oak staircase.



there were some unnecessary and irritating adjustments such as centimetres in roof height and the removal of a gable window from the design,” says Isabel.

Conservation Area status also meant that solar photovoltaic panels were not permitted.

Moving in with their son’s family, who live two miles from site, enabled both Terry and Isabel to focus on sourcing, budgeting and project management without the pressure of running a home.

They enlisted the help of a project manager for the initial stages of the build, but once the structure was watertight they took it on themselves. “We were nervous about groundworks, but with hindsight we knew more than we thought, and with a good contractor we need not have worried,” says Terry, a carpenter who makes bespoke rocking horses by hand. Being self employed, he was able to take three months off to be involved in the project, and was on site much of the time, available to make decisions and keep the site tidy. He used an old barn as a workshop during the build, while Isabel continued to work full time as



“There were so many decisions with deadlines, but often so many choices too.”

a senior manager for a local mental health charity.

The Crosses moved in sooner than planned, living in one completed bedroom and bathroom, the rest of the house bare plastered walls and concrete floors, while work went on around them. They survived for several months with a temporary kitchen, completing the interior one room at a time.

Connecting to services proved frustrating, costing far more and taking much longer than they had estimated. “A major factor was the distance from the road. We budgeted more than average but completely underestimated the cost of the power connection,” explains Isabel. “Other utility charges were more modest, but it was important to coordinate installation, as laying them meant digging up the neighbours’ drive. This proved to be a test of patience and the house was almost entirely completed using just an extension lead from a neighbour and a 50-gallon water bowser.”

The couple hired the main contractors, roofer, bricklayer and plumber, but undertook other work themselves. They hired equipment and labour to dig trenches and lay the loops for the ground source heat pump, completed much of the second fix carpentry and internal decorating and Terry also built the stairs and balustrade, incorporating Arts and Crafts style mini-inlays in handrails and newels.

Adapted from Potton’s Oakwell barn design, the single-height brick facades are met with a cat slide roof covered in Imerys Pamphelin clay tiles, bisected at the front with a double-height facade clad in pale green fibre cement weatherboarding and topped with an intersecting clipped gable, a shape replicated to the ends of the main volume. The chimney is in the centre of the house to allow the heat from it to radiate



throughout, and large expanses of timber double glazing flood the house with light. A triple garage/workshop has also been built in the same style. “Our vision was a country contemporary finish, where a mixture of old and new would sit well together,” explains Isabel.

Terry skilfully installed the shaker-style cabinets in the generous dining kitchen, which has an island unit, rounded breakfast bar and tiled floors, while wooden floors in the dining area continue into the spacious, well-lit lounge. In here a large inglenook fireplace provides an attractive focal point, and double doors both here and in the dining room open onto landscaped gardens.

There is a ground floor bedroom and shower room too, meaning that the Crosses can remain living in the house for life.

Upstairs, three bedrooms, an en suite and a family bathroom are connected by the mezzanine galleried landing, which has oak balustrades with one glazed section replacing spindles to prevent interruption



**LIVING SPACE**  
Wooden floors reflect the light in this airy and stylish living room, which has a feature inglenook fireplace.







## FINAL WORD

### What was the high point?

How much we have achieved ourselves, we feel very invested in every aspect of our home.

Terry has input a huge amount of work and skill, particularly bespoke carpentry.

### And the low point?

Moving in and still waiting for utilities when removals were scheduled. We built the entire house in seven months on a power extension lead and a water bowser from the neighbours as the utilities took so long – final frustrations ran very high!

### What was your greatest extravagance?

Not sure there is one – we bought high quality/best value throughout, and feel it is reflected in the final build quality.

### And your best buy?

We are really pleased with the kitchen quality and value; Terry fitted it and is meticulous by nature.

### Anything you would do differently?

Delaying moving in would have been helpful – we would not have had to complete all of the house room by room while living in it (it took a further year to sign off). If we had been able to consider spraying mist coat as one job before moving in it would have helped. There are points when there are so many decisions at once, despite marking up a comprehensive electrical plan we have ended up with the odd switch in the wrong place.

It's hard to accept you can't supervise or think of everything.

### BEDROOMS

Interesting angles in the barn-style roof create drama in the bedrooms.

of the view through the double-height windows.

A little ingenuity was required when the smooth shape and overall weight of the unusual egg-shaped bath meant that it had to be hoisted by a digger onto the balcony.

Creating the paving to the front door, the entrance has a level access, and a curved slope from the gravel drive has been created in brick setts. The woodland drive creates an impressive route to the house, while the front garden is landscaped and there is a formal garden to the rear, all designed by Isabel. She explains: "We were forced to prioritise the drive and landscaping when torrential rain turned the site, which was just earth at this point, into deep mud. We got up to find my car sinking, and the motor on the treatment plant at an angle!"

Working gradually through the house to complete each room in turn, the Crosses have worked hard to create a cosy, comfortable home with a sense of warmth and filled with natural light.

"Having an artistic and practical vision of what the end result might look like was a real help in decision making – there were so many decisions with deadlines, but often so many choices too. It has been a labour of love, and means we have had a very personal investment in our home," says Terry.

### TERRY AND ISABEL'S TOP TIPS:

"Be methodical with your receipts and record keeping – there is always someone asking for official information, right down to getting street numbering, and it is a huge benefit when assembling the self-build VAT claim. Pinterest is a great asset for mood boards. "