

Building for the future

Michael and Angela Romeril have built a cottage style four-bedroom timber-frame home in Dorset, designed to accommodate their changing needs.

STORY: LOUISE PARKIN PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM HODGSON

IN BRIEF

PROJECT

Timber frame new build

LOCATION Dorset

COST £195,000

SPENT £405,000

WORTH £620,000 approx

For Michael and Angela Romeril, the decision to downsize was as much about the garden as the house. Having lived in a draughty 16th-century thatched cottage for the last 15 years, tending to their high maintenance, one-acre garden was becoming unmanageable. "We are both in our 70s now, and our old thatched cottage was not really equipped to allow us to live there forever. We wanted a house that was more efficient, and we would be able to get around in as we grow older," explains Angela, who worked in international family law before retiring.

Friends alerted the couple to a dilapidated bungalow inhabited by an elderly lady and owned by a local farmer. The Romerils approached the owner requesting that their offer be considered should the decision be made to sell, and this was accepted immediately. Michael and Angela sold their house quickly, and moved into rented accommodation

nearby but when the owner sadly died just as contracts were being exchanged, probate delayed the sale and the Romerils moved up to Leeds to live in their holiday home and be close to their son and grandchildren. "Probate took six months, which is the amount of time we had agreed to wait. Fortunately the heirs of the bungalow honoured the original agreement to sell it to us at the agreed price," explains Michael, who is a retired environmental advisor to the government.

Convinced it would be faster and cheaper, the Romerils opted for timber frame construction after attending a number of self build shows, eventually choosing timber-frame housebuilder Potton, which has a show centre in Bedfordshire where there are five houses.

"We were introduced to Sean Adams who was a consultant for Potton, and he helped us through the whole process, from choosing and amending a design, to applying for planning permission, and even recommending a builder," says Michael.



REAR

A sunroom projects towards the garden, with windows, bifolds and roof lights on all sides.





“We were also able to get a good idea of the total cost. It made the process simple for us, which was important because we were living in Leeds and remained there throughout the build.”

The dead-end road leading to the home is unmade, and has only four other houses, all built in the 1960s. The style of these buildings influenced the Romeril's choice of external finishes, such as the cladding material and the roof height and covering. “We wanted the house to be built in the vernacular, and this means pale render and red clay roof tiles. The road is also slightly sloping, and we thought the roof height should stand midway between the two houses either side,” explains Angela.

The cottage-style home has two gabled windows and a porch on the front elevation, while at the rear is a single-storey sunroom, with a vaulted ceiling containing roof lights on both pitches, and windows on all three sides as well as bifold doors.

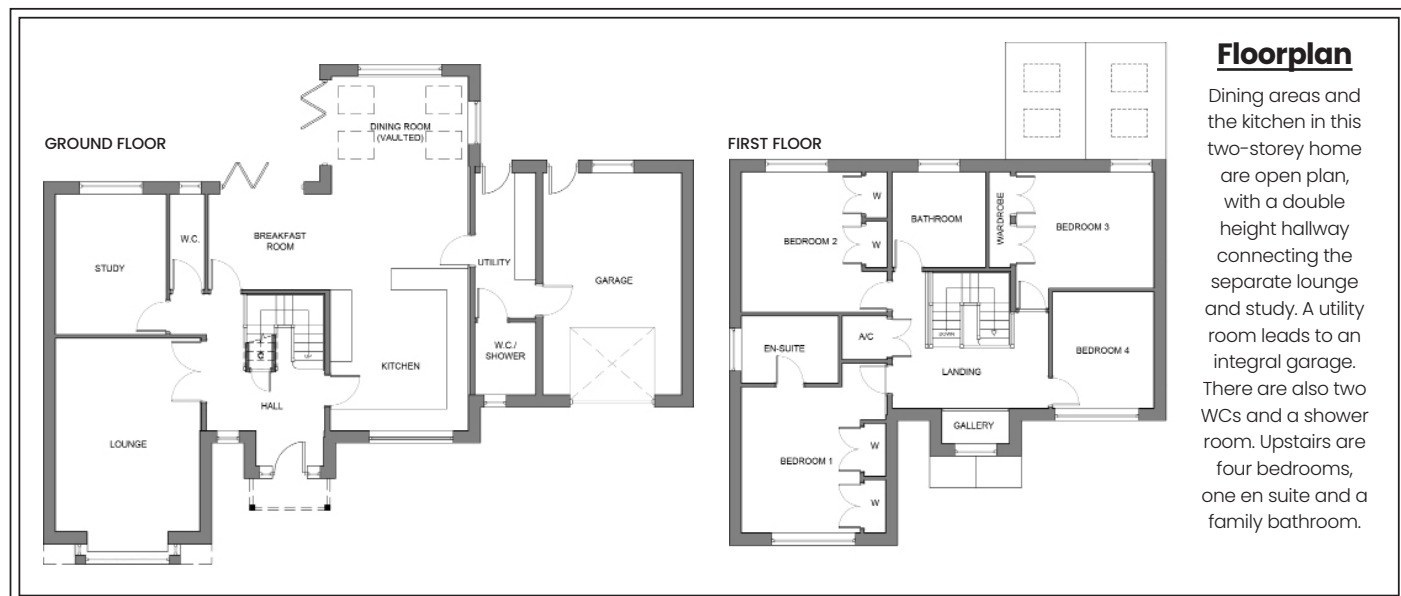
The couple needed enough living space for family to visit, as none of their three children live close by, so four bedrooms were required upstairs and large open-plan living spaces downstairs. “The layout gives us everything we need, and it's all on one level which means that it's suitable for wheelchairs, should we need them in the future,” says Angela. “We had to sacrifice the walk-in wardrobe though in the master suite, because we needed somewhere for the hot water cylinder, but other than that we have exactly the space we need.”

The prefab bungalow that occupied the site was demolished and the land cleared, which meant moving



FRONT

Coated in render with facing bricks below, the large home has two two intersecting gables, the roof covered in red clay tiles.





IN DETAIL	
PROJECT	FIXTURES AND FITTINGS
Architect Sean Adams: adamspss.co.uk	Kitchen and worktop Magnet: magnet.co.uk
Builder Acorn House Ltd: acornhousetd.co.uk	Appliances AEG: aeg.co.uk
Timber frame Potton: potton.co.uk	Bathrooms Bradfords: bradfords.co.uk
Groundworker Robin Chapman Ltd: robinchappo@yahoo.co.uk	Flooring Karndean: karndean.com
STRUCTURE	Flooring supply and carpets Cullingford Carpets Ltd: cullingfordcarpets.co.uk
Roof tiles Imerys Val de Seine clay tile: imerys.com	Staircase Potton: potton.co.uk
Bricks Weinerberger Kassandra red multi:	Stove Yeoman: yeomanstoves.co.uk
Brick supply Bradfords: bradfords.co.uk	Switches and sockets G Rowland Electrical Services Ltd: 01747 229296
Windows and external doors A&B Glass Company Ltd, Suffolk: abglass.co.uk	Decorating JustMint Painting and Decorating, Sherborne: justmintdecorating.co.uk
Insulation Kingspan: kingspan.co.uk	

a telegraph pole and burying the cables, as well as cutting down some large trees and removing what appeared to be a boundary hedge. This revealed another section of garden, almost doubling the total size. "We weren't really looking for a big garden, and this one is larger than we were expecting but it's been designed so that it's easier to manage," says Michael. A garden designer was commissioned to create a calming, low-maintenance haven, including a raised deck leading to a summer house accessed by shallow steps, raised vegetable and flower beds and a



KITCHEN
The Magnet kitchen, in off white and navy, has Shaker-style in-frame cabinets and pale stone worktops.

Michael & Angela's top tip

"Be prepared to make endless decisions, from the fundamental to the final dressing. It can be quite challenging."



OPEN-PLAN SPACE
A spacious living/dining/kitchen was designed to provide somewhere for the whole family.

generous lawn. Beyond the boundary the garden backs onto fields, grazed by sheep, donkeys and goats.

Acorn Construction of Ilminster, who have built more than 20 Potton homes in the area, were appointed as main contractors and also managing the project. They hired a groundworker, and then taking on the remainder of the build once the timber frame had been erected.

Services were on already on site but were poorly positioned for the new home. Water pipes ran beneath the sunroom, and cost £18,000 to move. "The services cost more than expected, and moving the water pipe was frustrating because we had to use the contractor recommended by the water company, even though we received a quote for half the amount. The electricity was £4,000 as well, but despite the unexpected expense we were determined to stick to the budget. My father was a builder and so is my brother, so I knew what to expect to some degree. We managed it but we did spend our contingency," says Angela.

The Romerils travelled from Leeds around once a month during the year-long project, to answer questions, make decisions and monitor the build's progress. This was in addition to daily phone calls to the builders while they were in Leeds.

Access to the site posed problems, when rights of way were brought into question due to the presence of a farm track, and careful negotiations were necessary to find a peaceful resolution with neighbours. Further problems were narrowly avoided following confusion over boundaries, but an exchange of similar-sized parcels of land provided a simple solution.

The energy efficient home has been built to a high standard, with some parts built with



GARDEN ROOM
The neutral décor and pale grey wood-effect Karndean flooring reflects the daylight pouring in from extensive glazing.





blockwork before being coated with render.

The oak and glass staircase is the main feature of a central hallway that connects all main living spaces. “We moved in before the delivery of the glass balustrades, which were delayed, so the builder made it safe for our visiting grandchildren by installing temporary timber panels to fill the gaps,” recalls Michael.

Windows are double glazed with uPVC frames, although Michael and Angela opted for the cheaper versions to keep within budget, a decision they later regretted. “We could have afforded the more expensive options, and we wish we had chosen them, but we were concerned about overspending so we were cautious,” Angela admits.

Neutral colours – mainly different tones of beige – were chosen for the interior, with soft furnishings introducing bright accents. “I am often teased for my love of beige,” laughs Angela, “but I think it’s a great paint colour for interiors, with cushions and throws for accent colours, as they can be changed easily.”

The couple chose a kitchen from Magnet, keen to use a national supplier to allow them to visit showrooms and carefully choose the look from their base in Leeds. In-frame cabinets are off white for



LOUNGE
A separate carpeted lounge offers a cosy retreat, dressed in breezy neutrals with soft furnishings providing bright accents.



GARDEN
Patio, decking and lawn offers ample low maintenance outside space.



UPSTAIRS
A master suite has its own bathroom, while three guest bedrooms share a family bathroom.



the perimeter and navy for the island, topped with stone worktops. Karndean flooring was chosen for its durability and, primarily, its smooth surface that allows no thresholds, a further aid to easy wheelchair access. The whitewashed wood finish continues throughout the living areas, including the lounge with its Portland stone fireplace and log-effect gas fire.

Three of the four bedrooms have fitted wardrobes, whilst the master bedroom also has an en suite with fitted cabinetry, and a bath with a rain shower and glass screen. A family bathroom serves the remaining three bedrooms and has a separate bath and a walk-in glazed rain shower. All of this is connected by a spacious upstairs galleried landing enveloped by oak rails and glazing.



BATHROOM
Extensive wall tiles blend well with the Karndean vinyl flooring.



FINAL WORD

What was the low point of the project?

Moving in!

And the low point?

The problem with access – it was stressful at the time but was resolved eventually.

What was your greatest extravagance?

The oak and glass staircase.

And your best buy?

Having the garden designed professionally.

What do you like most about your house?

The efficiency of the underfloor heating and the constant warmth. We came from a draughty 16th-century cottage.

Anything you would do differently?

A&B windows had a superior range to the



one we chose. We were concerned about blowing the budget, but with hindsight, we could have afforded the better option and wish we had chosen them instead.

What did you most enjoy about the project?

The reality of the finished product.