



**“We love being outside so there are lots of sliding doors with access to the garden, including one from our bedroom.”**



## In brief

**Project**  
Timber-framed  
new build

**Location**  
Peterborough

**Paid** £155,000

**Spent** £365,000

**Now worth**  
£575,000

## CASE STUDY

# IN WITH THE NEW

Influenced by mountain lodges in New Zealand, Pip and Steve Gunn have built a timber-framed barn-style home with spacious interiors.

Story: **Louise Parkin** Photography: **Potton**







**H**aving grown up in New Zealand, Pip Gunn was no stranger to the idea of self build. She has lived in the UK for more than 30 years, and together with her husband Steve had long dreamed of completing their own self build. So when their daughters had both left home and the time was right, they decided to pursue their long-held ambition.

They initially searched for plots in their home county of Surrey, but it soon became clear that they were too expensive and they needed to look further afield. "Plots around here cost our entire budget, so we knew that we needed to broaden our horizons, and it took six months of searching on PlotBrowser and one or two other plot websites before we found this site," explains Pip.

They were fairly open-minded – their only requirement being close proximity to a motorway, as Steve's work as a rowing coach takes him all over the UK. So when they found an entire street of self-build plots in Peterborough, they made an immediate offer on one of them.

Part of The Hamptons development, the large estate is full of developer-built houses, with an area reserved for self builds, thanks to local council policy. Pip and Steve's home is one of 12 self-build houses in a street that celebrates diversity in house design.

As a designated self-build site, outline planning permission was already in place, though during the design process it became clear from the planners that a contemporary scheme would be preferred over anything traditional. Pip says: "I'd seen a lovely cottage near Queenstown in New Zealand, and it looked like it belonged on a Welsh hillside, but inside it was open and spacious.

"We wanted something like that but the planners said



#### Exterior

With an ochre-coloured render and lots of glazing, the timber-framed house has a steel roof and Trespa cladding.

it had to be contemporary. So we passed the photo to Potton architect Vicky Corbett, together with a mood board we had compiled, and she came up with a stunning design that incorporates elements of that cottage but in a contemporary style that we absolutely love."

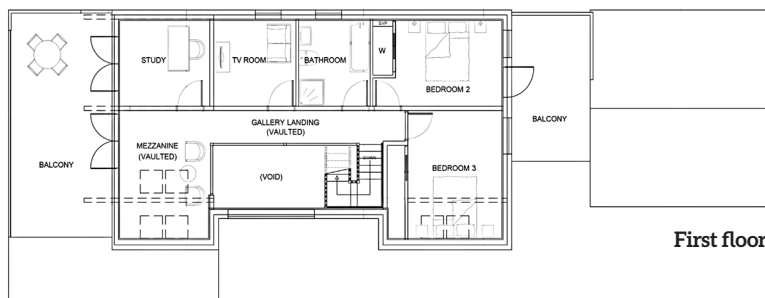
Despite being a new build, the strikingly modern house has echoes of a barn conversion, with a rich, warm brown render and a steel roof. "I was adamant I didn't want white render so we took a bit of a risk," says Pip.

Potton had been on Pip's radar for around 30 years, ever since she had been impressed by their designs at a homes show not long after arriving in the UK. Pip and Steve visited the company's show home village in St Neots in Cambridgeshire several times and were

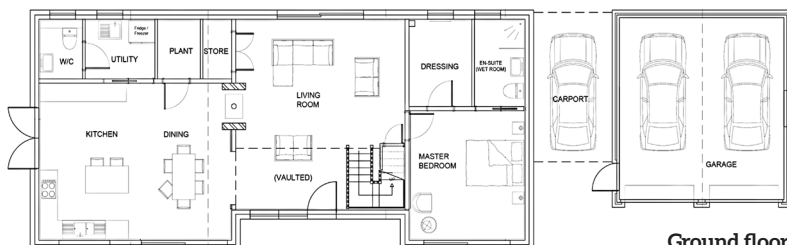




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First floor



Ground floor

### Floorplan

A central atrium opens onto a living room with kitchen/diner to the left of the front door and utility room, WC, plant room and store beyond. To the right is the master suite which has a walk-in wardrobe and en suite bathroom. Upstairs are two bedrooms, family bathroom, study and a vaulted mezzanine.



### Upstairs

A galleried landing leads to a mezzanine that is used as a quiet reading area.

convinced that Potton was the perfect fit to provide the home they were looking for. "The people at Potton were really helpful, nothing was too much trouble, and the bespoke design included acquiring planning permission, which was very appealing for us," says Steve.

Planning consultants advised on orientation and other key issues that would make planning approval more likely, and permission was granted within the eight-week time frame, with just a few conditions such as showing material choices and the landscaping scheme.

Potton recommended a building company from Kent which was hired without any other firms being approached. They looked after the entire project from foundations through to the dark grey steel roof.

Piles were required for the foundations, with 16 piles driven 12m into the soft clay. Kingspan's Logic PLUS closed panel system was used for the walls, insulated with Kingspan Kooltherm. The timber frame was erected in a matter of days, and Pip and Steve were on site daily throughout the entire project, renting a three-storey townhouse on the other side of Peterborough, which meant that they were able to choose materials and had easy access to the site to monitor progress.

"Andy from GPML, the builders, would often call to ask us to go to the site when there were decisions to be made, but we were there much of the time anyway because it was so interesting and exciting watching our house being built," says Pip.

Because of the soft clay ground conditions, it became clear that a 67m retaining wall was needed to prevent clay heave, which was an unexpected expense. "It was an awful moment discovering that such a large wall was required,

**"It was so interesting and exciting watching our house being built."**

## In detail

### PROJECT

**Architect** Vicky Corbett at Potton: [potton.co.uk](http://potton.co.uk)

**Building company** GPML Construction, Wilmington, Kent: [gpmgroup.co.uk](http://gpmgroup.co.uk)

### STRUCTURE

**Roof** TATA Steel Colorcoat Urban: [tatasteelconstruction.com](http://tatasteelconstruction.com)

**Cladding** Trespa Pura: [trespa.com](http://trespa.com)

**Insulation** Kingspan: [kingspan.com](http://kingspan.com)

### FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

**Kitchen** Ikea: [ikea.com](http://ikea.com)

**Worktop** Yes Granite, Northamptonshire: [yesgranite.co.uk](http://yesgranite.co.uk)

**Appliances** Ikea: [ikea.com](http://ikea.com)

**Bathrooms** Bathstore: [bathstore.com](http://bathstore.com), Bella Bathrooms: [bellabathrooms.co.uk](http://bellabathrooms.co.uk)

**Flooring** Topps Tiles: [toppstiles.co.uk](http://toppstiles.co.uk), Bathstore: [bathstore.com](http://bathstore.com)

**Lighting** Industville: [industville.co.uk](http://industville.co.uk), Terrarium Designs: [terrariumdesigns.co.uk](http://terrariumdesigns.co.uk)

**Carpets** Hampton Carpets: [peterboroughflooring.com](http://peterboroughflooring.com)

**Stove** Ikea: [ikea.com](http://ikea.com)

**Switches and sockets** Yesss Electrical: [yesss.co.uk](http://yesss.co.uk)

**Underfloor heating** Polypipe: [polypipe.com](http://polypipe.com)

**Solar panels** Solar Plants, Swansea: [solarplants.org.uk](http://solarplants.org.uk)

**Builders' merchant** Jewson: [jewson.co.uk](http://jewson.co.uk)

**Tiling** IDM Ceramics: 07805 332173

**Decorating** Superior Decorating Solutions: 07921 683427

**Garage doors** Hörmann, The Garage Door Centre, Wellingborough: [thegaragedoorcentre.co.uk](http://thegaragedoorcentre.co.uk)

**External paving** Marshalls: [marshalls.co.uk](http://marshalls.co.uk)





**“We love it here. It’s everything we hoped it would be. And now we have all this knowledge, we may well do it again eventually!”**

#### Lounge

The lounge is brightly lit, thanks to double-height windows to the front.

but the builders took it in their stride, and we had a healthy contingency fund so we could afford it,” says Steve.

Connecting up to the services proved problematic despite them being nearby. This caused significant delays to the project. BT initially quoted £9,000 to lay the required cables, which came as a shock to

Steve and Pip, but this proved incorrect and the eventual bill was just £300. “We had been speaking to the wrong department, and so a friend of Steve’s who works in the industry got on the phone and sorted it out for us, which was a huge relief!” says Pip. There was also a delay of several months for the

## Bathroom

Simple white fittings, grey porcelain floor tiles and wooden furniture give the bathrooms an uncluttered, calming quality.

water connection. Fortunately a neighbour allowed them to access his water supply during the build.

The open spaces and high ceilings of the completed house give the impression of a much larger interior than its relatively modest floorplan of 200 sqm. Large banks of glazing on the southern elevation provide ample solar gain, as well as affording views of the Hampton Reserve, a 300-acre nature reserve. Above the kitchen/diner is a prominent overhang, providing shading and preventing overheating in the summer months. Roof windows can be opened on hot days to release trapped heat, further regulating indoor temperatures when needed.

"We love being outside so there are lots of sliding doors with access to the garden, including one from our bedroom, plus a more conventional french door on the west leading from the kitchen," says Pip. The northern elevation has one sliding door but otherwise a very small number of windows, which improves the building's thermal performance. A double-height atrium opens out into the living room, with a galleried landing above leading to a mezzanine lined with bookcases. The entrance hall also leads to the kitchen/diner to the left, and to the ground-floor master suite to the right. This has a walk-in wardrobe and en suite bathroom, and there are two more bedrooms upstairs sharing a family bathroom.

"We future-proofed the house from the outset by locating our bedroom on the ground floor. That way if we end up in wheelchairs when we are older we won't have to move out!" says Pip, a retired PE teacher.

Battleship grey cabinets run along two walls of the kitchen to form an L-shape, with a 2m x 1m island and a bank of appliances and cupboards to one end. The kitchen was chosen from Ikea but their long lead times for installation meant that another company was employed to install it. "We needed the kitchen to be fitted in June but Ikea couldn't do it till August. We wanted granite worktops but we had to get them from another company, because Ikea would only supply granite if they fitted it themselves. So we got some from another company, in a lovely matt finish, and I think we got a really good price," says Pip, who had firm ideas about how the kitchen should look.

The couple chose brass cup handles, tiles from the USA and stylish brass pendants to go above the island, with a striking floral shade for the dining room

## Kitchen

Deep grey units and porcelain floor tiles are combined with brass handles and pendants to create an industrial feel.

## STEVE AND PIP'S TOP TIP

**"Get services in very early.  
Make it one of the first things you do."**



light, and an industrial-style floor that is porcelain but designed to look like a Brooklyn sidewalk.

Wood-effect porcelain tiles are used in the lounge and also in the hallway where they are laid in a different design that mimics parquet. This acts as an effective demarcation for the two spaces.

A double-sided fireplace, which goes through to the kitchen, gives the effect of logs but is in fact ceramic. The efficiency of the house means that it's rarely used but creates an authentic warming effect of crackling logs.

Steve and Pip moved in just six months after work started, commissioning tilers and decorators themselves which reduced the cost. "It was a real high point moving in, and we love it here," says Pip. "It's everything we hoped it would be. And now we have all this knowledge, we may well do it again eventually!"

## The final word

### What was the high point?

Seeing 3D designs projected onto the wall for the first time. We were both blown away by the design.

### And the low point?

Finding out we had to build a 67m retaining wall was not a good moment, because it was going to cost lots of money!

### What do you like most about the house?

The sense of space.

### What was your best buy?

The kitchen, because it looks like a bespoke kitchen after all the little customisations but it was from Ikea and great value for money.

### And your greatest extravagance?

The double-sided fire was definitely an extravagance. We have underfloor heating downstairs and radiators upstairs and so we don't really need a fire at all, but it looks lovely and I have always wanted a double-sided fire!

### Is there anything you would do differently?

We should have put a door leading to the loft from the mezzanine so that we don't have to go up from a hatch in the garage via a ladder. We will probably do that eventually.