

The garden

The plot has been professionally landscaped to incorporate gravel pathways and lawned areas with rusty steel edging. Silver birches have been planted, which help to enhance the Scandinavian feel.



In brief

Project New build
Location Oxfordshire
Land cost £850,000
Spent £400,000
Worth £1.3m

CASE STUDY

SIMPLY STYLISH

A contemporary masonry house has been carefully designed to respond to a willow tree standing on the site.

Story: **Debbie Jeffery** Photography: **Darren Chung/Kitchen Architecture; Andrew Priest**





“I’ve been building houses for about 25 years, and as a surveyor I’d always drawn up the plans myself,” says John Smitherson. “Then we saw some of architect Allister Godfrey’s designs and realised that he could bring something special to the process. This is actually the second house he’s designed with us, both in the same village.”

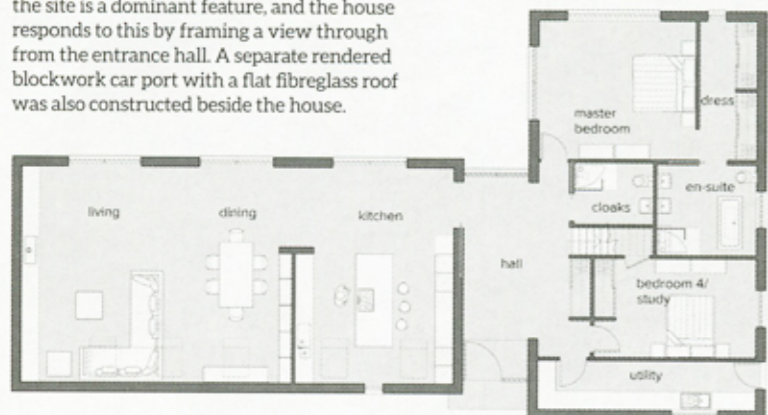
John and Anne’s previous home was a three-storey, six-bedroom contemporary new build where they lived for four years. “We had originally gained planning permission for two new dwellings on the plot, and decided to build another house next door which would be slightly smaller and more manageable for our retirement,” John explains. “Once again we approached Allister Godfrey to work with us on the design.”

Both Anne and John have a keen interest in contemporary architecture, and have attended courses in 21st-century design. Their new home was a collaboration between themselves and their architect, taking into account an existing willow tree to the rear of the site, which was one of the reasons the couple first purchased the land. They would meet up to discuss ideas, and Allister would try out suggestions using computer-aided design (CAD) to illustrate how these might work.

“We were so impressed by Allister’s attention to detail, and found him extremely easy to work with,” John continues. “Our brief was for bedrooms on the ground floor, open-plan living spaces and simple finishes. He listened to what we wanted and came up with a layout which is effectively two blocks connected by a glazed link.”

Exterior

The house has been designed in two distinct sections – one clad in cedar, the other in painted render. A willow tree to the rear of the site is a dominant feature, and the house responds to this by framing a view through from the entrance hall. A separate rendered blockwork car port with a flat fibreglass roof was also constructed beside the house.



THE FLOORPLAN

Most of the living accommodation, including the master bedroom suite, is located on the ground floor. An open-plan living/dining/kitchen wing is connected to the two-storey bedroom block by a glazed hallway link.



In detail

PROJECT

Design Allister Godfrey
Architects: allistergodfrey.com
Kitchen design and installation
Kitchen Architecture:
kitchenarchitecture.co.uk

STRUCTURE

Windows, entrance door
Velfac: velfac.co.uk
Roof windows Velux:
velux.co.uk
Insulation Celotex: celotex.co.uk
Galvanised steel guttering and downpipes Lindab: lindab.com

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Lighting Illuma: illumina.co.uk
Wood-burner Stuv: stuv.com
Kitchen (Bulthaup b1)
bulthaup.com

Laminate and stainless-steel worktops Kitchen Architecture: kitchenarchitecture.co.uk
Engineered Douglas fir flooring Dinesen: dinesen.com
Paint Farrow and Ball: farrow-ball.com
Appliances Miele: miele.co.uk
Extractor hood Gaggenau: gaggenau.com
Kitchen tap Tapstore: tapstore.com
Flos Glo-Ball ceiling lights Heal’s: heals.co.uk
Sanitaryware Hansgrohe: hansgrohe.co.uk; Duravit: duravit.co.uk
Floor fitters Roger Hyde Ltd: rogerhyde.co.uk
Roller blinds Jam Interiors Group: jaminteriorsgroup.com

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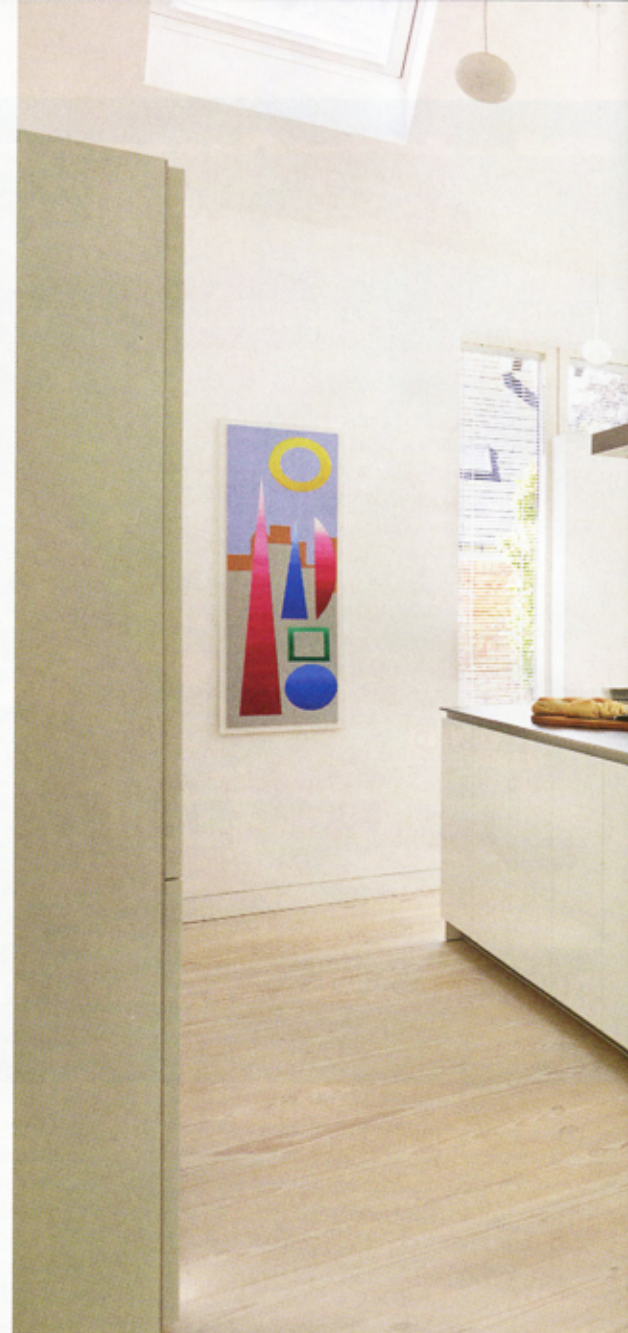
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The single-storey element of the 270-sqm house accommodates an open-plan living/dining space, with a blockwork wall creating a partial divide between this and the kitchen. The wall contains a useful painted MDF bookcase which was made by a local company.

To the other side of the glazed hallway link, a one-and-a-half-storey timber-clad block accommodates the master bedroom, en suite bathroom and dressing area, a utility room and WC, as well as a study which doubles as another bedroom. Upstairs, there are two guest bedrooms – one with an en suite and dressing area, the other positioned beside the family bathroom.

“Allister’s first sketch was for a flat-roofed house, to retain a low profile,” says John. “I’m a big fan of flat roofs, but knew that when we eventually came to sell the house it might be a problem, as people still have outdated misconceptions about how flat roofs perform. Instead, we chose Allister’s later design for a modern barn-style building with pitched roofs.”

The living areas in the single-storey area have a high ceiling, which is inset with roof windows for additional light. “I like modern buildings, and dislike new homes which ape Georgian or Victorian styles,” John explains. “Everything about this house has been simplified as much as possible, which made it both easier to build and to maintain.”

Entrance

Discreet storage was incorporated into the glazed entrance link, which is roofed in lead.

Gaining planning permission for the design proved relatively straightforward, as outline consent had already been granted, although the new house needed to be positioned more centrally on the plot than originally intended.

“There had been a damp, derelict house on the site, which was built just after the Second World War,” says John. “We demolished this to build our previous home and then built our new home in the back garden.”

A stream runs down one side of the one-third of an acre plot, and the house needed to be sited away from the willow tree to both preserve the tree and to avoid any potential problems caused by roots. The entrance hall, which serves as the link between the two blocks, has been designed with glazing to the front and rear, framing views of the tree in the garden beyond.

“The two pitch-roofed sections of the house are basically rectangular in shape, positioned at 90 degrees to one another and connected by the flat-roofed entrance, which was Allister’s idea,” says John.

“One of the problems with open-plan living is that you don’t have a great deal of wall space for furniture.”

Kitchen

A sleek white Bulthaup kitchen was installed by Kitchen Architecture, and is divided from the open-plan living/dining space by a partial wall.



“When you stand at the front door it’s still possible to see the willow tree above the flat roof, and then in the bedrooms you can see the willow leaves through the rear windows. It was a major part of the overall design.”

John and Anne remained living in their previous home during the 12-month build, with John acting as project manager, employing subcontractors, purchasing materials and tackling some of the unskilled work himself. Anne also spent a great deal of time researching fixtures and finishes for the new house.

“Most of the trades had worked on our previous house, so they knew us and we knew their work,” says John, who was on site every day and produced the Building Regulations plans himself as a way to focus on details and potential problems well in advance.

Installing services proved a slight issue, due to the length of the driveway, and weather conditions meant that the entire site was covered in mud. Concrete strip foundations were specified, some over two metres deep, and the house was built from blockwork with a part-filled cavity and some steel framing in the open-plan section. The building, which has a block and beam floor, has been highly insulated throughout.

Externally, the single-storey wing has been clad in Monocouche render, which is painted dark grey to serve as a backdrop to the greenery of the surrounding garden and plants. The one-and-a-half storey element is



Living area

Wooden flooring has been laid throughout the ground-floor living space, where a wood-burning stove makes a practical feature.



Dining area

Roof lights and glass doors ensure the vaulted living/dining space is brightly lit. Grey blinds may be used for shading.



John's top tip

"Keep things simple and start researching fittings a long way ahead – the more I build the more I realise how important this is."

finished in untreated cedar cladding, and the cut timber pitched roofs are covered in Spanish blue-black slates.

"I prefer vertical timber cladding, because if it's laid horizontally water can sometimes get into the grain," John explains. "Also, leaving a slight 10mm gap between the boards creates a pleasing effect."

Windows are a particular feature, and include distinctive horizontal and vertical slot glazing in the single-storey section, with glass doors overlooking the rear garden on the ground floor.

Internally, a partial blockwork wall was built between the kitchen and the living/dining areas, which serves to break the open-plan layout as well as making the design easier to build by providing structural support.

"One of the problems with open-plan living is that you don't have a great deal of wall space for furniture," says John, "so this bookcase not only serves as useful storage, it also meant that we could position kitchen cabinets and wall units along the other side."

Underfloor heating has been installed on the ground floor, with the first-floor bedrooms warmed by radiators. "We decided against solar panels and other technology, because it can be complicated and often spoils the look of a house," says John.



Detailing

Everything has been kept simple and low maintenance.

"I did research installing a ground source heat pump, but the cost was astronomical and we would have needed a three-phase electrical supply."

Douglas fir flooring was chosen for the hallway and the living/dining/kitchen space, which necessitated a six-month delay while the 75mm concrete screed dried out sufficiently. "I was determined to lay this flooring, but it did mean fitting a cheap temporary kitchen and moving in while we waited," says John. "When the fitters came they did a superb job and put down around 100sqm of wood flooring in a day, with no joins in the 13m main space."

Once the floor was finished the couple were able to replace their temporary kitchen with sleek white cabinets and a combination of white laminate and 10mm thick stainless-steel worktops. Walls are also white, and serve to reflect the light.

"We added detail and colour with books and artwork on the walls, some of which we bought from student art shows," says John. "Our goal was to keep everything as simple and low maintenance as possible, and that was really the key to the success of the whole project."

The final word

What was the high point?

Finally seeing the wood flooring go down after living in the house with concrete floors and a temporary kitchen. It was our own decision and worth the wait.

...and the low point?

There was a great deal of mud on site, which seemed to get everywhere.

The best buy?

Our kitchen, which is

fantastic quality. The stainless-steel worktop was also a good choice, and withstands all kinds of wear and tear.

...and the biggest extravagance?

Choosing Dinesen flooring was an extravagance, as it meant delaying fitting the kitchen while the concrete sub-floor dried out sufficiently.

