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& RENOVATING**
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Winner: Traditional Home



Delicately
Detailed



Peter and Les Adamson's new light-filled home combines a perfectly detailed period exterior with simple, elegant open plan interiors.

Words: Michael Holmes
Photography: Jeremy Phillips

It is astonishing just how few designers there are out there who have a real flair for creating new, authentic-looking period-style houses. So when Peter and Lesley Adamson set out to build a new house that combined the look of an established period property with spacious modern interiors, they contacted 35 local architects — and still failed to be inspired. The designer they finally commissioned was not an architect, but a former builder, Stephen Mattick, who has combined his knowledge and understanding of vernacular construction with a talent for drawing new buildings with the character and charm of the past.

Mood lighting in the main living rooms includes preset scenes at the touch of a button, controlling the low-voltage ceiling spotlights and 5amp table lamp circuit.

The house that Peter and Lesley have built, set in a pretty south Oxfordshire village, is already indistinguishable as a new property in a street full of beautiful period houses. This is in no small part down to the work of builder Dave Mill and his team, who have used traditional materials and techniques, learnt from restoration work, to bring Stephen Mattick's design to life. The handmade brick is laid in Flemish bond, with alternating header and stretcher courses, using a whitish grey mortar that looks like lime pointing. The roof that covers the deep, open plan room arrangement has been carefully designed to maintain ►



“I liked the idea of having a home with traditional character, but no poky corners with cobwebs...”

a traditional configuration, pitch and span, and is laid in reclaimed plain clay tiles, which have mellowed over time.

Like many Mattick designs, the Adamsons’ home even incorporates the irregularities and discrepancies that give old properties their enigmatic charm: in their case, mismatching gable heights at the rear of the property, where a swept Regency-style canopy stretches across the building at ground floor level. A Victorian-style extension at the side looks like a later addition to the original house. “Mattick is very good at making a house look like it has been extended over the generations,” says Lesley. “You have to have an eye for what looks subtle and not too rigid.”

“I thought new homes didn’t have any character,” says Peter, who admits he had to be brought “kicking and screaming” into taking on the project. “I was convinced we’d never find a piece of land, so I thought I was safe!” he says.

“I wanted a new house, but one that had some quality about it,” explains Lesley. “I liked the idea of having a home with traditional character, but no poky corners with cobwebs and dust. One of the joys of building a new house, rather than restoring an old one, is being able to give the interiors unity. We wanted to create a home with the same wooden

The maple kitchen furniture with grey limestone worktops was made by Cotswold Kitchens. The multi-room music system combines DVD home cinema with CD on one set of speakers and amplifier.

Judges’ Summary

Peter and Lesley Adamson have been meticulous about every aspect of their new home, from the selection of their designer and builder, down to the smallest detail both inside and out. They had a vision of exactly what they wanted and have achieved it: a house that combines traditional warmth and character outside, with a simple contemporary design aesthetic on the inside using neutral colours. The use of reclaimed materials, authentic vernacular detailing and traditional building techniques has ensured that this new period-style home already looks an established and mature part of the village streetscape.



flooring, wall colour and curtains throughout, with modern furniture in maple and glass. You can't really do that with an old house. This was the vision that provided a strong, basic guiding idea for the interiors. We ended up having to buy entirely new furniture for this house. Our taste has entirely changed."

It was the fortuitous discovery of a 0.4 acre plot that initiated the Adamsons' project. "We were about to place an advert offering a reward of £1,000 for anyone who helped find us a plot, when a friend told us of a site next door to their home," recalls Peter. "The neighbours were all objecting to the site getting planning for development, but they felt that if someone was going to build there, they would rather it were us."

Resolving the design issues and securing planning permission for their home didn't bring too many problems, but the Adamsons' project was almost derailed when they started getting back quotes from builders. "The biggest difficulty in the whole course of the build was our inexperience. We got the costings wrong at a very early stage," recalls Peter. "When the quotes came in they were more than 50% higher than we had expected. The trouble was, by that time we were so enthusiastic that we wanted to proceed anyway. Having overcome the main three hurdles, finding the land, a designer and a good builder, it is very hard to pull back." The couple resolved to take on more work, and to plough some of their pension savings into the project, on the grounds that they could always sell if they had to.

The Adamsons admit that they were the makers of most of their own problems during the build. "We were very fussy!" says Leslie. "We spent weeks choosing the facing bricks and drove miles all over the country. Peter put in hours researching whether or not we could lay solid oak flooring over underfloor heating.

"There were times when we wished we had never started. The thing we were most surprised about was the number of decisions you have to make. Our advice to anyone doing this sort of project is to increase your contingency budget. When you are looking around, you always see something a bit nicer that costs just a little bit more money. You get into the syndrome of 'not spoiling the ship for £50,000 of tar! It is hard to settle for second best."

The couple didn't make too many compromises. The four bedroom, three bathroom house has bespoke joinery throughout, designer ironmongery, underfloor heating, multi-room hi-fi, whole-house ventilation and a central vacuum system. "We thought the ventilation and vacuum might be a waste of money, but we are thrilled with both," says Lesley. ▶



Underfloor heating and solid oak floors

Many experts advise people to not to even think about combining solid timber floorboards with underfloor heating, but it can be done if the right product and technique is used. The Adamsons chose solid, pre-finished oak boards from Hoebeek (01274 511017) and followed detailed laying instructions. It is essential to allow the screed to fully dry out before laying, allowing at least four weeks drying per 25mm of screed — by which time the other wet trades should also be dry. The screed must be level (2mm tolerance over 1,000mm) and sealed. The boards should be kiln dried to 6-9% humidity and stacked in the house for 10-14 days in a crisscross pattern with the heating operating at 18° plus to allow it to acclimatise. The heating should then be switched off for two days before each board is stuck down onto the screed individually, with the tongue-and-groove joints left loose. An expansion gap of 15mm must be left at the perimeter under the skirting board and around pipes etc, so that the floor can move without lifting or splitting. Eight days after the floor has been fitted, the heating can be switched back on gradually 3° per 24 hours until the surface temperature reaches 28°C. It should be left at this temperature for at least five days, even in summer.



The three rear gables were deliberately designed to appear uneven in order to accentuate the building's appearance of having been there for years.

"We would definitely have them again."

The couple designed all of the interiors themselves, including the hole-in-the-wall fireplace for which they used a precast fire chest and flue system from Schiedel Isokern. They would have liked more help designing the lighting but couldn't find anyone and so designed this themselves, too, including automated scene lighting in the main living rooms.

"One useful piece of advice we picked up from an interior designer is that when you are furnishing a modern house, it is a good idea to have at least one piece in every room that is old and unexpected — something out of the ordinary. In most of the rooms we have managed to do that," points out Peter.

"I think the house has got a lovely calm atmosphere and that gives us great pleasure," says Lesley. "We love the way the light floods in and the way the rooms flow."

"It really is a pleasure to wake up and walk about the house," says Peter. "All the time we were building we were concerned that we were over-stretching ourselves financially. At the time we consoled ourselves by thinking 'if we have to sell and move back to our old home, we'll be just as happy as we've always been.' But now we've moved in we realise that it is just not the case. We would miss the house very much. We are still very conscious of just how lucky we are to live here." ■

Floorplan: The main living areas are open plan in an L-shaped arrangement, allowing the kitchen to open onto the dining area without it being visible from the living area. Two offices allow both Peter and Lesley to work from home. The master bedroom suite stretches across the whole of the back of the house. Bedrooms 2 and 3 share an en suite bathroom.

FACT FILE

NAMES: Lesley and Peter Adamson

PROFESSIONS: Writer and publisher

AREA: Oxfordshire

HOUSE TYPE: Four bedroom detached

HOUSE SIZE: 250m²

BUILD ROUTE: Main contractor

CONSTRUCTION: Brick and block

FINANCE: Private

BUILD TIME: March '02 – Aug '04

LAND COST: £162,000

BUILD COST: £360,000

TOTAL COST: £522,500

HOUSE VALUE: £695,000

COST/m²: £1,440

25%

COST

SAVING

USEFUL CONTACTS: Designer Stephen Mattick, Mattick Design: 01223 891159 Contractor DCM Builders: 01869 245865 Handmade bricks (new) Conservation Building Products: 01384 569551 Reclaimed plain clay roof tiles Conservation Building Products: 01384 569551 Solid oak flooring Hoebeek: 01274 511017 Kitchen furniture Cotswold: 01386 700110 Doors Premdor: 0870 990 7998 Underfloor heating Eco Hometech: 01302 722266 Ventilation ADM: 01756 701051 Central vacuum ADM: 01756 701051 Light switches Forbes and Lomax: 020 7738 0202; Fire chest and flues Isokern: 01202 861650 Windows AGA Joinery: 01993 772820 Rainwater goods Yeoman Rainguard: 0113 279 5854 Staircase Broadleaf Timber: 01269 851910 Canopy roof Fistral lead roofing: 01869 244263 Canopy columns Dorothea Restorations Ltd: 01663 733544 Bathrooms UK Bathroom Warehouse: 01491 832321 Floor laying ACH Flooring: 01865 717200 Lighting DJ Enterprises: 01628 676661 Door furniture Turnstyle Designs: 01271 325325 Fitted wardrobes Richard Kay & Co: 01296 658244 Fitted study Peter Radbourne: 01608 678001 Decorating Advanced Craft: 01235 760003 Audio equipment Audio T: 01865 765961 Italian furniture Massimo Bertola: (+39) 035 806054

