

property



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The Daily Telegraph



Grand design: the airy dining room at the Tae family's Hampshire home, which won Most Innovative Project

SIMON MAXWELL

CHARACTER BUILDING

For 20 years, the Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards have celebrated the best in British self-build. The 2012 winners are more daring and spectacular than ever, says **Ed Cumming**



There are plenty of reasons to be glum about property right now. In many parts of the country the market is stagnant or worse. Banks are still reluctant to lend, and the shortage of affordable properties for first-time buyers remains acute.

All of which means the *Telegraph* Homebuilding & Renovating Awards shine through the clouds like a beacon from on high, promising better days to come.

Recently there have been signs that the Government is coming around to the idea of self-build. In April, then housing minister Grant Shapps announced the Self-Build Portal, an initiative designed to make it easier for would-be home builders to source funding and contractors.

The awards, however, are far ahead of the trend. For 20 years, they have served as a reminder that even in the dark days, there are enterprising homeowners who won't be deterred.

Since this year's awards were launched in July, judges have travelled the country examining projects of every scale and style.

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Cover story

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Winners have been chosen in 10 categories. Each has created or modified a building to be true to their own vision of how to live.

That is where the similarities end, however. Compared to the rows of identikit houses created en masse in some suburbs, this year's winning entries are marvels of individuality.

"When it comes to pushing forward housing in the UK, self-build is the place to be," says Jason Orme from the *Homebuilding & Renovating* magazine. "Whether it be radical designs or highly energy-efficient building standards, I admire the commitment entrants put into their homes, and the risks they take."

Chris Tae, who has won this year's Most Innovative Project, worked on Downley House, Hampshire, for more than two years (picture on front cover). "In 2010 my wife and I decided to move out of London with our two young children," he explains. "Every site we looked at had something wrong with it: too close to the road, or too many neighbours."

"But when I got out of the car at our site I knew at once. I shut the door and heard... nothing. No trains, no planes, no cars. I offered £650,000 straightaway, and we exchanged in nine days."

Having worked in property investment and development for 10 years, Chris had a strong sense of where he wanted to take the project. "I was fortunate to be able to take the time, so decided not to have an overall contractor. "This kind of project, where the elements are

Online

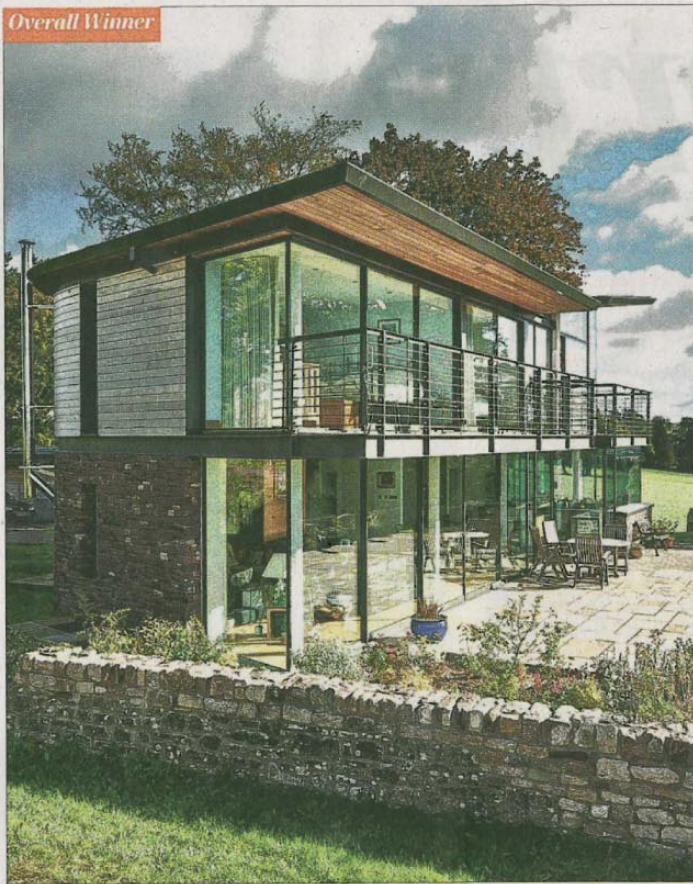
More pictures of this year's winners telegraph.co.uk/property



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Overall Winner



unique and likely to change, is hard to cost. So I took everything on myself. There are always issues; for example the glass was made incorrectly the first time and had to be redone. But there were no serious disasters."

The finished home is divided into three parts; the back of the house has two guest bedrooms, the kitchen and all of the maintenance rooms; then the family's part of the house, with three en-suite bedrooms, two living

rooms and a playroom. At the house's centre is the spectacular dining room, or *foyer*. An airy, arched space finished in oak and copper, it takes its name from the large barrels used in the winemaking process - a reference to Chris's

previous career in the wine industry. "We are thrilled with the house. The kids love it, too - they are always charging around. Another big factor in the site was that their school is at the top of the road. They can walk to the school each

morning without seeing any cars. It's idyllic." In the end this idyll cost Chris an eye-opening £2.5 million. "It is a lifestyle investment - we didn't build it to sell. But I would love to do another one - either to sell, or for an

individual who had the vision, but not the time." He stresses, however, that his energy was only part of the story. "A lot was down to the architects, who had a real vision. We asked six local firms, but Birds Portchmouth Russum was the only firm that understood what we wanted to do, and incorporated the old wall that was on the site."

Mixing new features with existing architecture was also a challenge faced by Dan and Jocelyn Ahmad, who won Best Renovation. Both solicitors, they wanted to give their detached five-bedroom Victorian home in Crouch End, north London, a modern revamp. They hired Phil Coffey, an award-winning architect who specialises in sleek spaces with clean lines and plenty of glass. The result is an eye-catching addition to the street (pictured above). "We moved here in 2007," says Dan. "But it took nearly three years to realise what we liked and didn't like about the property. It's a double-fronted Victorian house on an awkward triangular plot. It was quite hard to tell where the front of the building is. We wanted to make sense of the house and unify the garden, but keep the beauty and character of the Victorian property. What we absolutely didn't want was some

Winner's haul

The Coulsons win a stay at Hotel du Vin, in one of its locations across Britain. From a Georgian house in Winchester to a Gothic revival building just a stone's throw from the seafront in Brighton, Hotel du Vin offers something for every taste. The prize includes a three-course à la carte dinner in an award-winning bistro with a champagne aperitif and a bottle of wine selected by the chef, plus a sumptuous breakfast the next morning.

Eventually they got it. Their new property, the work of Gloucester architects Hall and Bednarczyk, is a stunning three-storey, four-bedroom contemporary house (pictured above left). Judges were impressed by its combination of style and local materials. Despite its modern design, it blends seamlessly into the surrounding landscape.

As Tim explains, however, their vision was not achieved without a fight. "We bought an old worker's cottage at auction for £350,000. The house wasn't particularly pretty, but it had amazing 270-degree views. But then we were stuck in four years of planning debates. We only won permission after an appeal to the Welsh Assembly. There were 18 months of bat inspections. But finally, by niggling away, we managed it."

The project in total cost £730,000, but the Coulsons are thrilled with it. "I might not do it again, in retrospect, but we are delighted with the finished project. When you are building you are never sure what you have until after you have paid the final instalment and walked through the door. But this is a great place to live."

As well as the self-build initiatives, there are signs that the Government is planning to relax laws to help self-starters like the Coulsons achieve their dreams. In September, David Cameron announced proposals to let homeowners undertake major renovations without seeking approval from the council.

Regardless of the regulations, however, building or renovating a home will never be a cakewalk. Compared to buying an off-the-shelf property, it comes with plenty of stresses and dilemmas, and the chance that costs will escalate beyond your wildest expectations. Two decades of these awards have offered compelling proof of self-build's advantages. This year's crop is a timely reminder that self-builders are not only pushing boundaries for eco-friendliness and sleek contemporary design, they are also responsible for some of the best homes being built in Britain. In 20 years' time, hopefully, homes like these will be the rule, rather than the exception.

A year's journey around the nation with Strutt & Parker Estate Agents.

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This week North Yorkshire



Viewpoint

by Toby Milbank Harrogate

Harrogate is the Bath of the north; a spa town famed for the Stray, the park which meanders through and gives a lovely feeling of space. Houses that overlook it are in hot demand and sell at £750,000 to £3m. Historically people have made their money in Leeds and live in Harrogate. The wealthy live in the middle of town or in the Duchy, in big detached houses a short walk from the town and the brilliant grammar and private schools.

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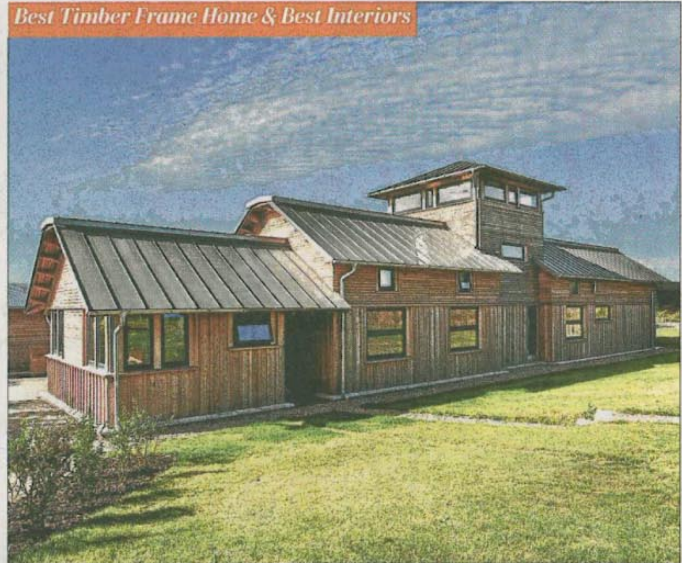
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Join the home builders

Thinking of building your own home?

- You can find self-build land for sale on general property sites, such as zoopla.co.uk and rightmove.co.uk. Also at specialist sites, including plotbrowser.com, plotfinder.net and plotsearch.co.uk.
- RIBA has lists of reputable architects in your area. See architecture.com.
- The website selfbuildportal.org.uk has a list of firms

supplying self-build mortgages. For advice on how to choose a broker, visit buildstore.co.uk/finance.

- Allow for slippage. Especially if you're building on a slope (problems tend to be more expensive). Put aside at least 10-20 per cent of your budget for unforeseen contingencies.
- Ensure that everything is done to a high standard and you will minimise the money you spend dealing with problems later.

- The Coulsons' design is elegant but uncomplicated. Generally speaking, the more fiddly a design, the more expensive it will be. Keep it simple.
- If you are building on a new plot, make sure you install water, electricity and drains as soon as possible.
- Contractors: the most important people. Make sure you are happy with everyone working for you. You depend on their skill and effort.

SIMON MAXWELL; JAMES BRITAIN

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The Ridgeway, Fetcham

Refurbished family home near the Surrey Hills 5 bedrooms (2 en suite) • 4 reception rooms • Kitchen/breakfast/family room • Further bathroom • Double garage • South west backing garden • Approximately 389 sq m (4,187 sq ft)

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Charlotte Court, Esher

Well presented modern family house in a private gated location close to the High Street and local amenities 5 reception rooms including a top floor games room Kitchen/breakfast room • 5 bedrooms • 4 bathrooms • Double garage and landscaped garden

Guide price: £1,450,000

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Sovereign Mews, Ascot

A brand new five bedroom town house property built by Antler Homes and located in a delightful gated development within a short walk of Ascot High Street 5 bedrooms • 3 bathrooms • Drawing room • Study Open plan kitchen/dining room • Garage and gardens

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Warren Road, Coombe KT2

A contemporary and stylish detached house • Master suite • 6 further bedrooms (4 en suite) • Shower room 4 reception rooms • Kitchen/breakfast room • Games room • Gymnasium with steam room • Garden • Garage Approximately 771.5 sq m (8,305 sq ft)

Guide price: £4,250,000

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Kings Road, Fulham SW6

A beautiful period cottage on this popular part of the Kings Road • Master bedroom suite • Further bedroom Bathroom • Double reception room • Kitchen/dining room • Family room • 2 guest WC • Garden • Storage room • Approximately 152.4 sq m (1,640 sq ft)

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