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Essex

Artists' Barn

Ben Coode-Adams and Freddie Robins started their barn conversion with half the recommended funds, but hard graft and determination gave them a home that's as unique as they are

Don't be fooled by the mesh roof on Ben Coode-Adams and Freddie Robins' barn – inside it's all timber, eight and a half metres tall, with no paint, paper or plasterboard to hide its structure. This project is raw architecture.

'People think we haven't finished yet,' says Freddie, an artist and textiles teacher at London's Royal College of Art. 'I love that it doesn't have the trappings of a normal home. I love the extremity of it.'

The barn belonged to Ben's parents, who transferred it to him several years ago. The couple were looking for a live/work space, but were limited by the noise made by Ben when creating his steel sculptures. The barn was the perfect solution, but it meant a renovation project. Hudson Architects designed the striking mesh roof to deal with a planning restriction banning visible roof lights; it lets in light while concealing glazing beneath.

Ben and Freddie were warned by their quantity surveyor that they wouldn't finish it for less than £1.3 million, but they went ahead with a budget of £650,000, determined they could make savings along the way. They let their architect go and Ben took over as project manager alongside Nick Spall, a timber-frame expert. Together, they translated the drawings into a home, staying a few jobs ahead of the builders and hiring people directly to complete specialist work. Their determined, can-do approach drove the build from the start, but it paid off – the completed barn is exactly what the couple wanted.

↓ Planning restrictions meant Ben and Freddie couldn't install visible roof lights, so the striking mesh roof lets in light instead

→ Ben and his carpenter built the kitchen, even casting the concrete worktops. They laid out furniture in the space to size the island correctly







Photography Rachel Smith

← Efficient heating was a major consideration in the vast space. Solutions include Gutex insulating wood fibreboards and underfloor heating

→ An existing silo, made of concrete blocks, was dismantled and rebuilt to conceal Freddie and Ben's en suite

↓ Gaps in the sixteenth-century timber frame are filled with plywood and strips of alder. The planners stipulated thin-profile Clement windows

↓ (right) Ben says the building was probably a threshing barn in its original state. The family also has permission to convert an adjacent silo



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