



SPACE
**Coop
dreams**

Where a chicken shed once stood is now a new-build barn – and the answer to affordable countryside living, says Dominic Bradbury. Photographs by Michael Franke



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Barn happy: 'I love the sense of light and space – the views and the clean ambience of the interior,' says owner Paul Gyseman (below). He wanted a building that 'had the benefits of a contemporary house, but that would be adaptable'

In a tranquil spot in the Norfolk countryside, a simple, low-slung barn sits alongside a mill stream, with a sprawling farm next door. But this is no typical conversion – it's a new-build home.

Built on the site of a former chicken shed, and clad in 15,000 cedar wood "shingles" – timber tiles popular in the US – the single-storey house has the simple outline of a traditional agricultural building. "I liked the idea of cedar cladding because it silvers with age," says owner Paul Gyseman, a retired trademark attorney who is now a photographer. "I wanted

a building that had the benefits of a contemporary house, but that would be affordable and adaptable."

Gyseman commissioned architect Anthony Hudson to create a modern barn. "The only instruction I gave him was that I'd like the house to look a little like the architect Glenn Murcutt's country house in Australia, which resembles a shed," he says.

Hudson has converted many barns in Norfolk, and has a fondness for the vernacular of farm buildings. "Paul had constraints on cost," says Hudson, "and the site is in a very agricultural area, so we decided on a



simple industrial form. We also saw it as something of a prototype for an affordable country home." The build cost around £250,000. "It wasn't a 'money is no object' project," Gyseman says.

The site came with planning consent to replace the chicken shed – most recently used as a workshop – with a new home, although Gyseman and Hudson put in for a new consent that allowed them to re-site it to make the most of the views – the new house has enormous windows, most strikingly in the corner of the living space, opening up to the mill stream and across the grounds. »

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Watch the world go by: The outside of the barn (above) with its cedar cladding that will silver with age. Below: The house has enormous windows, so rather than watching television, Gyseman can instead look at the spectacular views

Inside, the main living space is spectacularly minimalist and white – open plan with high ceilings and timber floors, all warmed by a German wood-burning stove. It is styled with modern furniture, from an Eileen Gray coffee table to white Verner Panton dining chairs. Most other pieces are from Habitat. “I love the sense of light and space – the views and the clean ambience of the interior,” Gyseman says. The compact kitchen is tucked away to one side and, as the house replaced a former commercial building, it had to have an element of work space within, so Gyseman created

a studio/gallery, dark room and office at one end.

The house sits on a flood plain. The mill stream feeds off the River Wensum, which to some extent is controlled by sluices and weirs, but, following an assessment, the Environment Agency and local planners insisted the building incorporate a series of flood-proofing measures. To that end, it sits on modest pilings that raise it off the ground, while the front door is accessed via a long wooden ramp and timber deck. All the electrical sockets are a metre up the walls, and the wall panels at low level are



designed to be easily replaced in case of water damage. A mezzanine was also put in above the built-in garage at the far end of the house to create a flood refuge if things go really wrong.

The house is a “real escape”, Gyseman says, so much so that he decided not to install a television in order to enjoy his gentle, green landscape. “I didn’t want to waste time watching it,” he says. “I take photographs of the surrounding countryside and coast, I go for motorbike rides, I cook and garden. I love the way that the exterior sits so comfortably in its surroundings.” ●