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JUNE 2000 £2.80

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# OPEN HOUSE

Spectacular views and an emphasis on natural materials combine to create an uncompromisingly modern seaside retreat on north Devon's coast

WORDS AMANDA HARLING • PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL



**ABOVE** Built on a sloping site, the design of the house incorporates rooms on a number of different levels. There are two distinct areas – the open living, dining and kitchen space, which faces south towards the sea, and the enclosed, private part of the house containing the family bedrooms, which faces north into the hillside. **RIGHT** The interior of the living area can be opened to the elements at the touch of a button, which lowers a wall-to-wall glass panel below floor level.





In a country as crowded as ours, it is rare to come across a modern house that enjoys as remote and spectacular a setting as that of Baggy House. It stands at the end of a single track road, on a rocky promontory overlooking sea, sky and miles of north Devon coastline.

When the owners, a family with three young children, bought the property in 1990, it was a much-extended Victorian house that had been used as a hotel. At first they thought of converting the building, but soon realised that a new house would suit their informal lifestyle so much better.

The London-based architects Hudson Featherstone were asked to design a six-bedroom property that would take advantage of the fabulous location. Luckily, despite the site's prominent position in a Coastal

Preservation Area, the planners agreed to replace a local landmark with the distinctive modern retreat. Baggy house is used year-round for weekends and school holidays, so it needed to make the most of the views and be practical weatherwise. "This part of the coast suffers from horrendous gales, quite an unnerving prospect for an architect," says Anthony Hudson, whose partner, Sarah Featherstone, also worked on the project. "We had to find ways of ensuring the house was protected from the worst of the weather, while remaining in direct contact with its surroundings." The solution was a floor-to-ceiling wall of glass. Nothing very radical about that until you discover that this one can, at the press of a button, disappear into a void below floor level. "Opening the interior of the house to the elements

**ABOVE** The sitting room fireplace is flanked by a pair of huge Conran sofas; the curvaceous blue daybed, designed by Michael Young, offers the perfect place to lounge. **RIGHT** The plain teal upholstery of the dining chairs reflects the green tones of the impressive glass tabletop.







is what the site is all about," says Anthony. So on fine days the living area becomes one with the terrace outside – and the views beyond; and when the Atlantic is doing its worst, the glass wall forms a protective screen without obscuring the outlook. Finding a manufacturer capable of making a vast vanishing window wasn't easy. "But as it was my idea, I had to find a way of doing it," says Anthony.

Different materials have been used to emphasise the distinct areas of the house: rougher, darker materials

have been employed in the more enclosed parts, while lighter surfaces such as glass and pale wood define the open-plan living space.

The raised sitting room, with polished oak floor and unusual copper-clad canopy, shows how a very traditional sense of comfort can be incorporated into an uncompromisingly modern interior. "We decided to make the sitting room the heart of the house," says Anthony. "It forms the central core from which all the other rooms radiate." Apart from the view, the focal point of the room



LEFT Clean expanses of wood, glass and chrome give the kitchen an ultra-modern, streamlined look. ABOVE A gleaming new Aga brings welcome warmth to the room on winter evenings, while one of the advantages of the glass worktop is being able to slot a cook book beneath it.



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT The shape of the rough-hewn piece of Dartmoor granite in the hallway was inspired by a prehistoric burial chamber; a sculptural blue glass and chrome basin; in the main bathroom, a similarly shaped basin stands above a solid cube of limestone; the main bedroom features pale wood and a restful shade of deep blue. OPPOSITE PAGE The tiles in the main bathroom were specially fired and glazed to achieve their intense turquoise colour.







is the fireplace, which “we believed was integral to the idea of a country retreat”. The oak planks above it are visual reminders of the rock strata in the nearby cliffs, while the colour of the wood is complemented by Kate Blee’s warm-toned rug.

The dining area on the level below is also simply furnished. Silk hangings, hand-painted in blues and earthy reds and suspended from an unobtrusive wire, frame the view from the wall-to-wall window.

The family bedrooms are protected from the worst effects of the winter gales by being at the back of the house facing the hillside. The main bedroom continues the theme of restful blue and pale wood. In the bathroom next door, the vivid turquoise wall tiles were specially glazed with the help of ceramicist

Jenny Dale, who, together with Jonathan Switzman, experimented with different glazes and firing techniques. The result was an intense depth of colour, which contrasts so well with the whiteness of the walls. Evident throughout the house, this perfect juxtaposition of materials and textures is one of the key elements contributing to the success of this remarkable and eminently comfortable family home. ■

**KEY CONTACTS ARCHITECTS** HUDSON FEATHERSTONE, (020) 7490 5656. **BATHROOM TILES** JENNY DALE, (01603) 754170; JONATHAN SWITZMAN CERAMIC SERVICES, (020) 8579 7468. **DAYBED** MICHAEL YOUNG, (00 354) 561 2327. **RUG** KATE BLEE, (020) 7704 6026. **TABLETOP** JEFF BELL GLASS CASTS, (020) 7275 8481. **WINDOW MECHANISM** SMART MANUFACTURING, (01237) 471977.

**ABOVE** The swimming pool, hidden below the rockery, features a soft-pink wall which echoes the colour of some of the garden’s indigenous heathers. **RIGHT** The copper-clad canopy, chosen for its weathered finish, forms a ceiling over the dining area and external terraces.

