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LIFE ON THE EDGE

Building a home of outstanding architectural quality requires a particular approach, as Gavin and Fiona Breeze found out

SELF-BUILD | JERSEY | SEP 10 - MAY 12 | SIZE: 550M² | CONTRACT COST: £1.8M PLUS FEES

WORDS: PETER HARRIS | PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES BRITTAIN

Front Elevation

Gavin and Fiona's new home - replacing a smaller bungalow but maintaining the same ridge height thanks to some judicious excavation - features a dramatic cantilevered section used as a home office. The stone entrance design is a nod to the Martello towers out at sea



When Gavin and Fiona decided that they would sell the traditional farmhouse that had been Fiona's family home and create their own contemporary house, they went to a top residential architect, Anthony Hudson (designer of the award-winning Baggy House in Devon) for advice. This was their opportunity to define for themselves how they wanted to live.

Rear Elevation
Super-warm, the house is built from insulated concrete formwork and finished in an insulated render system

The couple had found an amazing site containing a rather drab bungalow with commanding sea views over Jersey's St Ouen's Bay and wanted to make real use of it. Having bought the bungalow, they rented it out while they and their architects worked on the design. "We had a basic wishlist," explains Gavin. "We wanted to create an open plan family space but with a private area for our use, and with the ability to be able to close off the ground floor bedroom area when it wasn't in use."

To make the best use of the views the sloping site had to offer, it made sense to have the living area upstairs. Apart from the downstairs bedrooms, the couple wanted to be able to use the whole house. "In the old house, because of the L-shaped layout, we rarely used some rooms," continued Gavin. "Although basically open plan, the small changes of level throughout the main living areas allow the family to chat while we're actually in different spaces; so it's a friendly atmosphere but

with a degree of privacy. We also wanted to create some fairly extensive outside terrace areas on the upper level to make the most of the lovely location."

The couple wanted to avoid cramming the new house with gadgets and technology, but still be able to enjoy what is now considered the normal and expected level of comfort. Their one major exception to the "no James Bond-style gizmos" is the flat screen TV which retracts into an oak cabinet in their private sitting room. ▶



The planners were helpful and encouraged a modern design, and welcomed something contemporary and distinctive on the coastal site. The main planning issues concerned the ridge height of the original bungalow, which could not be exceeded. Fortunately, the bungalow was reasonably elevated, but they still had to excavate 2.5m down to prevent the house from dominating its surroundings. The extra volume did not cause too many problems with the planners, according to architect Anthony Hudson, who acknowledges that building a one-off home is not without its difficulties: "If you want to build a truly bespoke house of real quality and integrity of design and construction, you've got to have the courage of your convictions," he explains. "It's all too easy to compromise at various stages of the journey, but you need to stick to your guns."

Project architect, Janet Dunsmore of Hudson Architects, joined the team after planning consent had been granted and visited the site every two weeks for three years during the tendering and construction phases. "The

Open Plan Living

The main open plan living area is on the first floor to take advantage of the spectacular views out to sea. The space is informally demarcated by changes in floor and ceiling heights. The dining table is from YASK (available in the UK from Loft Living)





Energy Efficient

The house is heated by an air-source heat pump, but a traditional oil-fired boiler has been fitted as a back-up

main thing to realise about this project is that literally everything was bespoke — I think the contractors possibly underestimated the amount of bespoke work. Lots of traditional materials were used, but in a non-standard way. I had to be on the phone every day to the site agent.”

There is almost always some tension in the architect/contractor relationship: the architect naturally wants to see the design built correctly, without compromises. Builders, however, will typically want to get on with things as they're working against the clock in terms of both time and money (in the form of the time allowed for each stage of the job on the quotation). On this particular project, there was complete determination from the architects to execute the design faithfully — and the contractors duly delivered. ▶



INSIDE THE HOUSE

The entrance elevation contains a timber colonnade punctuated by a stone hallway bulging from the house – a reference to the Martello towers which are dotted around the coast. Timber cladding cuts into the white render of the sea-facing garden front, where the main body of the house and a visually lighter pavilion frame create a semi-enclosed, south-facing courtyard. Rising overhead, a ‘crow’s nest’ – which houses Gavin’s home office – cantilevers outwards. This, together with double-height living spaces and a series of balconies and terraces, enjoys fine views out to sea.

A sequence of different levels and a mixture of shapes and sizes for each space, as well as a variety of materials, provides a lively and interesting interior. The main living space mixes traditional and modern materials:

exposed granite walls, oak ceiling beams and tall oak columns that contrast with a more contemporary palette of steel, and glass used for the crow’s nest staircase.

The living area is a light-filled space with exceptional views out to sea from the large picture windows overlooking the garden, and a stylishly simple and very long oak kitchen dining table made by Polish company YASK fits in beautifully in the open plan kitchen diner.

At the other end of the upper level, a suite of rooms contains the master bedroom and bathroom, alongside a snug/living room and a library. This is the owners’ retreat – somewhere where they can shut themselves away from the rest of the house and enjoy more intimate surroundings. A series of generously proportioned bedrooms for family and guests are arranged on the lower level of the house, each with their own bathroom and access to the gardens. Other smaller spaces are packed full of character: including the stone hallway, with its tall, narrow windows, which suggests strength and seclusion in its design.

A wide range of high-specification fixtures and fittings are used throughout the house, which is also a showcase of exceptional craftsmanship with its rich palette of masonry, carpentry and bespoke furniture.

The whole house is highly energy efficient and is built from insulated concrete formwork (ICF) walls from the supplier Logix. These are polystyrene block shapes that connect up together and are filled with concrete. It’s an ingenious lego-like system that possesses excellent insulation qualities – further enhanced with the insulated external render system supplied by Envirowall. This silicone-based system is thought to be particularly suitable for coastal areas.

“It’s all too easy to compromise at various stages of the journey”



Master Bedroom

The master bedroom on the top floor is separated from the rest of the living space with its own dedicated staircase. The rooflights are from Glazing Vision

The Lowdown

Design Hudson Architects.....	01603 766220
Building contractor Camerons Limited.....	01534 725417
Structural engineer Ross Gower Associates.....	01534 879262
Services engineer Henderson Green Partnership.....	01534 871890
Quantity surveyor Tillyard.....	01534 738556
Lighting consultant MacDonald Tait LIGHT.....	01603 788448
Landscape design Sheils Flynn.....	01485 518304
Furniture manufacturer (fitted furniture) Paul Haslam Ltd.....	01534 484599
M&E subcontractor Aston Services Limited.....	01534 867171
Insulated concrete formwork (walls) Logix.....	0845 607 6958
Insulated render system (external finish to ICF walls) Envirowall.....	01535 661633
Roof panels with carrier system Kingspan.....	0800 970 9036
Slate slab rainscreen to roof Granite Le Pelley.....	01534 832488
Composite aluminium timber windows Velfac.....	01223 897100
Folding sliding doors Schueco.....	01908 282111
Western red cedar cladding, column casings and doors Ridon Joinery.....	02380 635722
LED lighting Architectural Lighting & Controls.....	01794 521234
Rooflights Glazing Vision.....	0333 800 0881
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Fixed glazing units set into steel channel frames Pallot Windows.....	01534 760900
Sanitaryware (general) Duravit’s Starck range.....	duravit.com
Sanitaryware (master suite) V&A.....	vandabaths.com/uk
EZY-jamb door frames Linear Building Ideas.....	0845 054 6327
Travertine and basalt tiling Jersey Monumental.....	01534 730252
Oak engineered timber flooring Tuttoparquet.....	020 7435 8282



An example of some of the tensions on site were the amazingly frequent requests from the builders asking for further information and requiring more detailed drawings from the architects. These are known as RFIs (requests for further information) and there were approaching 1,000 during the project.

“We told the contractors at the outset,” explains Janet, “that we were looking for a very high level of finishing. We had to constantly tweak things to make them work on site. For example, we had to set out the timber cladding most precisely to allow for tolerances in timber sizing. One of the challenges was the fairly complex roof design, using Kingspan insulated panels on a roof carrier system with natural slate on top. There is only one rainwater downpipe,” she continues, “so the whole roof is effectively a gutter channelling the water into the rainwater harvesting system.”

The result of all this effort is a beautifully constructed home that genuinely delivers against Gavin and Fiona’s original wishlist. “They were great clients,” sums up Anthony Hudson. “They were happy to allow us to suggest ideas to really make it work and were very supportive of getting something really special built.” ■

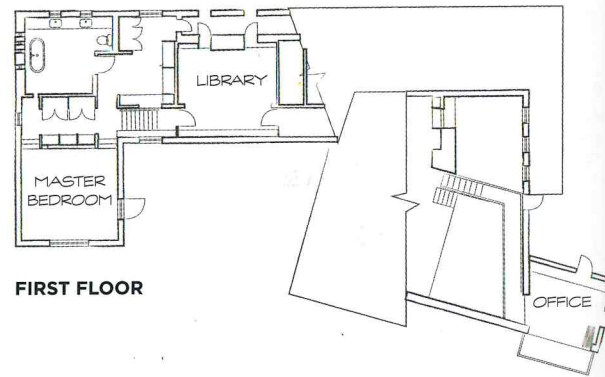
Main Bathroom

The spectacular main bathroom features an irregular series of small windows set into a tall wall beneath a stepped ceiling

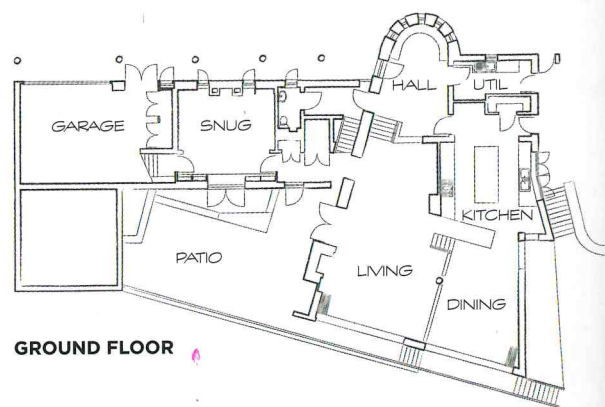
“There were approaching 1,000 [requests for more information] during the project”

Floorplans

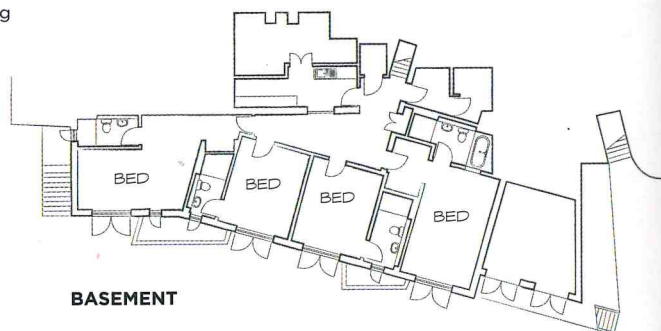
The semi-basement level accommodates most of the bedrooms, while the ground floor, which is elevated slightly, features a series of small changes in level. The master bedroom and office spaces are housed on the top level



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



BASEMENT