

Property



Variety is the spice of life: a modern house on Jersey by Hudson Architects, above

Country living with a contemporary twist

Just because you like all things bucolic doesn't mean you can't indulge in cutting-edge design, discovers *Emily Brooks*

Damp problems, lavish heating bills and living in small, dark rooms are the price we pay for the traditional charms of a listed cottage or handsome old rectory. For a growing group of rural dwellers, however, contemporary architecture and country living aren't mutually exclusive, but a perfect pairing. "It's harder to sell a listed property at the moment because people are reluctant to take on the additional costs of looking after it," says Chris Clifford, associate director at Savills in Exeter. "Contemporary properties are exciting and seem to be favoured over and above the traditional." Currently on Savills' books is Peter and Alison Baguley's five-bedroom home near Tiverton in Devon, which the couple refurbished and extended with the help of Exeter's Ford Gilpin Riley Architects. Both surveyors, the Baguleys were keen to put into practice the latest thinking about sustainable building. "We were

never prepared to compromise on living conditions," says Alison. "We wanted the best that was available in construction, something light and warm but also low maintenance that we could lock up and leave. We didn't want to be spending our time up ladders painting soffits."

With its double-height reception



space and floor-to-ceiling windows, their house is about far more than practicality, however. It has had a transformative effect on how the couple live.

"When I come out on to the landing every morning and I can see for miles, it's completely uplifting," says Alison. "The house uses every ounce of daylight, and there's always a changing picture outside. You can watch the deer come up from the woods."

Like many, the Baguleys wanted sociable, open-plan living. "The convention at the moment is for open spaces where you can eat, dine and sit, with perhaps a separate snug, and big glass doors that slide open and virtually create an outdoor space inside," says



Flexible living: the exterior of the Aikens' Springfield Farm, at Stony Littleton near Bath, above; Diana and Max Aiken in their kitchen, below



Empowering: the Baguleys' house near Tiverton, on sale with Savills for £1.25m, above

architect Anthony Hudson. "But you wouldn't want to destroy the character of a lovely older house just because you want to live in a different way."

Norfolk-based Hudson says that although clients are united in asking for this kind of layout internally, "there's a huge variety in terms of people's attitude to what a house should look like on the outside".

Clients generally fall into two camps: the young families who are moving away from the city for a better life and are likely to take on a new build or big refurbishment project, and downsizers who may live in a rural location already, but are looking for a more practical ready-made modern home for retirement.

Would-be self-builders usually find that a knock-down-and-rebuild opportunity is the safest bet for gaining permission to create a modern home.

Planners will usually make positive noises about replacing a draughty decrepit bungalow with a new energy-efficient dwelling, but it is far from a given that they will allow the footprint or the roof height to grow, so it's essential to seek out pre-planning-application advice.

But do rural planners favour

traditional architecture? "There's a public perception that everything has to be traditional," says architect Christopher Mackenzie of Bath's Designscape Architects.

"It varies from one planner to another. Planners are not supposed to exert any personal preference for a style, but if you are building in or near a conservation area, they will say that it has to complement the existing character. The home doesn't have to be a copy of neighbouring buildings, but needs to keep a healthy respect for the type of material and size."

Mackenzie designed a home, Springfield Farm, near Bath for retirees Diana and Max Aiken which blends in with the natural landscape, rather than fitting with the character of the built environment. Softened by hardwood cladding and a "living" roof, it's a classic example of a contemporary rural property that still holds its charm.

"A lot of modern architecture is too edgy for us. This is homely," says Max. That homely feel comes partly from their own personal touches, such as the Mondrian-inspired kitchen cabinets.

"We didn't want a traditional house," says Diana. "We wanted something open, but flexible, so that we can use the rooms every day, but they can be turned into bedrooms when family turn up."

If your ambitions are truly grand, there is an exceptional planning clause that allows a new home to be built on greenfield land, provided it is "truly outstanding or innovative".

Such properties are known as Paragraph 55 houses after the relevant clause in the National Planning Policy Framework. A handful of these have been completed, both in modern and traditional styles, with more in the pipeline, including Burcott Minor in Somerset by Anthony Hudson Architects.

"I think it's a fantastic clause in principle," says Hudson, "but there's no consistency. What one authority thinks is innovative, another won't, and you're never quite sure of the reasons why they got through in the end."

Would-be rural home owners are still willing to risk not being allowed to build exactly what they hoped to, because the potential benefits are so great.

"Here, we're not just surviving, we're enjoying life," says Alison

JAY WILLIAMS, JAMES BRITAIN