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# BAGGY HOUSE

Perched on a cliff at Baggy Point in Devon is an extraordinary new house. Commissioned by Gavyn Davies and his wife Sue Nye, Baggy House is the prize-winning design of architect Anthony Hudson, and along with a staggering view it boasts walls that wind down below ground, huge open-plan spaces, copper ceilings and glass walls, basins and stairs. Leslie Geddes-Brown looks on in wonder. Photography: James Mortimer



Previous page: Baggy House from the sea.

This page, above and right: Looking into the dining area, its glass window walls wound down to the floor. Steps inside lead to the living area.

The billowing silk curtains, painted by Louise Woodward, can be pulled to one side and hidden in a floor-to-ceiling cupboard. Plastic 'Lord Yo' chairs by Philippe Starck came from Coexistence.

Blue hydrangeas from the garden are arranged in a metal icebucket on a stand by Alessi. The verdigrised ceiling extends beyond the house to shade the stone-paved terrace. The limestone floor throughout is by Stone Age (0171-385 7954)

Asked to describe the attractions of his house, the owner said: 'The amenities of the situation and its extensive sea front are the answer... there are living rooms as well as the dining room which command the whole expanse of sea and stretch of shore.' The writer could be talking about Baggy House, a superb new building perched on Baggy Point near Barnstaple in North Devon - but in fact it is Pliny, describing his villa in South Italy 1900 years ago. There is, however, a connection: Pliny was, along with Safavid architecture and Mies van der Rohe, a major influence on Baggy's architect, Anthony Hudson.

Baggy has been chosen as building of the year by the Royal Fine Arts Commission and given its own exhibition at the RIBA headquarters in Portman Place, and it well deserves this attention. It is not only innovative in both its conception and mechanics, it works beautifully as a house and, most extraordinary of all, architect and clients are still friends. The new owners, Gavyn Davies, one of the Prime Minister's 'seven wise men' advising on the economy and a senior partner with Goldman Sachs, and his wife, Sue Nye, Gordon Brown's personal assistant, are delighted with their dazzling home.

Sue, rather than Gavyn, was the impetus behind the choice of site and the design of the new building. There had been an old hotel on the point with sensational views over the sea and, at one time they considered re-opening it. That dream was quickly destroyed by Edwina Currie and the salmonella in eggs affair - Sue realising that hygiene regulations were not her idea of fun.

The hotel had once been a pretty little house but, over the years, funny bits had been added and it had become a mish-mash. 'I wanted a lot of glass so there was nothing between us and the sea,' Sue explains. 'And Anthony said "Why not demolish the old building entirely?"' So they did.

One of the wonders of the new Baggy





*Looking out to sea from the sofa area. The curved terracotta wall on the right folds round a corner sun-room which has two descending glass and wood walls and a spectacular view out to Lundy Island and Baggy Point itself, both owned by the National Trust. All the paints in the house were supplied by Papers & Paints (Tel: 0171-352 8626). The balustrades are made of rope and zinc-sprayed steel. The curved ceiling canopy is clad with verdigrised copper*







*Above: The bar, with the kitchen beyond. At right is one of the descending glass walls arrested at knee height; beside it is the curtain cupboard, with the curtains stowed away. Right: The kitchen's island unit has a hinged lid-top. When folded back there is a gas hob for when the Aga is not in use. Under the window is a pair of butler's sinks. Atrium supplied the lights, which are by Cing Castaldi. The small metal basin is set in a raised glass-slab work top with drawers and storage bins beneath. The metal-door fridge is by Armana. All wood is American oak. Anthony Hudson designed the units, plate racks and glass top*

House are its huge one-ton windows overlooking the sea which, at the turn of a switch, will wind themselves down into the ground as though they had never existed. (The mechanism takes 2.5 minutes in total - very slow so that it is safe with children about.)

Above them is an upturned canopy of verdigrised copper which becomes the roof of an open pavilion, while the floor is an uninterrupted area of soft French limestone which leads on to an outside terrace. The whole dining-room area with, further into the house and up a few steps, the living room are at once open to the elements. The windows of a further small room with a curved wall also open up to create an intimate and private belvedere. 'It is absolutely fantastic,' says Sue Nye. 'On one occasion, a whole lot of butterflies came in and floated around us.'

Elsewhere, living with the elements was less successful. Sue originally wanted to continue her love affair with the ocean with a bedroom facing the Atlantic. 'We had our bedroom above the sitting room but, a force 8 gale in the New Year was so noisy that we moved to the back of the house, where it feels very safe and secure. I've learnt a great deal about rain since I have been here - it can be horizontal and even go upwards. When the gales come in from the Atlantic, this house is the first thing they hit.'

The Davies were keen that the house should be an all year round retreat, even though it's four hours' drive from London. 'The sitting room, with its removable glass walls, feels warm and cosy - safe - in bad weather.' The limestone floors are cooling on hot days and, with under floor heating, warm to bare feet in winter.

Indeed, the whole scheme is clever, which is why it has won awards. The windows which









Top: The hall's 'dolly-finished' granite obelisk (from Merrivale Quarries, Dartmoor) supports the upper floors. Brazilian slate flooring was supplied by Cambourne Slate (01209-313629). Lead-clad steel sheets (from Cooksons Industrial Materials, Tél: 01244-321022) cover the ceiling. On a half landing behind the glass-brick wall is a small cloakroom (above). The blue-glass basin is by Völa (01525-841155). Right: Zinc-panelled bath in the guest bathroom. The window with a central clear circle is from Tintopal. The zeebrite-polished metal radiator is by Hudevad. The floor is maple





*Above: The frosted glass treads of the staircase were made by Glass Casts (Tél: 01 71-275 8481). Right: The circular ceiling skylight in the blue-tiled master bathroom clocks the time of day with a round patch of sunlight that moves across the room. To the left of the bath is a shower area, and beyond that a steam heat room and a dry heat room, both by Nordic. The bed's cotton-damask duvet cover is by Frette*

sink into the ground, for instance, don't have to go as far underground as it would seem, because Hudson used the sloping site to give the house a basement. Nor did he have to blast any rock for it, though the whole site is a cliff.

Hudson has used natural materials to give solidity and drama to the house. The entrance hall is floored in dark slate with a piece of local granite, rough hewn, used as a supporting column, and its ceiling is clad in lead. From the hall, visitors climb stairs, still of slate but smaller slabs, unaware of the lights and drama revealed when they reach the top. The limestone of the open dining room then gives way to polished wood in the living room and the ceiling is supported by a maple column which look as though it was floating. 'It is very orchestrated,' Hudson admits.

The mood of the building softens as you go up. The bedrooms are reached up glass stairs and their floors are covered in seagrass. The main bathroom reflects Hudson's interest in Islamic architecture being tiled and austere luxury. Doors on all floors lead outside onto tiny stone gardens, onto decking overlooking the sea or open terraces.

The whole is very subtle - a sliver of nautical influence in the portholes and decking; a touch of Islam in the turquoise tiles and cool stone floors, a hint at Devon traditions in the hefty white walls and determined chimney and, of course, a large dollop of both Modernism and Mediterranean. The wonder is that the planners allowed it to happen ■



