

REAL PROJECT
BARN-STYLE NEW BUILD

Radical rethink

Antony and Jenni Bulley weren't even considering building their own home, but an idyllic building plot with plenty of potential proved impossible to resist





NAMES Antony and Jenni Bulley

OCCUPATIONS Retired

LOCATION Wiltshire

PROJECT Contemporary replacement build

PLOT COST £340,000 in 2018

BUILD COST £260/ft²

WORK BEGAN March 2020

BUILD COMPLETED April 2021

WORDS Alexandra Pratt

PHOTOGRAPHY Pete Helme

When Antony and Jenni Bulley were

thinking about moving to a smaller home until they stumbled across a plot with plenty of potential. “We didn’t have a plan and we were even thinking of downsizing, but then this plot became available via auction,” says Antony, who along with wife Jenni, had never self-built before. “I’ve seen the opportunities, but I’ve also seen the pitfalls,” he says. But the couple felt it was their “last chance to do such a large project.”

CONFRONTING THE RISK

The project itself was a risk from the beginning. The site they found included a pair of derelict workers’ cottages on four acres of rural Wiltshire, which they bought through an auction. Like the buildings, the land had also become derelict. “There were mounds of earth, rubbish and brambles,” says Jenni. “We couldn’t see the paddock and we didn’t know what we would uncover.”

Their first step was to get the lapsed planning permission reinstated, although that design didn’t include their preferred layout. “We wanted the house to look like an old barn that had been converted — a group of agricultural buildings joined together,” says Jenni. Consequently, they turned to local architect Rob Elkins — someone they have known personally and professionally for several years. “Rob creates interesting, contemporary designs with real quality and longevity,” says Antony.

FINALISING THE DESIGN

An initial pre-planning application revealed the couple’s desired footprint was too large. But by working with the local planning office, their plans later passed for an attractive two-storey replacement home, with additional bedrooms in the attic space for when the grandchildren visit. On the ground

“We couldn’t see the paddock. We didn’t know what we would uncover...”



Sitting on four acres of spectacular Wiltshire countryside, the charcoal colour of Antony and Jenni’s home complements its rural surroundings.



floor, a large and comfortable open-plan kitchen, dining and living room offers enticing country views in three directions.

A large masonry gable and spine wall anchor the home, with the remainder constructed around a steel frame. The design reflects the appearance of neighbouring barns, emphasised by scorched timber cladding and black metal roofing.

The materials used in the construction don't just help the new home to sit quietly in the landscape, they also have good sustainability credentials. In addition, Antony and Jenni added an air source heat pump to run their underfloor heating system. With their heating choices restricted to oil, electricity or bottled gas, using a renewable system was an obvious choice for them. "We also wanted to add solar panels and rainwater harvesting, but the budget was a factor," says Jenni. "We hope to add solar later."

KEEPING THE BUDGET IN CHECK

Antony and Jenni were delighted with Artel 31's design and build of their home. They kept their budget under control by selling their existing home and moving into a caravan for the duration of the build. "We wanted to be on site," says Jenni. "We had a nice caravan, but it was two winters and it did get cold. The water froze a few times." Another advantage to living on site was their ability to pick up some time-consuming jobs. One of these was scorching the timber cladding, which Antony took on. "I had finished work so I thought it was a good idea," he says. "It turned into a full-time job for a while."

Other bespoke elements in the project included the impressive central staircase, constructed from Corten steel, with oak handrails and treads, designed by their architect. The steel came from a local company and the couple lacquered it to stop the characteristic rusting from developing too far.

Less successful was their initial decision to use clay plaster on the masonry wall in the entrance hall. After ongoing

problems with the product cracking and falling off, Antony and Jenni decided to cut their losses and replace it with conventional plasterwork, now painted a stunning dark blue.

DEALING WITH CHALLENGES

Their biggest challenges during the build were the pandemic lockdowns. This initially led to big delays in work starting on site, particularly frustrating as the weather in spring 2020 was ideal for groundworks. "Our lowest point was sitting in our caravan during the first lockdown in perfect weather looking at a digger not doing anything," says Antony who eventually hired a temporary crew to get the build started, after their original groundworker was unable to work due to Covid-related ill health.

Further along in the project, Jenni and Antony found that sourcing finishes was also more difficult. "We had issues getting, or even looking, at things," says Jenni. "We bought so much 'blind'. There were a few leaps of faith." One supplier that was open by appointment, was Wren Kitchens and the couple were "blown away" by the choices available.

When it came to worktops, however, they went to a local company and chose a unique 'rainforest' marble. This connects the kitchen with the landscape on view all around, through the aluminium-framed glazing. Throughout, the finishes are of superb quality, featuring limestone, oak and other raw materials, while the bathroom fittings resonate at the luxury end of the spectrum.

All in all, the promise of that derelict site they stumbled upon has not just been realised, but surpassed. But are Antony and Jenni glad they embraced such a risk at a stage in their lives when many are taking things more gently? "Our lives here have been transformed," says Antony. "It's all about the location and we have a lovely home with all the features for how we want to live. The views are glorious with all those windows, too. We've got everything we could want." 



Jenni originally wanted polished concrete flooring in the open-plan kitchen, living and dining room, but budget considerations pushed her to instead choose limestone tiles in a neutral tone.



The top floor has a glazed gable and enjoys exceptional views across Wiltshire. The windows were supplied by Antony and Jenni's son's company, Visions Glazing Solutions.





SPOTLIGHT ON: SHOU SUGI BAN

One of the most distinctive elements of Jenni and Antony's new home is the charred timber cladding — a Japanese technique that's growing in popularity. Antony, who had retired and had the time to spend on site, took on the responsibility of the cladding himself.

"We don't like the grey, weathered effect," says Jenni. "And we didn't want composite." Given the rural setting, charring seemed like the obvious answer. The benefits of shou sugi ban are persuasive; the new carbon layer on the outside of the timber protects it against UV light, water and insects. The process can be tweaked to produce different effects or depths of colour, which enhances the character of the timber.

Jenni and Antony chose larch, a popular timber for cladding, being hardwood. This durability is only enhanced further through the charring method, meaning that the cladding can last up to 120 years.

"Pre-scorched cladding was too expensive," says Antony, who went through the laborious process twice, washing down the timber between applications. As a final step, he oiled the charred cladding to improve durability to ensure the timber maintains its colour over time. The scorched colour works perfectly with the charcoal of the house's Sinusoidal metal roofing, which also clads the small bump-out pantry. Areas of off-white render provide contrast and interest to this timeless and sensitive home.



THE BUILD



PRE-BUILD The original buildings on the site when the plot was bought at auction were a pair of derelict farm cottages.



PEGGING OUT The Covid pandemic at the start of 2020 meant building was delayed because of lockdowns.



MATERIALS Larch hardwood timber was selected by Antony and Jenni for the shou sugi ban charred timber cladding.



STEEL FRAME Erected in just one day, the property's steel frame underlays the charred timber cladding.



ROOF AND WALLS Weathertight is achieved. A utility and pantry sit at the front of the house in a small entry wing.



COMPLETION The self-build was completed in 13 months and Antony and Jenni moved in April 2021.

THE PLANS



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR

SUPPLIERS

ARCHITECT/MAIN CONTRACTOR
Rob Elkins at Artel 31: www.artel31.co.uk

MARBLE Windsmere Stone & Granite:
www.windsmerestone.com

OAK FLOORING Pietra Wood & Stone
flooring: www.pietrawoodandstone.com

LIMESTONE FLOORING Boniti Bath:
www.boniti.com

GLAZING Visions Glazing Solutions:
martin@visionsglazing.solutions
07854 810702

GARDEN DESIGN NB Designs:
07854 363193

HARD LANDSCAPING
Poolman Patios: 07971 966583

BESPOKE STAIRCASE
Webcox: www.webcox.co.uk

