

BOB *the* BUILDER

Architect Robert Elkins has turned an awkward corner plot on Ashley Hill into his dream eco- home, managing the entire process from design to build. Brace yourself for extreme property envy . . .

By ABI DARE
From the new Lookbook
by elephant estate agents >



With windows this huge it's no surprise to discover that the rooms are fabulously light and airy

From the outside, the house is a striking fusion of glass, stone and timber cladding; inside, it's filled with light, thanks to banks of floor-to-ceiling windows. It's also packed with innovative features that make it environmentally friendly, cost-effective and extremely comfortable to live in.

We asked Robert to tell us more about the inspiration behind the house, the benefits of eco-design, and the highs and lows of his self-build journey.

Please can you tell us a bit about yourself and your background?

I'm an architect, and I run a building firm. I grew up in Chippenham and spent many years trying to avoid the West Country, until I visited a friend in Bristol six years ago and fell for the city. After that, I never really left.

It all began with a gurt big hole in the ground



What motivated you to build the house?

A desire to create better than I could buy. There is no way my wife Hannah and I could have bought a house like this in this location.

And what inspired the design?

Bristol, with its idiosyncratic blend of styles and its human scale. We borrowed ideas from everywhere – even the sheds in the Ashley Hill allotments!

Why was creating an environmentally friendly house so important to you?

Minimising waste on all fronts is fundamental to our ethos. It doesn't mean living with less, but it's a simple and pragmatic formula that leads to all sorts of savings, as well as helping the planet. When you consider the cost and environmental benefits, you wonder why anyone wouldn't want to build an eco house!

What eco features does the house have?

It uses passive solar design with exposed thermal

mass, which means it attracts and stores solar heat in winter and rejects it in summer. It also has passive ventilation and very high levels of insulation, enabling fresh air to circulate without letting heat escape. We installed triple acoustic glazing and low-energy lighting throughout, and we used lots of natural and reclaimed materials – including old bike handlebars, which we turned into a stair rail. Finally, we conducted lifecycle assessments to look at the house's environmental impact at all stages, from the initial build through to future repair and maintenance.

Were there any particular highs and lows during the build?

To be honest there weren't many lows, although we did experience three months of solid rain when we wanted to install the flat roof of the garage, which obviously hampered the process. There were lots of highs – too many to single out, really – but I always enjoyed talking to people who stopped to ask about the house as they wandered past, and sitting down in the sun to drink a beer after a hard day's labour. And now, living in the house on a daily basis is a major high.

On that topic, what is it like to live in?

Amazing – warm in winter, cool in summer, and very light and airy. And it fits our daily life perfectly.

What's your favourite corner of the house?

Hmm – that's like asking about your favourite memory of a trip. There are so many corners that I like for so many reasons. During the day I like to sit by the window at the top, watching people go by as I work, and I like the office for its serenity. I love spending time on the roof terrace in the

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STAIR RAIL



A happy mixture of natural materials
with a contemporary eco-design
characterises this lovely house

evening as it catches the last of the sun, and our double-sided breakfast bar is wonderful in the mornings as Hannah and I can sit and talk over breakfast.

What advice would you give to anyone thinking of building an eco home?

Do it! Do lots of research and think about things, but then just take the first step, work out what you need to do next, and keep doing that until you have a house – it's the best way, really. There's no denying that the process is hard sometimes, but it always comes good in the end. **BL**

To see inside more beautiful Bristol homes, take a look at the new Lookbook by elephant estate agents www.elephantlovesbristol.co.uk

Read more by Abi on her blog www.thesefourwallsblog.com

