

WELL WORTH THE EFFORT

Alex Cooper has built a stunning new home on an awkward site overlooking Exeter and the surrounding countryside.

IT WAS THE SECLUDED raised elevation with views over Exeter city and beyond that enticed Alex Cooper to buy St Clair, a rundown pre-1930s timber bungalow which had stood vacant for many years. The property had been the first development in the privately owned narrow lane known as Lodge Hill and was awkwardly situated, surrounded by neighbours gardens on all sides, with a 1.2m wide path providing the only access. This had deterred many prospective buyers.

But Alex, a local businessman, managed to buy some neighbouring land, which not only provided better

access to enable construction work it also provided enough space for a detached garage.

Alex instructed a local RIBA architect to apply for planning permission for a modern contemporary design, with a mono pitch roof and striking elevations. Planning was granted with a minor amendment as Alex wanted the footprint of the house moved slightly to take advantage of the views.

Although the elevations restricted the internal layouts, these created opportunities to include sloping ceilings and split levels, with the main living areas kitchen located on the first floor to maximise the 180 degree panoramic views of the city and surrounding countryside.

However the mid-level entrance hall presented challenges to meet Building Regulations with regard to disabled access and a plan check by warranty provider Premier Guarantees highlighted several design errors. Alex decided to dispense with the services of the architect and engaged a new team to take the project forward. Weststructure Timber Frame was commissioned to supply the frame and with the aid of 3D modelling they were able to enhance the design and satisfy Building Regulations.

Paul Brown of Self Build Alliance had been recommended to manage



the project. Alex viewed Paul's previous project, and had lengthy conversations about costs, the self build process and construction and specification. He was impressed by Paul's hands-on approach with his practical skills put to good use during his daily site visits.

Once the existing St Clair was demolished it was clear that considerable savings could be made on the initial architect's groundworks design. Rather than a costly subterranean construction which required tanking, Paul suggested creating a void, with the engineered retaining wall moved away from the superstructure so that timber frame could be used

for the entire structure. This void beneath the entrance path could be used to house the thermodynamics system and provide handy storage with access from the front and rear gardens.

The logistics of getting materials on site was a constant battle with vehicles limited to 7.5 tonnes. Access to the lane could not be restricted for long either, so deliveries and orders had to be planned well in advance so that the neighbours could be notified. Luckily frequent social gatherings provided a handy point of contact to the local residents.

Any bulk deliveries had to be made to a hardstanding area 300m

down the bottom of the lane near the main road. A forklift was then used to transport materials on site. Excavated spoil also had to be dumped to hardstanding area for disposal by grab lorries.

Buildbase, the main builder's merchant for St Clair, acquired a transit flatbed truck to deliver the block and beam floor direct to site. The transit proved so efficient that the local Buildbase manager used it throughout the project.

After hundreds of forklift and dumper trips, the groundworks and substructure base were finally completed. But if this stage of the build had proved challenging, the timber



frame delivery needed military planning.

Using a shuttle truck the timber frame was delivered nearby and then transferred to site in smaller loads and unloaded by crane. The position of the house on the plot gave ample storage room for the frame to be delivered in one unit keeping disruption to a minimum.

The frame was erected within three weeks and attention now turned to the mono-pitch roof and the aluminium fascia and soffit. With the changes of pitch and angles and the overall design requiring a perfect fit, the contract for this was awarded to Single Ply Structures. Several meetings with them confirmed that the original design would need to be replaced with a more modern multiple-angled design.

The design includes three primary colours: anthracite grey for the roof, aluminium, windows and facing bricks, JUBB white render, and pre finished UV protection coated cedar cladding. Keeping to these three colours gives St Clair the wow factor.

The aluminium sliding doors that open onto the balcony presented Alex with his first major budget dilemma: these would cost £20,000 more than an anthracite flush casement modus range of UPVC. After visiting high end local developments where UPVC had been used, Alex chose this option, using the additional budget on other design finishes.

A wet flow self-levelling screed was used on the ground and first floors, with special attention paid to the split levels for continuous pipe layouts. The screed system enhances the UFH

system and also gives the timber floor a solid feel.

Internally, Alex chose Intoto to design and install the kitchen, with feature sandblasted walnut breakfast bar to contrast with the Corian slim-line worktop. The pastel cashmere colour is offset by the oak flooring and the lighting which includes multiple options of plinth, under edge, drop pelmet and numerous downlights.

The main feature of the kitchen is the framed void, initially proposed by Pete from Weststructure to enhance the views from the first floor. It is possible to look through the lower level lounge and the tri-sliding aluminium doors onto the terrace balcony and beyond to the views over Exeter. This achieves a sense of openness and natural light throughout the first floor living area.

The lounge has a log-burning stove and solid slate hearth, with a feature window also offering impressive views. Fully-glazed doors open onto a porcelain-floored balcony under an overhanging mono pitch roof,



finished on the underside by the aluminium plank and Cedar cladding. With so much prominent glazing, a dwarf cedar wall was constructed to create a private space.

The flexibility to change or add features



was the most important aspect of the build for Alex, and he was able to discuss design and finishes with Paul who guided him with his choice of finishes. "Although having a fixed specification can be advantageous at the beginning not all clients know what finishes to have until the structural elements of the project are complete and they can walk around a blank canvas and add a personal touch," says Paul. "It was important that Alex felt that he had contributed in building his own home although he did not undertake any work personally."

An oak and glass staircase leads to a mid height landing entrance area with hand-built oak oversized entrance door and side light with glass porch canopy. Shaun Radford from Radford joinery Ltd and Balustrade South West designed the oak and glass works throughout St Clair guiding Alex through the numerous options.

A void beneath the mid-height landing holds the mission control centre for St Clair, housing the mechanical ventilation manifolds and renovation system supplied by Tim Bartlett of CVCC. The ground floor UFH, electrical consumer units, data points and speaker cables all return to this central point. Housing all the intelligent and service elements in one place leaves the internal room layouts

uninterrupted for unsightly controls or boxing provisions.

Under floor heating and the hot water system was supplied by Thermodynamics. Nine solar panels situated on the roof are connected to the external void area that houses the Energie system. All the pipework is hidden from sight in an aluminium downpipe that looks like part of the gutter system.

The bedrooms, located on the ground floor, have direct access to the private gardens, with the master bedroom big enough for a double bath and a large wet room area.

Careful attention was paid to the landscaping and garden at the ground work stage, with Paul using his construction and landscaping background to design a garden that features new timber sleepers to complement the elevations of the house. Vertical sleepers have also been used for the fence lines at the entrance to separate the front garden. Different paving shades and materials define areas of interest, with a raised circular entertaining and bbq area area providing the perfect place from which to enjoy the views.

Building on such an awkward site presented more than its share of problems and, according to Paul, probably added £15-20,000 to the overall cost of the build. But the completed house shows that it was well worth the extra expense and effort.



AT A GLANCE

BUILD COST: 450k **LAND COST: 230k**
BUILD AREA: 230m² **PLOT SIZE: 0.2 acres**
VALUE: excess 850k **EPC: C (77) 4 off a B rating**
AIR TEST: 3.21 **BUILD DURATION: 10 months**

Project Manager: Paul Brown, Selfbuild Alliance. 07971 571276
Groundworks: Paul Brown, SUBSTRUCTURE TECHNICIANS 07971 571276
Timber Frame: Pete Doman, Weststructure Timber Frame. 01884 34635
Single ply roofing and aluminium works: Gary Yelland, Single Ply Structures Ltd. 07812 600087
Render: Des Locke, The Coloured Render Company. 07850 510801
Builders Merchants: Buildbase Exeter. UPVC windows and doors: Victoria Windows. 01884 829302
Plumbing and Thermodynamics: Mark Glanville, Modern Heating Ltd. 07866 674076

Electrics, security and lighting design: Marcus White, Electrical & Security Solutions Ltd. 07977 538844
Stairs and entrance door: Shaun Radford, Radford Joinery Ltd. 07789 750958
Balustrading and glass canopy: Shaun Radford, Balustrade South West Ltd. 07789 750958
Stove: Ian Prince 07540 115502
Decorator: Davis & Venn 07971 128435
Landscaping: Paul Brown, PLEASURESAPES 07971 571276
Cleaning contractor: Paula Riglar, No fuss 2 Dust 07703805771
Bathroom furniture Roper Rhodes
Paint Farrow and Ball

