

Double take



THE SEATON FILE

NAMES Guy & Julia Seaton

OCCUPATIONS Construction manager & IT director

LOCATION Staffordshire

TYPE OF BUILD Self build

STYLE Traditional farmhouse with contemporary elements

CONSTRUCTION METHOD Brick & block and oak frame

PLOT SIZE 4.5 acres

LAND COST £430,000

BOUGHT April 2012

HOUSE SIZE 270m²

BUILD COST £647,500

COST PER M² £2,396

TOTAL COST 1,077,000

BUILDING WORK COMMENCED November 2012

BUILDING WORK TOOK 45 weeks

Their vision of a property that would combine a traditional brick facade with a contemporary glazed oak at the rear has given **Guy and Julia Seaton** a truly individual new home

WORDS **IFEOLUWA ADEDEJI**
PHOTOS **OAKWRIGHTS/JEREMY PHILLIPS**

You'd be forgiven, as you head up the gravel drive to The Green, for assuming that Guy and Julia Seaton had simply built a charming farmhouse in the Staffordshire countryside. The heritage-style brickwork and oak frame sash windows, which are complemented by elegant stone sills and a timber porch, lend the property a chocolate-box cottage air. However, once you enter the house and head towards the rear you come to appreciate the dedication and detail that's gone into merging modern living with traditional style.

Guy and Julia didn't have to think twice about putting in an offer to buy the original dilapidated cottage, set within four acres of land, because they immediately fell in love with the area. "When we went to see the property Julia looked at me and simply said 'yes, I'd like to live here,'" explains Guy. Although he's been working in the construction industry for many years and owns a brickwork sub-contracting company, undertaking a self build was actually Julia's dream – and she'd done her research on how to take the project forward. So when they were faced with a choice between renovating the existing house and knocking it down, the couple knew it made more sense to start over.

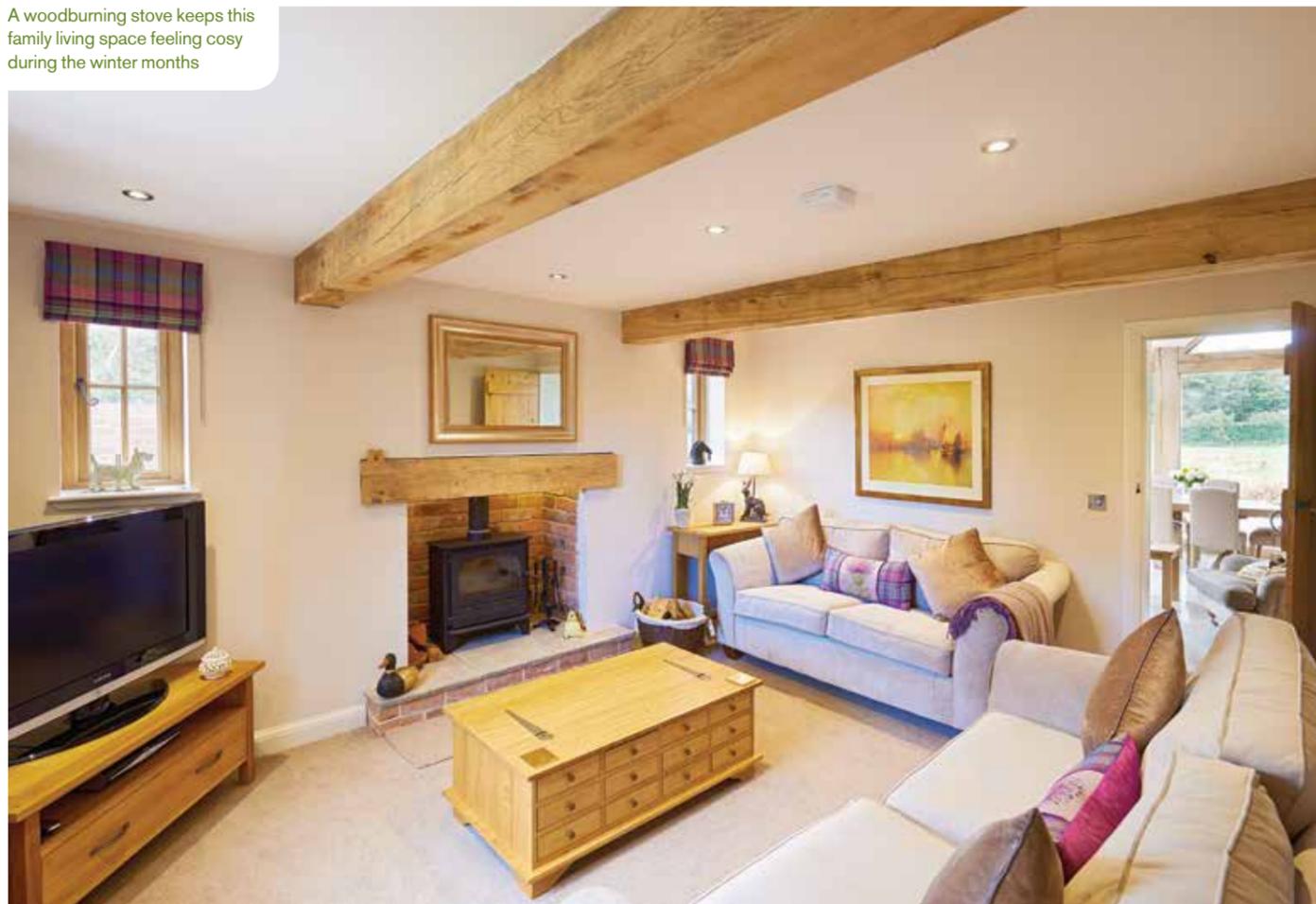
Persuading the planners

The Seatons had clear ideas of what they wanted to establish on the four-and-a-half acre plot; namely a home that would bring together the best of timber and masonry design. "I made some sketches and took them to our architect. He then worked closely with our chosen oak frame provider, Oakwrights – who we felt comfortable with right from the start – to devise a proposal that we could take the planners," says Guy.

Before the couple could get the go-ahead they had to prove to the council that building a new property was more financially viable than refurbishing the existing one. "The cottage was very old and had really low ceilings so to get it habitable we'd have had to change the floor levels and it would have taken a lot of work," says Guy. The Seatons hired a quantity surveyor to help them get a realistic idea of the costs involved in renovating as well as building



A woodburning stove keeps this family living space feeling cosy during the winter months



The contemporary kitchen adds a pop of colour to the neutral interior scheme

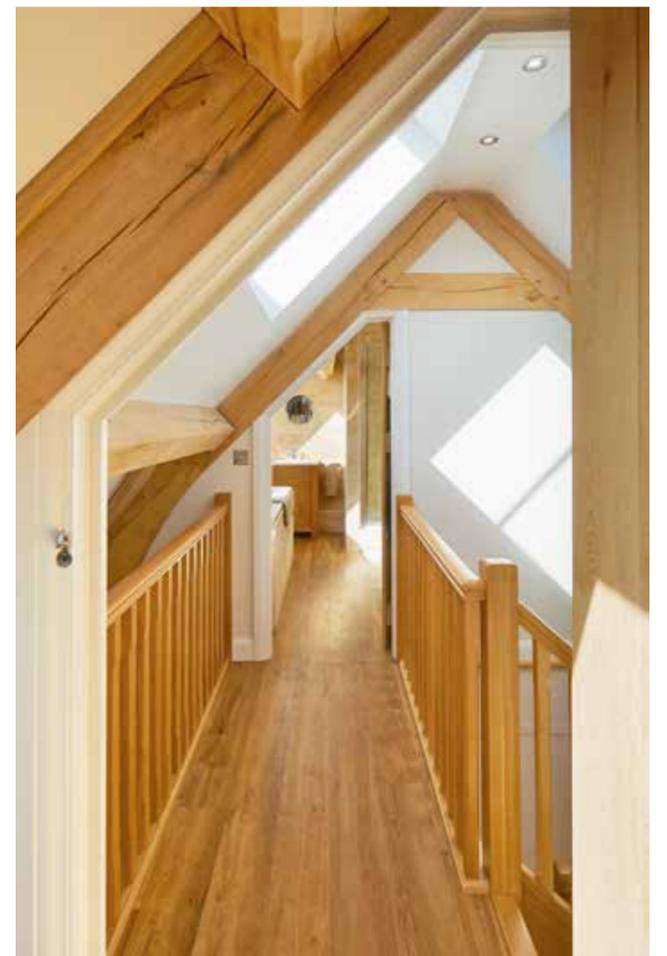
a new house. "Our quantity surveyor made some calculations and gave us some figures. We were able to show that it would cost us more to transform the cottage into a modern and energy-efficient property than to start again," says Guy.

The planners granted permission for the couple's new home in spring 2012 and work was scheduled to start in the summer of that year. However, discharging the conditions the local authority put on the build delayed the scheme. "We had labour ready and waiting to go and we couldn't afford to lose them," says Guy, who acted quickly to move the project forward.

In particular the council wanted more information on how the house would blend into the setting and asked them to produce a landscape plan. "At that stage we had no idea where shrubs would go – we were more worried about pouring concrete," says Guy. The couple put a design together in order to placate the planners, but they were also instructed to conduct a bat survey and had to work around a tree protection order. "These were small nuisances," explains Guy. "We managed to start on the outbuildings first to give us time to have the conditions discharged."

Moving forward

The footings for the stables and garage were laid and preparation for the main house's basement – which would be built using insulating concrete formwork (ICF), a modern masonry system offering an easy route to a waterproof substructure – began at the same time. Guy explains that while digging for the foundations they were lucky to hit bedrock level when they did. If it had occurred any shallower, they may not have been able to create their basement and would have had to install a standard strip foundation. "This was really a great thing as we could put a concrete slab down and build straight off it," says Guy. The subterranean zone has given them an extra 50m² of living space



WE LEARNED...

THE ACTUAL BUILD itself wasn't stressful. It was the external aspects such as waiting for the conditions to be discharged, which are out of your control, that made it difficult.

IT'S EASY to overspend once you get to the interior fittings and finishes stage, so things end up costing a lot more than you initially anticipated. Make sure you have room in your budget for a contingency.

HIRE TRADES that are local to your site and have a reputation to uphold. We knew our contractors already and they all did an amazing job on the project.



and contains a home cinema and plant room. "We really needed that because the planners only let us replace the original 165m² cottage with a structure that was 70% bigger," says Guy.

The couple's dual-style home is the result of combining two principal building methods above ground; a striking oak frame cleverly merges with conventional brick and block. "We built the ICF section of the house up to damp proof course level and then started laying the brick and block to eaves height. While the oak frame was being erected for the rear section we added the trusses, porch, softwood roof and the purlins to the front as well."

Plans derailed

The couple originally wanted to knock the cottage down and build a new home while living in their existing property at the time. They'd hoped to then sell their home to fund the final stages of the project. "We already had a buyer lined up for our converted barn," explains Guy. "But they pulled out because when the plans for the new HS2 railway line were published, it showed it would be running straight through our existing front room."

This left the couple with a financial shortfall as they were relying on the sale of the property to complete the finishing touches. But

eventually, after six months of negotiations with HS2, the Department of Transport (DoT) bought the converted barn through a hardship scheme, which was established to allow the DoT to buy from people who could prove they have a need to sell due to the disruption caused by the proposed railway track.

Running the project

Although it was his first time, Guy was confident he could manage the build himself – especially as he had access to trustworthy trades that could help him with the scheme. He focused on making sure that the contractors had all the materials and tools they required to do the job on time. "You've got to be on the ball but not look too far ahead, either. I think people can get a bit too organised and order something three months in advance only to find they then need to change it – there's a balance to strike," he explains.

The couple didn't set a schedule, nor does the initial budget reflect the final project cost. "We expected to pay £270,000 to build the main house and it ended up costing £430,000," says Guy. "I think you're more likely to underestimate the budget for the internal works rather than overspend on the main structure. The fit-out costs much more than you expect; so you reach watertight stage and think that you're on the home run when in fact you're not. It's also hard to get a handle on different trades doing a range of tasks. Plus you'll probably end up changing your mind on some parts of the spec. If you've not done it before it's tough."

Warm & welcoming

Guy and Julia really wanted a house that would be comfortable to live in, so they made sure to pack in as much insulation as possible

to make it thermally efficient. "We used Celotex boards in the roofs and the walls and have installed underfloor heating (UFH) throughout," says Guy. "Where this has been laid under screed it's fantastic, but it doesn't work as well where we have suspended floors because the system takes considerably longer to warm up."

The couple also chose to install a 16-panel array of solar photovoltaics (PVs), which provides them with more electricity than they use. The panels are sited on the roof of one of their three stables so as not to disturb the aesthetic of the main house. "We are also able to benefit from the Feed-In Tariff," says Guy. Looking at the figures I think that it was worth installing them; we'll get our money back in about five to six years."

The property is flooded with light through the glazed oak gable and via a set of Velux rooflights, which illuminate a stairwell that links the four floors. Exposed oak beams and brick walls combine to bring warmth to the interiors. A neutral palette and elegant, high-quality fixtures and furnishings mean that the decor will not date. Each of the bespoke home's four bedrooms benefits from stunning country views and has access to an ensuite bathroom.

Guy doesn't regret a thing about the construction process, but he does wish that the planners had allowed them to build a bigger property. "We'd have loved to have increased the house size by approximately 15%; it is set within four-and-a-half acres of land so it wouldn't have had much of an impact on the landscape," he says. Nevertheless, the resulting house is not far off the design that the couple initially took to their architect. "From the front the property looks like a traditional farmhouse but at the other end it's fairly contemporary. Our home has turned out pretty much how we envisage it would be," says Guy.



Velux windows combine with modern downlights to illuminate the central void and staircase

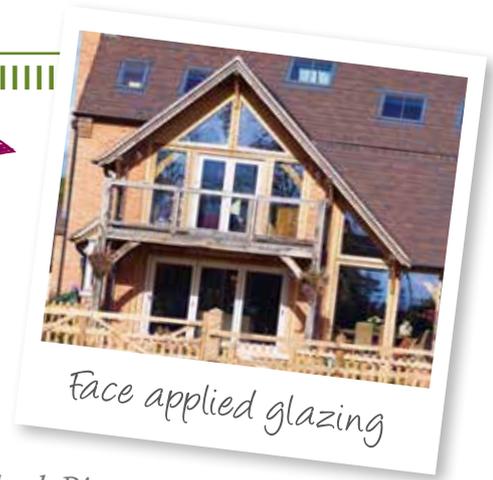
The Jack and Jill ensuite bathroom on the first floor can be accessed from two of the bedrooms



closer look

Picture perfect views...

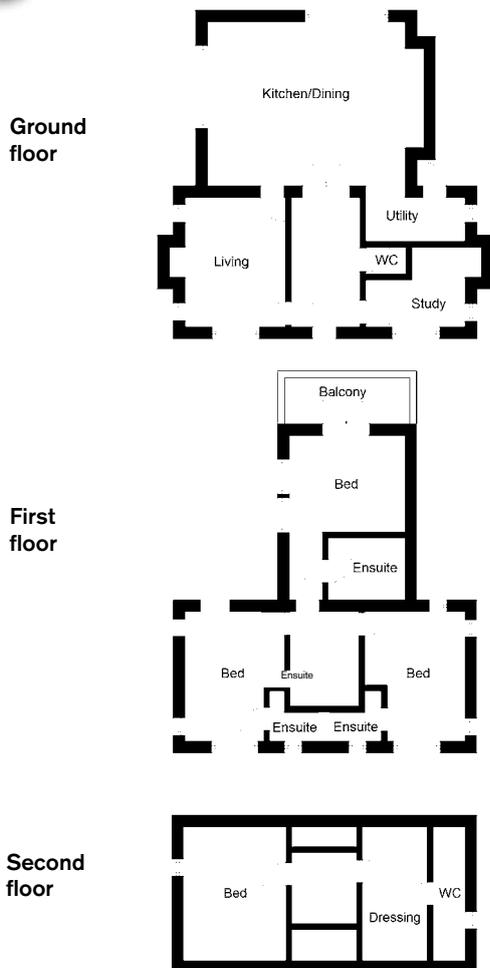
The Seatons' favourite aspect of the house is the oak frame zone at the rear of the property. It offers fantastic views from the modern kitchen-diner and sun room. Their architect worked closely with Oakwrights to design the two-storey section with its glazed gable-ends. Its visual appeal is further enhanced by its pairing with a large timber feature balcony on the upper storey. This provides a connection between the master bedroom and the external space. Black Pig installed the fixed panes using a face applied glazing system. This method overcomes the issue of potential water ingress when adding glazing to green oak, which is constantly moving while it dries and settles. The glass units are clamped and secured onto the outside of the timber using dry seasoned oak cover boards that will not warp or move. This leaves the oak frame completely visible internally and stops rain water from seeping in.



Face applied glazing



Floor plans



TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m ²	Cost %	Total cost
Demolition	£15	< 1%	£4,000
Site clearance	£37	2%	£10,000
House foundations incl basement	£159	7%	£43,000
House superstructure	£117	49%	£317,000
External works, fencing / drainage	£156	6%	£42,000
Garage foundation	£33	1%	£9,000
Garage superstructure	£170	7%	£46,000
Stables subs structure	£52	2%	£14,000
Stables foundation	£189	8%	£51,000
Capital purchases & consumables	£81	3%	£22,000
Solar PVs	£20	< 1%	£5,500
Landscaping	£222	9%	£60,000
Fees	£85	4%	£23,000
Grand total			£647,500

Useful contacts



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