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The Cornwall County Magazine

CORNWALL LIFE

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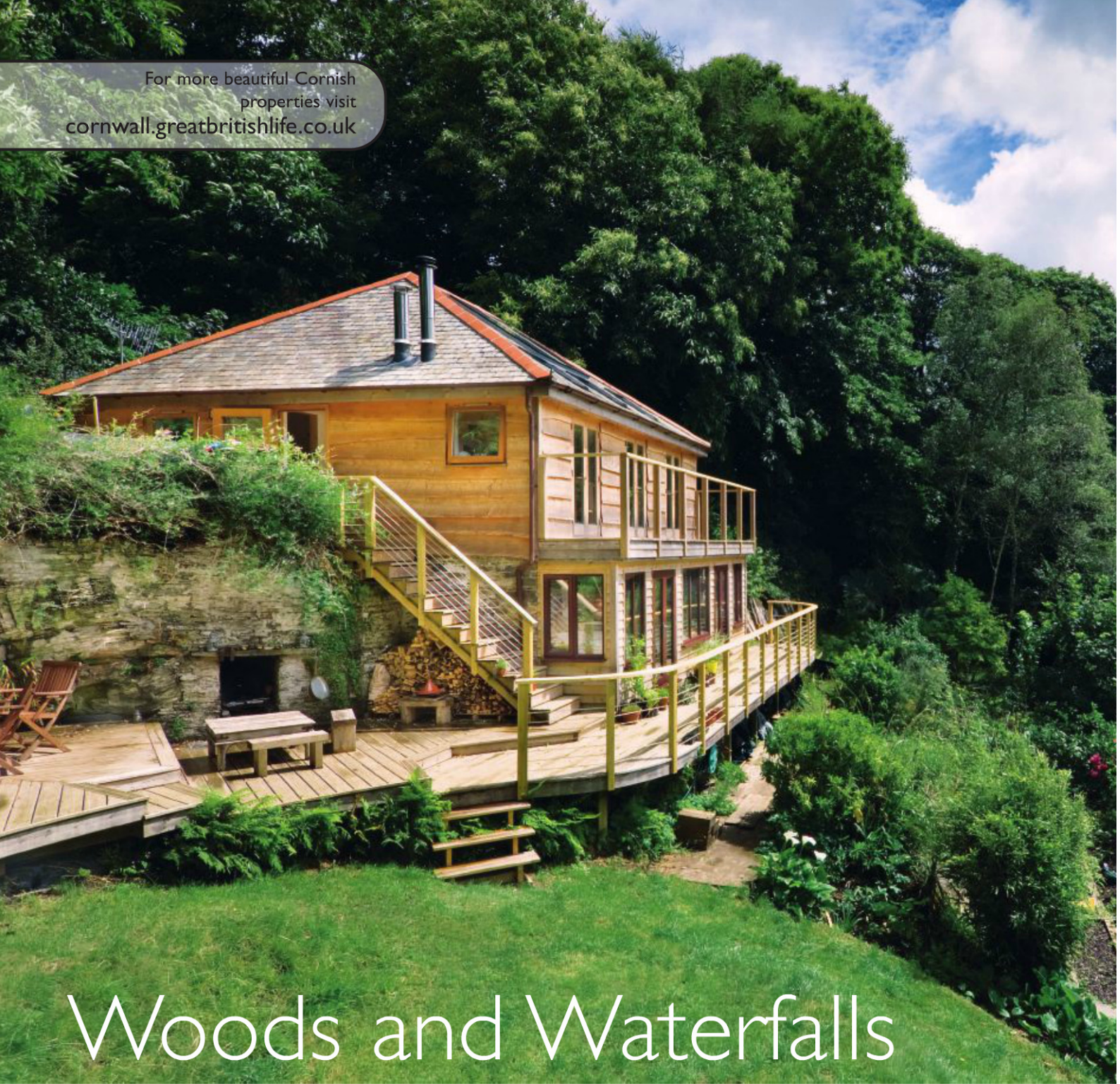


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Woods and Waterfalls

Treetops in Trethevy is a beautifully renovated house in a remote and steeply wooded valley near Tintagel and Boscastle, writes Ian Wilkinson

When Dan Haylock and his partner, Jo Finn, decided in 2002 on a change of lifestyle, they began a search for a property that was a little bit different. Somewhere that offered a retreat from the urban sprawl, yet somewhere that would provide a family home and a base where Dan could continue his work as a publisher. By definition that meant somewhere in the countryside not too from civilisation but remote enough to provide some solitude.

In Treetops they found the perfect house and it is certainly remote! The property lies at the end of a mile-long farm track in a steeply wooded valley known as St Nectan's Glen, which lies to the south of the Tintagel to Boscastle road. At the head of the glen is St Nectan's Kieve, a spectacular 60ft waterfall on the



PHOTO: RICHARD DOWNER

Opposite
Treetops has a striking timber frame

Above
The Master bedroom

Below
Dan Haylock, owner of Treetops



Trevillet River. Opinions differ on the identity of the saint who gave his name to this beautiful area; some say that he was a hermit who lived close to the waterfall and had connections with King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Others point to pagan times and to Nechtan, a Cornish water god whose name was christianised by the early church.

Whatever the truth behind the saint's identity, the glen has an air of calm, bordering on the spiritual. Arriving at the house, first impressions are of the deep silence of the woods, punctuated at intervals by birdsong. Gradually, you become aware of the distant roar far down in the valley, of St Nectan's Kieve.

“Suppliers had the problem of the steep drop down to the house, so we rigged up a system of pulleys, winches and wooden chutes to bring materials down”

From the track, you look down onto the slate rooftop of Treetops as it clings to the steep side of the glen in a way that appears to defy gravity. It is two-storey, clad almost entirely in seasoned local larch and has full-length balconies to both ground and first floors. The lower balcony gives access to the upper floor by way of a timber staircase, before





Opposite
Wooden beams and feature fireplace make the lounge a room for relaxation

Above
The second bedroom is a good size

Left
There is plenty of natural light in the open-plan living area

merging into an extensive area of decking that partially surrounds the beautiful terraced garden.

Dan explains the thinking behind the extensive renovations that have transformed Treetops. “When we moved into the house, some nine years ago it was, on the surface, in relatively good order apart from the décor – pink walls – would you believe!” However, the house, originally a stone cottage of indeterminate age, has had several owners over the years, each one having undertaken alterations – some good, but much of it bad. The roof was a major problem area and had to be completely renewed. “When we started to dismantle it and saw the state of some of the roof trusses we had been living under it made us shudder!” says Dan. “It also became obvious that we would have to renew the timber frame that supports the upper storey. We got a structural engineer in and he told us that it simply wasn’t safe to live here until the works had been carried out, so we moved out of the house and stayed with a neighbour, and later with Jo’s mum, until the work was complete.”

Local architect Gavin Woodford secured the necessary planning permission and a local builder was employed to undertake some of the work. “When we first moved, the living area was on the ground floor and the bedrooms on the first floor,



The property lies at the end of a track in the wooded valley of St Nectan's Glen, at the head of which is St Nectan's Kieve, a spectacular 60ft waterfall

and this didn't make sense because the ground floor was much darker and was difficult to heat. So we moved things around and put the living area on the first floor. One difficulty was getting materials on site. Having negotiated the farm track, suppliers then had the problem of the steep drop down to the house, so we rigged up a system of pulleys, winches and wooden chutes to bring materials down to the house."

Treetops' new timber-framed structure uses an interlocking insulated building system that effectively absorbs daytime heat and dissipates it to the interior at night. "While the ground floor still needs to be heated in the winter, the first floor living area hardly needs any heating at all. We have underfloor heating but never use it. In fact, all we do is light the wood-burner in the lounge for an hour or so in the evening and that's sufficient," Dan explains. This, together with the use of solar water heating, the extensive use of timber and the use of argon-filled double glazing, means that the house is very energy efficient.

The first-floor living accommodation is open plan, with the kitchen opening onto the living/dining area. Recycled materials have been used where possible, much of it from the original house. Although the kitchen has been relocated from the ground floor, the granite worktops of the original ground-floor kitchen have been reused. The floors throughout the first floor are cut from reclaimed hemlock joists, and in an effort to avoid the use of hardwood, the doors and window frames are made from Douglas fir.

The lounge/dining area is spacious, light and airy, with massive exposed beams and an open stairwell leading to the ground floor and a cleverly constructed mezzanine level houses a concealed storage area. Three large French windows lead out to the full-length timber balcony, which has magnificent views over the gardens to the valley beyond, and a large wood-burning stove occupies the end wall. Unusually, the bathroom is also located at this level. The extensive use of pine softens the stark white of bathroom fittings and the room is lit by a large roof light. "It's not just for light," Dan tells me. You can lie in the bath for ages gazing up through a canopy of trees to the sky beyond!"

There are three bedrooms in the house, a small one on the first floor and two larger ones on the ground floor. They are simply furnished and the ones on the ground floor have access onto a conservatory which, like the first floor, has large French windows leading out to a full-length balcony. Dan is proud of the conservatory: "It was constructed almost entirely from materials salvaged from other parts of the original house, so all of the doors and windows, and even the nails holding it all together, are effectively recycled!"

The house is now transformed into a beautiful family home for Dan and Jo and their two young children, Maisie and Sandy. "So much love and care went into everything we did here that in a sense it's become a part of us," says Dan. □

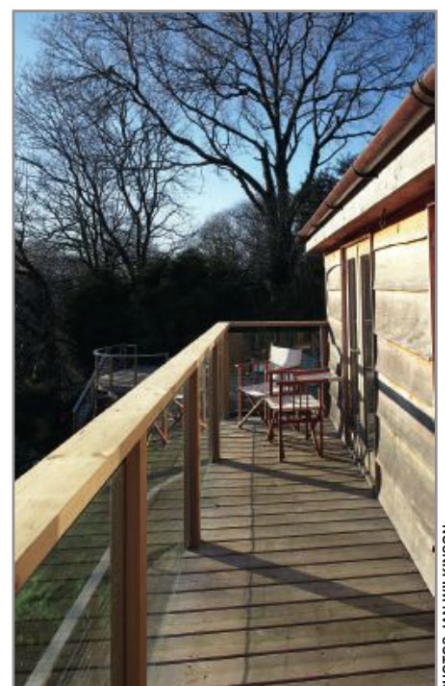
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Opposite

The kitchen opens on to the lounge/dining area

Bottom left to right

The bathroom is spacious; the balcony has magnificent views



PHOTOS: IAN WILKINSON