

# DRIFT



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## *Capturing* *an* EXPERIENCE

*Distilling a passion and curiosity for the Cornish  
landscape into photographic form*



THE PINNACLE OF LUXURY LIFESTYLE IN CORNWALL

*Breaking*  
*new* **GROUND**





*Client-led and with a passion for the little details; in conversation with the founders of Woodford Architecture and Interiors.*

WORDS BY DAN WARDEN

A reputation for quality. This is what husband and wife team Gavin and Sarah have gained in the years since launching Woodford Architecture and Interiors. “We are homemakers,” says Gavin, but not, perhaps, in the day-to-day sense of household management. What he means is that the buildings they bring to the fore transcend the rather bleak characterisation of ‘houses’. Each one is in fact a home – the realisation of a client’s vision, designed and built in harmony with the landscape, and with interiors akin of those featured in your favourite lifestyle magazine.

Asked about her background, Sarah looks back to her time at the Sir John Cass Furniture School. “Here, I studied Fine Antique Restoration and Conservation. I then worked for Arnold Wiggins and Sons, who are historic framers to the Royal household and international art galleries. During my time there I worked on the framing of world-famous old masters’ paintings, as well as modern British masters. Having that experience has honed an attention to detail and an appreciation of historical context, particularly when working on older and listed buildings.”

Sarah then completed her interior design training at the Inchbald School of Design. Later still, whilst working in London, she continues: “I was invited to work with some leading international interior designers on large-scale renovations of central London properties, using my traditional decorative skills in a more contemporary way. It was during this period that I decided to combine my talents with Gavin’s to create Woodford Architecture and Interiors.”

And Gavin? “My interest in architecture began when I was 13 and I was given a small drawing board. I somewhat bizarrely cried with joy!”

Gavin grew up in the Caribbean and then South East Asia, and at 15 already had experience working in an architectural practice. “Since then, I’ve had some incredible opportunities, working with some world-renowned architects and interior designers, one of them being Norman Foster of Foster and Partners. With Norman, I was able to work on some iconic architectural projects being developed, including Wembley Stadium, The Reichstag in Berlin, 30 St Mary Axe (The Gherkin), the Millennium Bridge and the British Museum, to name a few.”



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Fabulous homes in equally  
beautiful locations



## D I A L O G U E

It seems then, that a varied and rather illustrious path led Gavin and Sarah to the foundation of Woodford Architecture. But what led them to Cornwall? “We would spend our summer weekends escaping from London to Cornwall and Devon, to the beaches and countryside, where we would camp and live a simpler life,” Gavin tells me, with an air of reminiscence. “We love food, cooking and the outdoors, and the variety of possibilities that a weekend out of the city can offer,” he elaborates, admitting that the two of them are blessed to have had such amazing opportunities to travel. “We just felt that the surrounds of Cornwall, Dorset and Devon were some of the most special places we had the fortune to visit, and so it seemed completely logical to make this special part of the world our home.” Now, as the business goes from strength to strength, Gavin explains that he and Sarah have recently started a family – twins. “We cannot believe how lucky they are, being able to grow up in such a fantastic place.”

So what about architecture and interior design here in Cornwall? Having ‘cut their teeth’ in London, working at the pinnacle of their respective industries with some of the most prestigious companies and clients, I find myself wondering how their disciplines here in Cornwall compare to the rest of the UK. Far removed from the global icons of Wembley Stadium and The Reichstag, Gavin explains: “For many of our clients, our projects in Cornwall are particularly about enjoyment with their families and a connection to the outdoors and their surroundings. It’s more about relaxation and wellbeing, and a care for the environment and sustainability. We love to use local materials such as reclaimed Delabole slate, and rustic slate from quarries such as Trebarwith Road Rustic Quarry.

“Traditional and rural skills inform a lot of our work too,” he continues, “such as beautiful dry-stone walling and diminishing course slate roofing. We like to integrate traditional techniques with modern design and materials such as high-performance glazing, green roofs to create bio-diversity, and recycled products. There are some outstanding local suppliers here too, such as Contec (landscape suppliers) and The Cornish Bed Company, as well as some superb local tradespeople.”

This all helps the Woodford team to live up to the company ethos, which is to create homes that are precisely tailored to each individual client’s needs. “We want to create homes,” says Sarah, “and as such we don’t have an in-house style. Together with our clients, we want to think of every little detail that goes towards making a home as special as it can be.”

This starts by listening carefully to a project’s requirements. During these initial conversations, Gavin and Sarah will sometimes ask challenging or thought-provoking questions to explore and identify what the essence of their brief is. “We love to see and hear our clients’ ideas,” says Gavin, who firmly believes that open and engaging conversations early on can proffer rich rewards later. It’s all about, as he puts it, “sounding out those hidden gems”.

Functionality is paramount, however it is equally important that everybody involved knows what they wish the ambiance to be within the new space – something that’s dictated by an array of factors, from choice of materials, fixtures, fittings and lighting, to the fabrics and furnishings incorporated in the final stages. Collaboration, Gavin tells me,



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It's easy to see why clients choose  
to work with Woodford



ABOVE  
What does your interior vision look like?



## D I A L O G U E

is key – “working together with our talented and enthusiastic team, discussing the master plan and getting a feel for a project, before exploring each room and space and how they ultimately link up to create a holistic home that is eminently practical and beautiful.”

So, the Woodford approach is one that relishes the details. It’s responsive and led by the client, who in turn is gently guided through the process and involved as much as they wish throughout, ensuring that the finished result meets – and surpasses – their brief. It’s no wonder that Woodford is continuously bringing new clients on board; they can see that Gavin, Sarah and the team’s talent lies in an ability to provide truly integrated architecture and interior design. As the old adage goes, ‘the proof is in the pudding’, and it’s fair to say that Woodford Architecture’s commitment to quality and passion for their work shows in each and every project they’ve been a part of.

As an example, Gavin shows us Coastal Retreat – a recent residential property that garnered the Woodford team the coveted ‘Best Residential Property in the UK’ award at the 2020/21 International Property Awards. Set within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty by the Cornish coast, Coastal Retreat is moulded into a south-facing grassland slope. On a technical level, the home incorporates ground-source heating, boreholes, a solar panel array, heat recovery and control systems, plus high levels of thermal insulation to minimise energy use and, ultimately, provide a highly sustainable home. The design, Gavin explains, responds sensitively to the site, utilising natural materials including local slate and Shou Sugi Ban timber.

Inside, the interior spaces are flexible and functional, whilst timeless in style. “Dramatic and sometimes playful volumes are counterbalanced with the careful use of materials, lighting and subtle features for storage and decoration,” picks up Sarah, “with huge 18-metre sliding doors seamlessly connecting the inside and out.” The finished result really is beautiful.

Another project currently nearing completion, is an astounding new riverside home overlooking the Helford river. Based around four linear blocks that house the core functions of the home, with a bridge link connecting to the main entrance at first-floor level and into a dramatic entrance hall with a vaulted ceiling, the design here is absolutely staggering. Outside, sub-tropical landscaped gardens slope down to the water’s edge, connecting the new house to the sailing waters of the Helford between Flushing and Falmouth, creating a corner of coastal paradise for the clients who, it’s fair to say, are itching to move in.

There are plenty of other projects in the pipeline too, as Gavin and Sarah continue to develop plans for new homes, as well as restoration and refurbishment projects across Cornwall and Devon, in coveted locales such as Mousehole, Helford Passage, Rock and Salcombe. “We are extremely grateful and feel very lucky that our practice and our work attracts a diverse client base that have the same enthusiasm for design as we do,” finishes Gavin. “This has – and is – giving us the opportunity to create more outstanding work and really push the boundaries within our field.”

 [woodfordarchitecture.com](http://woodfordarchitecture.com)