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Toast of the Coast

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ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Dan Haylock and Jo Finn have reinvented their gravity-defying 1950s Cornish home, perched high above the treetops, into a shining example of sustainable living

Details Eco renovation, Cornwall, Aug 2008 – May 2010

Project Cost £70,000 (£729/m²)

Designer Woodford Architecture and Interiors



The Daily Telegraph
**HOMEBUILDING
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**WINNER
READERS' CHOICE**

Integrated into the landscape
‘Treetops’, originally built in the 1950s, has been transformed into an environmentally friendly home. With the ground floor built in local stone, and the newly rebuilt timber frame first floor clad in larch, the house nestles perfectly within the natural landscape. Curved decking integrates with the large terraced garden, while a balcony above provides valley views



Words: Debbie Jeffery Photography: Nigel Rigden

There's getting away from it all and then there's 'Treetops' — a true hideaway, totally removed from the pressures of urban life. The house is built into a steeply sloping wooded valley near Tintagel in Cornwall, where only natural sounds break the silence, including the soothing rhythm of the nearby river and St Nectan's Kieve, a plunge pool fed by a 60ft waterfall.

It's no wonder that Dan Haylock fell in love with the idea of living in such a secluded and magical place. But life in this isolated location came at a price — Treetops is reached by a narrow, mile-long farm track only passable in a four-wheel drive.

"It was actually the poor access which got me the house in the first place," explains Dan, a self-employed publisher. "The property had received no viewings in six months when I spotted it for sale in an estate agent's window and went to take a look. It reminded me of an alpine chalet and I liked the idea of resurrecting the large overgrown garden, so I put in an offer the next morning — only to be told that another buyer had just beaten me to it."

The new owner was, however, unable to drive, and later decided to sell up due to the access issues. Dan was given first refusal and successfully purchased the ramshackle three-bed property (and an all-important off-road vehicle) and moved in during 2001.

"I paid for the previous owner's survey and asked a builder friend to have a quick look around the house,"



1

Split-level living

The open plan living space (1) has been relocated to the first floor so as to make the most of the valley views. Hemlock flooring from Wingleigh Timber – laid above underfloor heating – and exposed timber beams feature, with a woodburning stove from Stovax providing the central focus. A 6ft-high concrete heat sink has been constructed behind, ensuring that the heat is absorbed and slowly released into the space

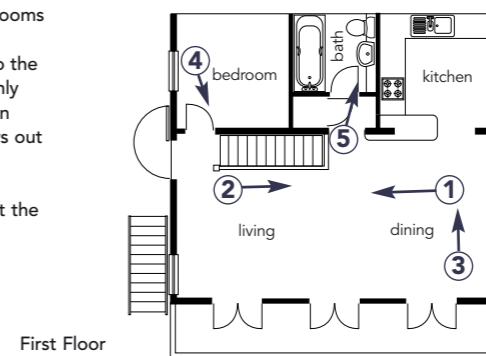
Dan explains, "but to be honest I had no idea just how much work would be needed."

Built in the 1950s, the ground floor had been constructed from locally quarried stone, and was later extended upwards to create three bedrooms and a large bathroom. This timber frame first floor was cut back into the slope, making it twice the size of the lower level. Thick stone walls and tiny windows ensured that the ground floor was dark and cold.

Dan had been happy to make the best of it while he lived in the house on his own, spending much of his time landscaping the surrounding garden. But when his partner, Jo Finn, moved in and later gave birth to

Making the Most of the Valley Views

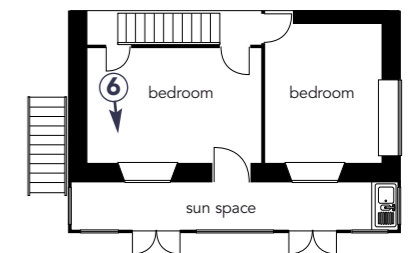
Reversing the layout to place two bedrooms downstairs and moving the living accommodation upstairs was the key to the success of this dramatic project. Not only does the open plan living/dining/kitchen benefit from high ceilings, but the views out across the valley may now be fully appreciated. The addition of a glazed sunroom to the lower level ensures that the previously cold stone structure is now warmed naturally by the sun.



First Floor

Photographs were taken at numbered positions; refer to the numbers located in the corner of images throughout the feature

Ground Floor





2

their first child – Maisie, now four – it became obvious that things needed to change.

“At first we just wanted to add insulation, decorate and replace the old pine cladding,” reflects Dan. “But when the roof structure was revealed my builder friend realised that the upper floor was unsafe, and a structural engineer basically condemned it.”

With no funds allocated for such major repairs, the family found themselves without a home. They eventually moved in with Jo’s parents, a 30-minute

Treetop views

The open plan living/dining/kitchen now occupies a large proportion of the first floor, and can be thrown open to the full-length south-facing balcony through three sets of Douglas fir patio doors. The latter feature low-E glazing. Velux rooflights above also maximise on light and solar gain on this south-facing aspect

drive away, while Dan contemplated the painstaking process of rebuilding the entire top floor and roof. It was at this stage that he contacted local architect Gavin Woodford for advice.

The previous layout made little sense, and plans were drawn up which positioned open plan living accommodation upstairs to capitalise on the tranquil valley views. Now three sets of French doors open out onto a full-width balcony. One bedroom and the bathroom are also located on this upper level, with two further bedrooms on the ground floor fronted by a south-facing sunroom.

“We’re in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the planners didn’t want to allow a single change to the house, but in the end they were happy with the Douglas fir sunroom we designed,” says Dan, who increased his mortgage to fund the work. “The basic shape of the house has stayed the same, but changing the layout was a big improvement.”

USEFUL CONTACTS: Planning consultation and design Woodford Architecture and Interiors: 01364 654888 Insulation Thermafleecce sheep’s wool insulation: 01768 486285 (Warmcel recycled newspaper insulation) Excel Industries Limited: 01685 845200 (Pavatherm Plus insulation panels) Natural Building Technologies: 01844 338 338 Woodburning stove Stovax: 01392 474000 Salvaged wood flooring Winkleigh Timber: 01837 83573 Floor wax Osmo: 01296 481220 Kitchen IKEA: ikea.co.uk Sanitaryware Bathstore: 08000 232323 Exterior and interior woodwork Dominic Raffer: 07956 818393 Solar panels Vaillant: 01634 292310 Underfloor heating and pipework Uponor Unipipe: 01455 550355 Larchwood cladding Toms and Sons, Bodmin: 01208 221752



3

Working with existing materials

The kitchen (3) – which features new IKEA cabinets and sleek appliances – has been designed around three granite worktops which were fitted in the former ground floor kitchen. A breakfast bar serves as an informal spot to eat, as well as providing a visual division between the open plan kitchen and living area. The flooring, crafted from reclaimed Hemlock floor joists, has also been continued in the first floor master bedroom (4)

DAN & JO’S RENOVATION

Construction Stone and timber frame
Size 96m²
Build Time 23 months
Build Route Self-managed subcontractors and DIY
House Cost £140,000
Project Cost £70,000
Value on Completion £375,000



4

Restricted Access

Situated off the scenic coastal road between Tintagel and Boscastle, Treetops is accessed via a narrow mile-long track. “Access became a major issue. Once suppliers had negotiated their way along the track there was still a steep drop down to reach the house itself,” explains Dan. As such, the softwood timber frame first floor was stick-built on site to keep material sizes to a minimum for delivery.

Innovative solutions were devised when it came to some of the other materials. “We rigged up a system of pulleys and winches attached to trees. Cement and blocks were transported in a crate on a zip wire, which was only large enough to take one block at a time. We also made a wooden chute, and someone would stand at the bottom to catch decking planks as they came down. It was just a massive problem-solving exercise.”

Eco Credentials

Living in such a beautiful natural landscape, Dan was determined to make the house as environmentally friendly as possible, despite his restricted budget. Particular attention was given to the insulation. “I was introduced to someone who’d studied at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales, and he told me about eco-friendly Pavatex Pavatherm Plus interlocking wood-fibre insulation boards, which we used to clad the roof and first floor,” explains Dan. “This made a waterproof sealed skin on the outside of the frame. Inside, there’s a racking layer of OSB and it was plasterboarded internally, before the void was filled with Warmcel blown recycled newspaper insulation.” All interior walls were also insulated with sheep’s wool.

“As a result, we hardly need to turn on the underfloor heating upstairs, and tend to rely solely on the woodburning stove in cold weather,” says Dan. Downstairs, the two ground floor bedrooms now open into a new south-facing sunroom designed to warm the stone walls, which in turn act as a thermal store. This sunroom infills a former external veranda, and was built using timber windows and glazed doors salvaged from the demolished upper level. Solar thermal panels were also specified to contribute to the domestic hot water supply.

Dan and Jo used locally sourced materials – such as the seasoned waney-edge larch boards, purchased from a nearby sawmill, to clad the exterior – and materials reclaimed from the old house throughout. Existing slates were saved and relaid on the new roof structure, whilst granite worktops were salvaged from the previous kitchen and used in the new first floor one. “The entire kitchen was designed around those worktops,” says Dan, who chose flooring made from reclaimed Hemlock floor joists, finished with four coats of wax-oil. “We had a limited budget so recycling materials made good sense.” 🏠



ABOVE: A difficult plot

Perched high above a valley, the attractions of this secluded, steeply sloping site are undeniable, yet a narrow one-mile access track made material deliveries difficult. As such, reusing existing materials – such as the slates, painstakingly lifted from the former roof and relaid on the newly rebuilt roof structure – was key. Continuing this sustainable ethos, flooring made from reclaimed Hemlock floor joists has been specified, and also been used as cladding in the first floor bathroom (5)

BELOW: Warm rooms

Both ground floor double bedrooms have window seats and open onto a glazed sunroom, which warms these stone-walled rooms built into the side of the cliff. Dan insulated and replaced the ceilings, retaining the original solid pine beams

