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grow

Sue Crowe, with help from her son Matthew, has created a new oak frame home that simply oozes charm and light

SELF-BUILD | SUFFOLK | MAY 10 - JUNE 11 | SIZE: 160M²
PLOT COST: £120,000 | BUILD COST: £301,000 (£1,881/M²) | VALUE: £480,000

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The Hybrid House

The three bedroom house is primarily an oak frame construction, but Structural Insulated Panels (SIP) have been used for the roof and between the glazed areas in the walls. SIPs give the roof an added depth, which required skillful detailing on the leadwork and fascias



“I think it is an exceptional house, and just what I wanted”

Sitting Room

The oak frame is exposed in all its beauty in the informal sitting room which opens up onto the garden through Rational doors



**Open Dining / Living
Kitchen Space**

A charming sail blind has been incorporated to reduce the problem of overheating in the main open plan living space. The oak frame package was provided by Carpenter Oak



Lighting Complications

Exposed oak frames sometimes struggle with modern 'hidden' lighting schemes. Probably the best example in the house centres on the purlins that strengthen the roof structure in Sue's sitting room. The object was to illuminate the frame - and so stress the beauty of the structure - so Matthew and Ian had to drill through the huge timbers in order to fix the spotlights. The wires leading to the spots were concealed in a precut channel on top of the purlins where it was not visible from floor level



Front Elevation

Sue's new home has been built at the end of a cul-de-sac in the garden of an adjoining house.



Open Panel = Open Plan

Sue enjoys separation between different spaces but all the benefits of light, open plan living by leaving some of the oak frame panels unfilled. The Neptune solid oak kitchen (shown middle left, too) is from Okells





First Floor
A galleried landing enjoys plenty of light thanks to the bank of Velux rooflights. The main bathroom features sanitaryware from Victoria Plumb



After being married to a carpenter for 36 years, it was hardly surprising that widow Sue Crowe decided on a self-build design that featured a lot of timber. After her husband Andrew died in 2005, she gradually realised the cottage they had lived in for 13 years was too much work for her and that she would eventually have to downsize. Failing to find a suitable period property in the area, she decided to self-build.

A visit to the Homebuilding and Renovating Show at the NEC in Birmingham, a few influential magazine articles, and a visit to the Devon base of Roderick James Architects and associate company Carpenter Oak Ltd. convinced her that a green oak frame was the route to follow.

The result is a beautifully-designed three bedroom, contemporary oak frame house, positioned at the end of a cul-de-sac overlooking open fields in a Suffolk village near Felixstowe — the area where Sue has lived all her life.

It is perfectly finished, compact, and yet with three good-sized bedrooms, is quite adequate to provide sleepover space for two of her grandchildren, who live just round the corner. It was Sue's son, Matthew, who was the key to the build. Like his father (and his father before him) Matthew is a carpenter. He aided his mother by taking on the role of main contractor. However Sue, who sold her cottage fast and lived in a rental for 18 months until moving in during June 2011, worked every day fetching and carrying, skivvying, cleaning up and acting as teamaker-in-chief.

"Both Matthew and I have good roots and contacts



"I found it hugely stressful and couldn't have done it without the assistance of my son"

round here," Sue says. "Without this knowledge, undertaking the build would have been extremely hard because there are very little new builds in this style round here."

The project had a fairly traumatic start because there was a lot of local hostility. "The plot was part of the garden of the adjoining house, and the local people did not want anything built here," Sue explains. "Gaining planning permission presented little problems, but convincing the village people that I intended to live here and play a full part in village life was very hard."

Now all is finished, peace reigns. "People appreciate the quality of the house and all the thought that went into it," says Sue. "With an oak frame like this containing a very high proportion of glazing, it really is important to get things right down to the last detail. Fortunately, Matthew had a really excellent team to support him, including my brother-in-law Terry George — a former builder." This is evident as soon as you view the outside — especially in the oak detailing round the glazed areas and the lead work on the roof. "We worked on a lot of these vital details as we went along," Matthew says. "I would chat with architect Mike Hope in Devon — or when he came over every month to supervise — then he would draw up the details and send it to me so the subbies could work from it."

The use of SIPs between the glazed areas in the walls and in the roof proved a success because of the speed of the erection and their remarkable U value, and very reasonable cost. However, this gave the slate-clad roof a depth that had to be seamlessly blended into the glazed roof of the garden room beneath. This

The Lowdown

SUE'S COSTS

Fees:	£26,500
Oak Frame:	£64,000
SIPs:	£35,000
Contract, Building Materials/Carpentry:	£93,000
Sprinkler system:	£5,000
Services:	£8,500
Sanitaryware:	£4,000
Plumbing inc UFH:	£12,000
Electrics:	£10,500
Kitchen:	£11,500
Doors & Windows:	£10,000
Roof, inc tiles & leadwork:	£12,000
Glazing:	£7,000
Hire charges:	£2,000
Total:	£301,000

SUPPLIERS

Design Roderick James Architects: Mark Rudland: 01803 868000	Brick plinth, chimney and wall Mark Rudland: 07773 411527
Oak Frame Carpenter Oak: 01803 732900	Windows & Doors Rationel/ M A Simmonds: 01296 428280
Main contractor & carpentry Matthew Crowe, Ipswich Woodwork: 07885 282801	Underfloor heating Uponor: 01455 550355
SIPS Sips Industries: 01383 823995	Sanitaryware Victoria Plumb: victoriaplumb.com
Plumbing/underfloor heating Mick Banyard: 01473 311664	Kitchen Neptune/Okells: 01829 741512
Electrics Ian Finch: 01394 282307	Interior tiles The Tile Studio: 01394 610528
Roof glazing Velux: 01592 772211	Conservatory glazing/glazed panels/ and internal glass Kevin Turpin: 01473 461311
Roofing and leadwork Vince Sawyer: 07730 739738	Additional oak Whitmores: 01455 209121
Roofing slates Primera: 01487 825222	Other materials Travis Perkins, Felixstowe: 01394 278999
Staircase Simon Warrington: 07739 390802	
Crane Hire Quintos: 01473 712041	

involved skilful leadwork by roofer Vince Sawyer: It would have been very easy to get it wrong. Likewise, the finishing details where the roof glazing meets the fascia.

“We were hampered by three weeks of snow during the winter of 2010/11,” Sue says. “We also had slight delays with the Velux rooflights and the SIPs, but we still managed to move in during June 2011 to coincide with the expiry of my house rental agreement.”

The finances however, did not run as smoothly — the final build cost of £301,000 was £40,000 above Sue’s original budget. She attributes roughly half of this to increasing the specification on many of the materials and fittings. But, the demand from the building inspector for a full internal sprinkler system added £5,500 to the cost, and bringing electric power to the site cost a massive £7,500.

“Matthew had urged me throughout not to skimp on things, and I didn’t,” Sue says. “Fortunately I was able to find the additional money. I think it is an exceptional house, and just what I wanted. But, even after having undertaken a self-build before, I found it hugely stressful and I could not have done it without the assistance of my son. I am sure my late husband Andrew would have loved the end result just as much as I do.” ■

What I’ve Learned

What was the surprising thing for you about doing a project like this?

The costs of installing the services.

What was your best buy?

The kitchen: through the architects we gained a massive discount.

What is your favourite part of the house?

The kitchen and garden room.

What did you find surprisingly easy/hard?

The hardest part was all of the forward thinking and the need to make important decisions early on. Finishing the kitchen was the easiest. It was all planned so carefully that when it was installed, it worked perfectly.

What is the one bit of advice you’ve got to pass onto others?

Remember pre-planning and try to think ahead as much as you possibly can.

If you could do the project again, what would you change?

Nothing — the house is exactly as I wanted.



OAK: DESIGN DETAIL ISSUES

Because the main structure of the building (the oak frame) is constantly ‘on show’, this carries with it the ever-present danger of looking terrible if all the details are not just right. At the top of the list of pitfalls is the challenge of concealing all the electrics and plumbing.

Matthew Crowe admits he found it hugely challenging when he worked with electrician Ian Finch to conceal the wires leading to electrical fittings attached to large timber posts and beams.

“You can’t just go drilling through an oak frame on a wing and prayer,” says Matthew. “You really have to get it right.”

“Because of the style of construction and the visibility of the oak frame, there was only one place in which we could position the extractor fan in the bathroom,” Matthew explains. “And this entailed seven metres of ducting that had to travel through a specially

concealed space constructed in the garage roof to vent to the outside air. Fortunately, Ian and I had worked many times together. Things would have been a lot more problematical working with a less experienced electrician whom I did not know as well.”

The other problem that Matthew encountered was the presence of large oak corner braces where some posts and beams meet. “The drawings do not always show the position of the braces,” explains Matthew.

This fact caused a major problem in the downstairs bathroom, where they had to move the position of the WC because every time anyone got up from the pedestal the result was a bruised head! In order to do this, they had to remove a section of the beam-and-block floor and move the waste pipe.

“You really can only position things in certain places with an oak frame, and this involves a great deal of forethought and pre-planning,” Matthew says.

Floorplans