



The house that **SUE BUILT**

Sue Crowe has created a unique oak-framed home at Kirton, near Felixstowe

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARAH LUCY BROWN



Sue Crowe opens the door of her home and greets me with a warm smile. In fact, she barely stops smiling for the next hour.

And why wouldn't she? She's proudly showing me her green oak timber-framed house, tucked up a quiet lane in Kirton, near Felixstowe – and it's quite simply superb.

Designed for contemporary living, its open plan design, generous use of glass and light filled spaces put one in mind of Cape Cod or Queensland.

But this is a very Suffolk house – solid, strong, practical and good looking, built using traditional materials and mostly local craftsmanship. It's also a bit quirky.

The pressure comes from having to make lots of decisions and having lots of choice

Completed two and a half years ago, the house marks a new chapter in Sue's life – a home of her own, following the death of her husband, Andrew, in 2005. And since it's a timber house, it's also a wonderful tribute to him since he was a carpenter.

The couple were married for 36 years and built their first true family home together in 1981 on a plot of land in Trimley St Mary. They later moved to a country cottage, but when Andrew died, Sue decided it was time to find somewhere more manageable. Unable to find anything suitable, she decided to



IN THE FRAME

Sue's favourite part of the house: garden room

Biggest surprise: the need for a sprinkler system because fire engines wouldn't be able to get near the house

Advice to others: plan well and think ahead as much as you can





build something for herself and with help from her son Matthew – also a carpenter – found a plot in Kirton.

“The question was what to put on it?” she says. “I’d seen an article in *Ideal Home* magazine about an oak framed house and really liked it, so I found out who the architect was and it grew from there.”

Devon-based Roderick James Architects came up with the design for the three-bedroom house and associate company Carpenter Oak Ltd supplied the frame. Matthew managed the project from start to finish, a great relief to Sue who freely admits it had its stressful moments, including opposition from local people.

“Getting planning permission wasn’t a Suffolk November 2013

problem, but convincing the village that I wanted to live here and be part of village life was very hard.”

But convince them she did and now Sue’s very happily installed in her new home, at the end of a cul-de-sac, overlooking open fields and just around the corner from her daughter and grandchildren.

Open house

The open design of Sue’s house creates a wonderful feeling of space. Yet somehow it also manages to be compact – it doesn’t ramble and there’s no wasted space or areas without purpose.

The hub of the house is what Sue >>



>> calls the 'garden room', a central area which is full of light thanks to its glazed roof, floor to ceiling windows and glazed doors that open on to decking and the garden. It's a combined hall, dining room, and day room for relaxing, reading and keeping an eye on the grandchildren, as well as sleepy schnauzers Mollie and Oscar. The garden room displays the timber frame to its maximum effect and with its ceramic tiled floor is practical for indoor/outdoor living.

The adjacent kitchen is sizeable and sociably open plan, while the living room with its exposed brick fireplace and raspberry red feature wall is cosy and restful.

Also on the ground floor is a utility room/laundry, bathroom and a bedroom. Sue decided early on to make this bedroom her own. Upstairs, off a galleried landing, are two more – one reserved for

WHO DID WHAT

Design: Roderick James Architects

Oak frame: Carpenter Oak

Plumbing and underfloor heating: Mick Banyard

Electrics: Ian Finch

Roofing and leadwork: Vince Sawyer

Brick plinth, chimney and wall: Mark Rudland

Conservatory glazing, glazed panels and internal glass: Kevin Turpin



Above and below; Sue's bedroom and some pretty finishing touches in her Kirton home



her grandchildren's sleepovers and a generously proportioned master bedroom, which Sue uses as a craftroom. There's also another bathroom.

The house has underfloor heating but lots of glass also provides excellent year-round solar gain. For the summer months Sue has invested in some natty sail blinds for the glazed garden room roof, which can be removed to take advantage of winter sun. The house is furnished in a simple country style with furniture Sue already owned and some new items. She chose Laura Ashley fabrics for blinds and soft furnishings.

Sue is equally proud of her garden, which wraps around the house. Planted with shrubs and lawn it's low maintenance and incorporates a generous decked area where she says she spends much of her time.

The house was constructed in about 13 months. Progress was hampered by three weeks of snow in the winter of 2010/11,

which made it difficult to get the roof on, but it was still fairly swift due to the use of structural insulated panels (SIPs) between the glazed areas in the walls and roof. They provide excellent insulation at reasonable cost.

Timber homes are not the cheapest to build – Sue went over budget, mainly, she says, because she increased the specification on many of the materials and fittings. And there were some unpleasant surprises – bringing power to the site cost £7,500 and a requirement from the building inspector for a full internal sprinkler system cost £5,500.

Was it worth it? "Yes," says Sue, without a flicker of doubt. She has a very beautiful home, a one-off designed just for her, which she very clearly enjoys.

"It was stressful at times," she says. "The pressure comes from having to make lots of decisions and having lots of choice. I couldn't have done it without help from Matthew. But in the end, I love it."