



“We built a sustainable home full of charm”

Tony Cooke talks to Alison Wall about how he and his wife Emma combined local materials with the latest building technologies to create their stunning new home in the Dorset countryside



#### OAK FRAME SELF-BUILD

**HOMEOWNERS** Tony and Emma Cooke  
**BUILD TIME** 2016-2019  
**CONSTRUCTION METHOD** Oak frame with structural insulated panels  
**SIZE** 303m<sup>2</sup> (main house) and 134m<sup>2</sup> (annexe and office outbuilding)  
**LOCATION** Dorset  
**PLOT COST** £373,000  
**BUILD COST** £2,500/m<sup>2</sup>  
**VALUE** £1.75million



On a mission to build using oak frame, Tony and Emma Cooke have created a timeless and warm home for life, as well as a cleverly conceived annexe that provides them with extra income.

#### Your home is idyllic, how did you find the right plot to build on?

We'd been struggling to find somewhere to live in the Sherborne area, and when this plot was advertised in the local classifieds, we could see straight away that we'd be able to put a replacement dwelling there. There was an old wooden bungalow already on the site that was only really intended as a temporary home. We lived in it for three years as we went through planning and for most of the build, too.

#### What was on your wish list?

We wanted our house to be sustainable to build, and then to live in afterwards — it was really important to us. We chose Roderick James Architects as they're renowned for doing oak frames, which we wanted, and they really

## TIMELINE

Planning permission approved	Jul 2015
Building Regs approved	May 2016
Started on site	Jun 2016
Foundations completed	Nov 2017
Watertight shell	Apr 2018
First fix	Jun 2018
Second fix	Mar 2019
Final decoration	Jul 2019
Date occupied	Sept 2019

### THE EXTERIOR

The house is clad with a SureCav rainscreen, local stone and oak weatherboarding while a natural slate roof gently contrasts with the zinc-clad curved porch which adds a contemporary touch.

understand sustainability. We went for new, thicker high spec SIPs [structural insulated panels], which meant we didn't need to install a heat pump; instead, we have two woodburners that heat the whole house and an MVHR [mechanical ventilation with heat recovery] system that means we get fresh air every three hours.

We did look at getting Passivhaus certification, but that was too expensive so we decided to follow the principles instead. All our money went into the fabric of the building, the insulation and the natural materials. Also, rather than having five bedrooms in the main house, we wanted four bedrooms with a one-bedroom annexe that we can use for our parents to stay, and possibly use as a granny annexe eventually.

### Your house fits in so well with the local area. How did you achieve that?

We were really keen, as were the planners and

WORDS ALISON WALL; PHOTOGRAPHY:  
NICHOLAS YARSLEY; STUART COX; TONY COOKE



**SEPARATE SPACES**  
By adding an annexe, Tony and Emma have created a spot to rent out, or in the future, for their parents to reside in while another outbuilding (left) acts as a workshop, garage and office.



architects, to use the local vernacular, which around here is stone. Roderick James had used a drystone wall effect on previous projects, and I'd seen drystone walling used at the Gloucester Service station [as facing stone to the building] and really liked the look of it.

We approached a few stonemasons, but they said they couldn't get that finish. In the end we used the stonemason who'd done the drystone walling in the garden. He bedded the stones into the structure with what's called a 'three-quarters mortar backed', so it looks like drystone but isn't really.

### You built the annexe first. How did this help with the build?

We wanted to test the builder, so we hired him to do the annexe part of the build first. The construction method was exactly the same as for the main house but in miniature so we could see how the different junctions and detailing worked.



## KEY SUPPLIERS

**ARCHITECT** Roderick James Architects:  
www.roderickjamesarchitects.com  
**STRUCTURAL ENGINEER**  
Williamson Structural Design:  
www.williamsonstructuraldesign.co.uk;  
Ballantine Arnold:  
www.ballantinearnold.co.uk  
**PROJECT MANAGER, INTERIOR DESIGN,  
LANDSCAPE DESIGN**  
Tony and Emma Cooke at Bartlett Cooke  
Design: www.bartlettkookedesign.co.uk  
**OAK FRAME AND SIPS SUPPLY**  
Westwind Oak Buildings:  
www.westwindoak.com  
**PLUMBING AND HEATING**  
AJS Plumbing & Heating:  
www.ajsplumbingandheating.co.uk  
**BUILDERS' MERCHANT**  
Bradfords Building Supplies:  
www.bradfords.co.uk  
**STONE CLADDING**  
Sherborne Castle Estate Quarries:  
www.sherbornestone.com  
**OAK CLADDING** Timbersource:  
www.timbersource.co.uk;  
Yandles: www.yandles.co.uk  
**WINDOWS** Rationel: www.rationel.co.uk;  
Devonshire Windows:  
www.devonshirewindows.co.uk  
**FIXED GLAZING** Roman Glass:  
www.romanglass.co.uk  
**ZINC ROOFING** Mike White:  
www.mikewhiteltd.com  
**WOODBURNERS** Charnwood (annexe):  
www.charnwood.com; Heta (main house  
snug): www.heta.dk/en;  
Contura (main house living room):  
www.contura.eu/en-gb  
**KITCHEN** Neptune: www.neptune.com/  
**BATHROOM** Matki www.matki.co.uk;  
Burlington Bathrooms:  
www.burlingtonbathrooms.com  
**BATHROOM TILES** Mandarin Stone:  
www.mandarinstone.com

**BRIGHT IDEAS**  
A glazed gable,  
fixed windows  
and conservation  
rooflights serve to  
bring masses of  
natural light deep  
into the home. The  
woodburning stove  
is from Charnwood.



### JUDGE JACOB BARLOW SAYS

*This is the type of build I love. It's oak frame, which I never get tired of, and it's built with environmental concerns in mind, something I don't think you can place enough importance on. The mortar-backed stone elevations are lovely, and this new house feels instantly established thanks to both the use of natural materials and the carefully curated landscaping scheme. But it's the interiors that steal the show here, conjuring that elusive combination of warmth and light that really says 'home'.*

### What inspired the interiors?

We were looking for an honesty to the interiors, with nothing pretentious or showy, using high quality materials that are well executed and we went for a relaxed modern feel with a touch of Scandi design. There are lovely touches, like a truss in the oak frame that follows a serpentine shape rather than a classic arch — one of the framers noticed the timber when it came into the yard and cut and split it into two mirror pieces that follow the elongated curved grain of the timber. We also wanted to be able to enjoy views even on a wet day but we resisted bifolds to go for French doors on the garden side of the house.

### Did you find it tricky to stay within your original budget?

We did go over budget, for a whole load of reasons. Even though the main house had a simple design, there were so many material transitions, and that slows everything down. A lot of elements were one-off or bespoke, so the build process was two to three

times longer than a standard build. We didn't want to rush things — we had a core team of three, plus the teams for the different packages such as the SIPS.

Over the three years of the build, some of the material costs went up, although we had fixed prices for the oak frame and SIPS because we'd gone out to tender on those elements. That was part of the pressure in the last six months — every week that we had people on site we were spending money, but we'd got so far in the only way out was to finish it. So, we dug deep and soldiered on. It was emotionally, financially and physically draining but we were determined to try and enjoy the process.

### How do you feel living in the house?

Now it's finished we've had it valued and it is worth more than we thought, and we're renting out the annexe so the house can earn its keep. It's a wonderful house — warm, welcoming and relaxed, bathed in natural light and with a great flow of space for modern family life. **H**

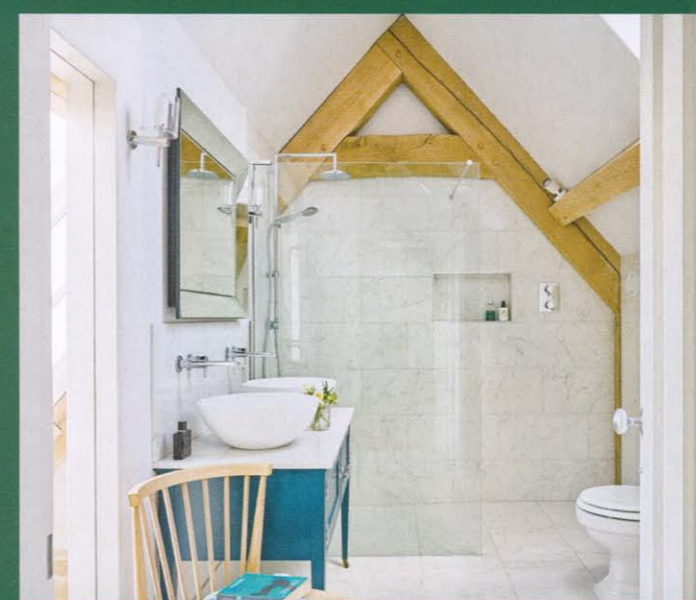


**ELEGANT INTERIORS**  
The oak posts and beams, using locally sourced timber, provide natural zoning areas in the open-plan snug, kitchen and dining space. The exposed oak trusses inject extra character and pendant lights from Pooky Lighting keep the space feeling fresh and modern. The kitchen is from Neptune.



**SELECTED COSTS**

Architects' fees	£70,000
Other professional fees	£10,000
Groundworks	£30,000
Oak frame	£100,000
SIPs	£90,000
Roofing	£30,000
Stone walling	£30,000
Oak cladding	£20,000
Windows and doors	£24,000
Fixed glazing	£15,000
Zinc roofing	£7,000
Plastering	£8,000
MVHR system	£6,500
Central heating and hot water	£12,000
Electrics	£25,000
Bathrooms	£20,000
Kitchen units	£12,000
Woodburners	£10,000
Decorating	£15,000
Flooring	£10,000
Demolition	£10,000
Landscaping	£35,000
Labour	£300,000



**WARM AND RELAXED LIVING**  
Engineered oak flooring has been laid throughout the ground floor while two well-placed log burners in the living rooms work to heat the house. The pared-back interior theme continues upstairs, letting the oak provide character and decoration, and splashes of contemporary colour have been introduced using the fixtures and finishes. The vanity, above, is upcycled from an antique side table and the tiles are from Mandarin Stone.



**BEST OF BOTH**

The traditional oak frame sits elegantly alongside Rational timber windows painted in a modern blue-grey to capture the views of the woodland plot.

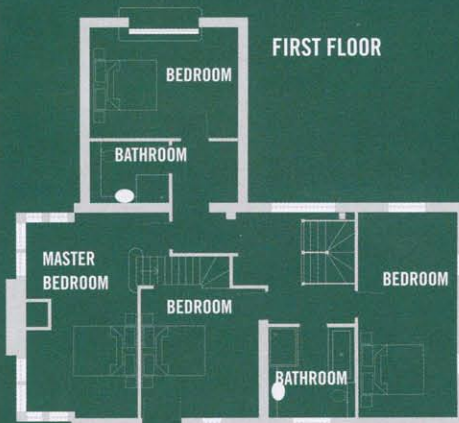
**THE FLOORPLAN**

The ground floor centres around the broken-plan kitchen, snug and dining area with the pantry, utility and boot room sitting alongside the kitchen. A further living area, study and WC are accessed off the hall. On the first floor there are four bedrooms and two family bathrooms. The master bedroom (pictured on the previous page) features a generous vaulted ceiling and its own staircase which leads to a dressing area and en suite bathroom above.

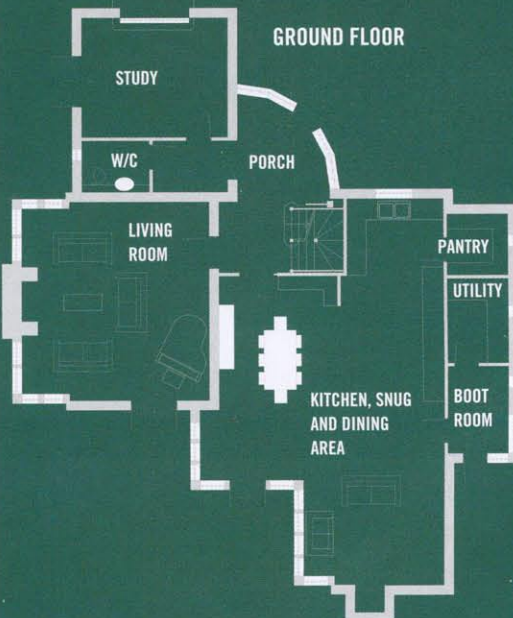
**SECOND FLOOR**



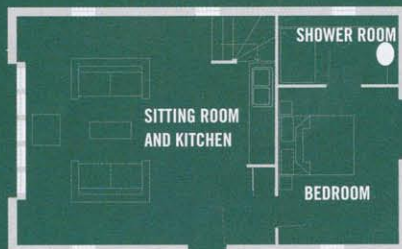
**FIRST FLOOR**



**GROUND FLOOR**



**ANNEXE**



**BEFORE: A 'BOUGHT AS SEEN' HOME FROM A 1927 IDEAL HOMES SHOW ON THE PERFECT PLOT**

