



In brief

Project New timber and oak-frame house

Location Tingrith Lakes, Bedfordshire

Cost £550,000

Spent £350,000

Worth £750,000
(excluding land and lakes)

EXTERIOR

The new house sits on the edge of a lake, and has been designed to take advantage of the views.



Lakeside living



Melanie and Clive Paul built an unusual timber-frame home to make the most of the views from its lakeside location.

STORY: **LOUISE PARKIN** PICTURES: **RICHARD MARSHAM**

Here in the UK, around 12 per cent of new homes built each year are self builds, trailing far behind other parts of Europe and much of the rest of the world. Take New Zealand, for example, where more than a quarter of new homes are built by their owners. So when New Zealand-born Melanie Paul and her husband Clive bought a 23-acre plot containing three lakes, building on the site seemed like a perfectly natural thing to do.

Tingrith Lakes had been on the market for some time, but was over the Pauls' budget. Clive put in a low offer regardless, and was surprised when it was accepted. "Clive is very spontaneous, and I didn't know the offer went in until it had been accepted," explains Melanie. "I was happy about it, but it came as something of a shock because although there was a residential property on the site, it was in a poor condition."

Set in stunning Bedfordshire countryside, Tingrith Lakes was created more than 50 years ago and borders Woburn Abbey Estate. Melanie manages the fishery which comprises three lakes set in 23 acres of mature countryside, situated parallel to the M1 motorway, and was originally burrow pits used for building the motorway in the late 1950s.

Sitting on the edge of the lake, the house has a cruciform floorplan with an oak frame at its heart, clad



“It was suggested locating the house near the lake, which we were thrilled about.”



A portal-style oak frame has been used to provide an uncluttered interior to take advantage of the lakeside views. The combination of oak, steel and glass, gives the low-lying structure a distinctly contemporary look.



In detail

PROJECT

Architect Roderick James Architects: rjarchitects.co.uk
Groundworker Roddy and Reid: roddyandreid.co.uk

STRUCTURE

Builder Dawson Carpentry: dawsoncarpentry.net
Oak frame Carpenter Oak: carpenteroak.com
Plumber J Child Plumbing: jchildplumbing.co.uk
Roofer RH Roofing: 07796 274185
Painter AJ Pickering: awrpickersgill.org.uk
Green roof Organic Roofs: organicroofs.co.uk
Cladding Woodtrend: woodtrend.co.uk

Windows/external doors Kastrup from Internorm: internorm.com

FIXTURES & FITTINGS

Underfloor heating, air source heat pump NuHeat: nu-heat.co.uk
Kitchen Marabese: marabeseceramics.com
Worktop Algarve Granite: algarvegranite.co.uk
Flooring Marabese: marabeseceramics.com
Staircase/bookshelf doors Oak Hill Joinery Ltd: oakhilljoinery.co.uk
Glass balustrade UK Glass Products: ukglassproducts.co.uk
Blinds Alchemist's Interior Design: alchemistsinteriordesign.co.uk

in wood with a living roof. Because the house is dug into the landscape, the roofline appears very low from the main entrance at the rear of the house, providing no clue as to the impressive lakeside location.

Melanie, a graphic designer, and Clive, who runs his own business, attended a pre-planning consultation to test the water with the planners and find out what would be acceptable, with an unexpected outcome. Melanie explains: “We weren’t even planning to build a house to live in at first – we thought the site would be ideal for some holiday cottages. The planners said they would prefer something residential though, so we started thinking about what we wanted from our own house.”

The existing building on the site was a dilapidated prefabricated former work room used during the motorway construction, and was tucked away in a damp corner overlooking a car park. The new building would be restricted to identical dimensions including height, but meetings with Roderick James Architects proved illuminating when the couple discovered it would be possible to move the house to the side of the lake.

“We had seen Roderick James Architects at a self build show and admired their work with oak. They also converted a nearby mill into a cafe, and we loved the look of it,” enthuses Melanie.

THE FLOORPLAN

The single-storey home has an open-plan living/dining room, with the kitchen adjoining to form an L-shape. The three main bedrooms are positioned to the eastern side of the house, all of which have lake views except the guest bedroom, which has an en suite bathroom. The main bedroom has an en suite and dressing room, and there’s a playroom between the children’s bedrooms.





“They suggested locating the house near the lake, which we were thrilled about because we had assumed we would have to build on the same site.”

A detailed brief stipulated a barn-style timber home with an oak frame that merged with its surroundings. It would be single storey to ensure a low roofline, with renewable technologies to create an eco-friendly, energy efficient home.

“We love lots of light, open spaces and Scandinavian-style interiors, and we also knew we wanted an oak frame, so that was really the starting point,” says Melanie.

The design was prepared with only minor tweaks, and the architects arranged the planning application. The design was passed but a reptile survey was required, which took two months and required no action.

Disaster struck two weeks before construction on site was due to start, when the builder pulled out. Melanie hired a project manager to handle the technical aspects of the build, and also took on some of the responsibilities herself reading up on health and safety legislation, and managing the final three months of the project once the building stage was complete.





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A local firm was employed to carry out the building work, which was a stressful time, especially for Melanie. “It wasn’t really a conventional build because we didn’t have one contractor, hiring contractors as we needed them. It wasn’t easy finding people and getting them to fit in with our schedule, and we had a lot of different personalities and different work ethics and methods,” she says.

The couple and their two children Maddy (12) and Alex (10) remained living in their previous house on a development nearby during the build, and Melanie was on site every day while Clive was building a new outbuilding for the fishery at the same time. “Clive didn’t have much involvement because he was replacing a derelict shed for the fishery. I gave him regular updates and discussed choices with him, but his biggest requirement was for the utility room sink to be big enough to clean the barbecue grill,” laughs Melanie.

Their existing house took two years to sell, so proceeds from the sale of their previous home in New Zealand had to be used instead to finance the project.

To meet roof height restrictions, the new home had to be sunken into the landscape, with 76 piles installed for the block and beam foundations. To enable open-plan interiors with no vertical beams disrupting the views, the oak frame replicates a steel portal frame. But using oak instead of steel presented some technical challenges for the Carpenter Oak team, who used large flitch plates slotted into the cross frame junctions to act as bracing, along with an external steel frame at one end. A hidden steel ridge beam and plywood sheathing in the walls and the roof enable the frame to do away with traditional braces and ties.

LIVING AREA

White walls and light floors allow the oak frame to enjoy the limelight.





KITCHEN

The Italian kitchen is understated, combining matt black and white finishes with a red glass splashback and porcelain floor tiles.

The limited bracing made the erection of the frame more complicated than normal, and even the number of bolts required to secure the steel plates could have proved problematic on site. To make things easier, elements of the frame were delivered partially assembled with lifting positions clearly marked for the installation.

The frame is insulated and clad externally in garapa, a Brazilian hardwood, while a generous overhang supported by timber pillars gives the house an alpine chalet-style appearance. Triple-glazed windows with slate grey aluminium frames help to reduce the noise from the nearby M1 as well as improve the building's thermal performance. Some of these form entire facades and reach up into the gables in the main living area, flooding the interiors with natural light.

The slate roof for the main living area has roof lights, while the roof above the bedrooms and kitchen is planted with wildflowers to help the house blend in with the surrounding landscape. This dramatically bursts into life in the spring. Its split pitch allows a line of clerestory windows to throw additional light into the utility room, bathroom and guest bedroom.

Renewable technologies were important elements of the project, with an air source heat pump providing underfloor heating and hot water. The property has its own well with filtration and softener system and a sewage treatment plant.

High ceilings and plenty of glazing mean the interiors are open and airy, with impressive views onto the lake. An Italian kitchen fitted by a local supplier features a matt black granite worktop with matt white doors, a red glass splashback and integrated appliances. Porcelain floor tiles were chosen throughout for their similarity to polished concrete but at a fraction of the cost.

Three of the four bedrooms are located at the front of the house with the master bedroom at the far end incorporating a dressing room and en suite. It opens out onto the deck through a large sliding door. The children's bedrooms each have secret access



through a bookcase to a playroom that connects their bedrooms, providing a place for them to relax with their friends. All three bedrooms have lake views, while a fourth guest room is located to the rear of the house with its own en suite bathroom.

Two tiers in the garden create visual interest as well as performing an important role. A large deck wraps around the front and side of the house, while the upper tier is partially laid to lawn and wildflower meadow, planted on an acoustic bund which is designed to restrict traffic noise from the M1. "We can't hear noise



BEDROOMS & BATHROOMS

Simple styles were chosen for bedrooms, while Melanie spent hours searching online for the right bathroom suites.

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from the road at all inside the house, but we can a bit from the garden. We plan to install an acoustic fence to create a barrier and we have also planted some trees, which will eventually help too," says Melanie.



Melanie's top tips

"Photograph where the services were placed in order to understand where pipes are within the building in case something goes wrong. We had a problem with sewage smells for several months but we had changed the drainage from the drawings so we were unsure where it was coming from. Cameras were used to discover that the storm-water was being directed into a foul drain by mistake! Employ a contractor who you can work with and trust. Get everything in writing as well so that there are no miscommunications and everybody knows what is expected for what price."



Final word

What was the high point?

Taking all the protection covers off the floor, and we could see the space properly.

And the low point?

Stress from lack of funds when we couldn't sell our house.

What was your greatest extravagance?

We opted to go for triple glazing instead of the original double glazing that was planned. It did cost an extra sum of money, but it was so worth it as it adds extra sound proofing and insulation.

And your best buy?

The bathroom furniture. I spent many hours shopping around for the best deal and I am really pleased with the simplistic, modern look that it creates.

What do you like most about your house?

The lounge/diner. When we first moved in it felt like we were on holiday and it still does. The living room is such a relaxing space looking out to the lake and the wildlife that we see every day. We have a kingfisher who sits on



the deck right outside the living room window which is magical to watch.

Anything you would do differently?

I now have the confidence to manage a project, if we were to build again. However, I would probably hire a main contractor next time who has his own electrician, plumber, tiler etc. Finding each contractor was hard work, and managing them to ensure they fitted in with the schedule was also difficult at times. Thankfully the project manager did a lot of the chasing. I would also allow plenty of time to find that main contractor, look at his other projects and speak to his clients to get a real feel for his work.