

# Modern masterpiece



*“The whole self build process was fantastic. I’m only just coming back down to earth from the adrenalin rush”*



## Elspeth Jones and Fiona Inglis didn't expect to build a contemporary home, but a chance discovery changed their fortunes

WORDS **JANE CRITTENDEN** PHOTOS **MIKE BLACK**

**T**his larch-clad property, with its clean white render, low-lying roof and defined geometric lines, evokes style elements seen in Scandinavian or Japanese houses – but in fact, it's closer to home, on the edge of the Lake District.

Unsurprisingly, Elspeth Jones and her partner Fiona Inglis were delighted when they first saw the plans – even though they'd had no input into the design. “We just thought ‘wow, this house is amazing; why wouldn't we want this?’ The contemporary style was stunning, and as planning was already in place we couldn't believe we had permission to build this sort of house straight away,” says Elspeth.

The couple found themselves in this fortunate situation after discovering the site in early 2012. Elspeth had thrown her heart and soul into looking for a plot near to where they lived as land was scarce and they were desperate to self build. “I sent letters to architects and contractors in the area and we struck lucky one day when a builder contacted his friend, who was considering selling his land with planning permission,” says Elspeth.

The plot was a partly demolished 1950s bungalow on a third of an acre in a Lancashire village; it was at the end of a small row of bungalows with an open aspect across to the Lakeland fells. “It's a quiet spot with amazing views,” says Elspeth. “It sounds twee but when Fiona and I went to have a look one snowy February morning, it felt like home from the start.”

That May, a figure of £275,000 was agreed upon for the plot. The couple went to see JMP Architects, which had prepared the drawings, and chatted to director Neil Nute and project architect Conrad Till about the design in more detail. Elspeth says that Neil and Conrad reminded them they could have a completely different



design if they wanted, but the couple were wary about making significant changes. “We thought it had probably been hard enough to get planing approval for a contemporary house in an area of outstanding natural beauty,” says Elspeth. “If we made extensive alterations we might struggle to get permission again and going through the process would increase our overall expenditure, too.”

However, the couple discovered the house was going to cost about £350,000 to build. “Our budget at the time was only £250,000 so we needed to go away and have a long hard think,” says Elspeth. The pair contemplated what else they might build instead. Before buying the plot they had always imagined they would opt for a more traditional design, but in the end they came to the conclusion that this was an opportunity not to be missed.

“We really embraced JMP’s contemporary drawings and the concept of open plan living,” says Elspeth. “We knew this was our chance to build a unique house, so we decided to take the long view.” The couple managed to raise the extra funds they needed through savings and a self build mortgage with Furness Building Society. “Neil and Conrad were very good at making sure we weren’t committing to a project we couldn’t afford,” says Elspeth. “But we have ended up with a mortgage the size of America!”

### **Internal tweaks**

Although the external design and materials were locked in by the detailed planning approval, Elspeth and Fiona were keen to make changes to the interior elements. They decided to radically alter the upstairs layout by adjusting the bedroom sizes to create a bigger



Larch cladding, and the deep overhang, lend this house a Scandinavian feel – but the views across to the Lakeland fells are typically English

**THE JONES & INGLIS FILE**

**NAMES** Elspeth Jones & Fiona Inglis  
**OCCUPATIONS** Elspeth runs a cake business & Fiona works in human resources

**LOCATION** Lancashire

**TYPE OF BUILD** Self build

**STYLE** Contemporary

**CONSTRUCTION METHOD**  
 Timber frame clad in block, with larch cladding & silicon render

**PLOT SIZE** 1,350m<sup>2</sup>

**HOUSE SIZE** 267m<sup>2</sup> (2,875ft<sup>2</sup>)

**PLOT COST** £275,000

**BOUGHT** December 2012

**BUILD COST** £367,000

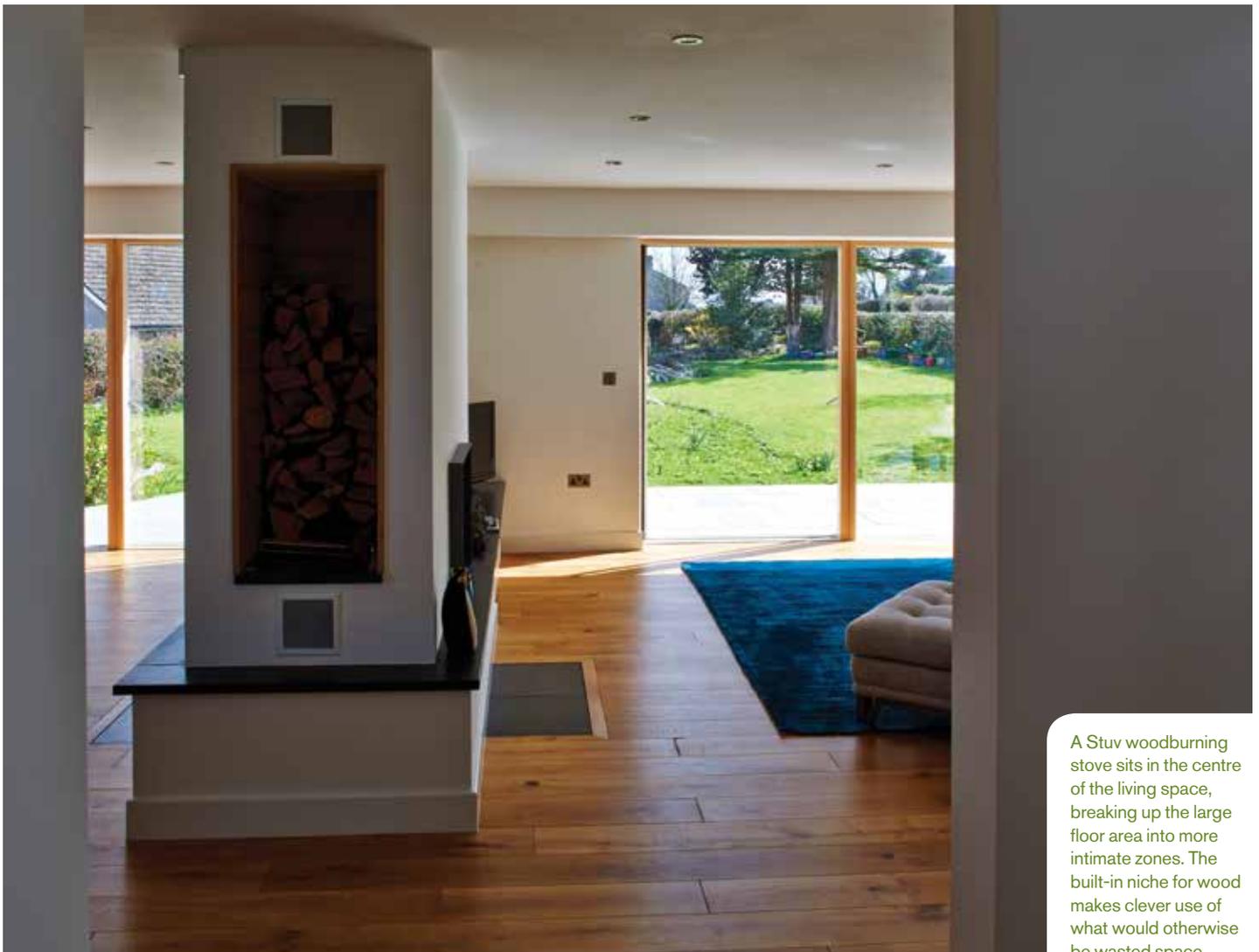
**COST PER M<sup>2</sup>** £1,375 per m<sup>2</sup>  
 (£128 per ft<sup>2</sup>)

**TOTAL COST** £642,000

**BUILDING WORK COMMENCED**  
 December 2012

**BUILDING WORK TOOK**  
 Nine months

**CURRENT VALUE** £700,000



A Stuv woodburning stove sits in the centre of the living space, breaking up the large floor area into more intimate zones. The built-in niche for wood makes clever use of what would otherwise be wasted space





The Hacker kitchen, supplied by Webbs, blends handle-free white cabinetry with a more textural black-brown timber veneer. Appliances, such as the hob and extractor, are as sleek and minimal as the units



The staircase, with oak treads and white woodwork, is a key feature

master bedroom with a walk-in wardrobe and ensuite, and to maximise the rural views. Downstairs they widened the kitchen to accommodate the design they'd worked on with Webbs of Kendal, and encased the dual-aspect stove and flue instead of having it freestanding, to provide a solid divider for the room.

### Organisation is key

By now the couple had sold their home and were renting a bungalow nearby. Fiona has a full-time job in human resources working for The Co-operative in Manchester, so it was practical that Elspeth, who runs a local cake business, should be the first point of contact on the project. They decided to bring in JMP to formally project manage, with Elspeth playing an active role. "This decision was more expensive, but Fiona and I felt it may have cost us a whole lot more if there had been a serious mistake because this was our first self build," she says.

Elspeth spent six months working on the changes to the design with Conrad, and endless weekends were taken up by shopping with Fiona to make decisions on all the materials, right down to the last plug socket. "The preparation was the most crucial part of the project because we wanted to build to a fixed price," says Elspeth. "We gave ourselves plenty of time to choose the bathrooms, kitchen and all the other details so everything was fully costed up and in place before work began on site."

Conrad sent the project out to tender to six local contractors. Paul Wood from Branstone Beck Development became a favourite, so Elspeth and Fiona went to have a look at his work and liked what they saw. Paul and his team came on board, and in December 2012 the project got underway with the full demolition of the bungalow. "He was really great to work with and it was good to see he was a real disciplinarian," says Elspeth. "The team functioned really well together and were also very courteous to our neighbours, who were patient and accommodating throughout."

### The build

The shell of the house is constructed from engineered timber frame on the lower and upper levels, with steel beams supporting the cantilevered first floor and roof. The timber frame construction



The corner windows are a recurring architectural theme; they wrap around two sides of the house to maximise views of the surrounding garden and countryside

was a slight sticking point for Elspeth – her family has a 50-year history of concrete block-making through their company, Plasmor. Elspeth's brother Julian now runs the business, which also manufactures paving.

"I've grown-up in a construction family so it was definitely a controversial decision," says Elspeth. "But it was still important to use the family firm, so Plasmor's blocks clad the ground floor walls and were used to construct the floor and garage. We also used their pavers on the driveway."

At first the architect and builders were hopeful they could construct the house on the bungalow's old foundations. But once it had been demolished it became apparent that the old ones weren't adequate. New plastic water pipes were also going to be needed to replace the lead ones.

A run of cold, dry weather during February and March helped the timber frame go up smoothly, and when the scaffolding was erected, Elspeth and Fiona were able to see the view at height for the first time. "We hadn't been able to go upstairs in the dormer bungalow because the interior had been partly demolished, so we had no

idea quite how spectacular the surrounding countryside was until this point," says Elspeth.

Weekly meetings between Elspeth, Paul, Conrad and the other trades kept the project running on time, and nine months later the house was finished. "Building to the original design was really key to the project's success," says Elspeth. "I just had to be very disciplined, and not change my mind about anything along the way!"

That said, the couple did make a few changes after the internal walls had been built. "I wanted the staircase to feel light and open so Conrad came back with some alternative ideas and created a brilliant open-riser design" says Elspeth. "It cost an extra £6,000 but I don't think that was too bad in the grand scheme of things. We just had to make sure whenever we increased our costs we found a saving elsewhere to keep our budget balanced."

### **A place to call home**

The finished house is a striking property. A strip of grey aluminium flashing creates a demarcation between the upper and lower levels, while larch cladding and a white silicon render highlight the form of



the building. Echoes of the slate roof are found in the black limestone paving and even the slate hearth inside. The Velfac window system fits with the house's contemporary style, with anthracite frames on the outside to match the flashing, and pine interiors.

"Conrad's really thought about the order and symmetry of the materials and that really appeals to me," says Elspeth. "I love that the floor-to-ceiling windows are placed in all four corners of the house and follow the sun's path. Even on darker days the quality of the light is incredible."

This diligent thinking is embodied in every part of the house's architecture and is testimony to how important detail is to good design. But it's clear the measure of this architectural triumph is in the simple fact that Elspeth and Fiona turned down the chance to start afresh, because they loved those initial designs so much.

Elspeth says even Paul the builder – who has built close to a hundred properties – is particularly proud of this house. "It's such a beautiful home to live in and I will never get tired of the views," says Elspeth. "The whole self build process was fantastic; I'm only just coming back down to earth from the adrenalin rush."

**Elspeth's written a blog about the project, which you can read at: [www.homegrown40.tumblr.com](http://www.homegrown40.tumblr.com)**

#### WE LEARNED...

**CHOOSE** an architect and builder who are good at what they do and are as enthused about your project as you are. Make sure you trust their judgement and you get on, as working well together will help the project to run smoothly.

**DO** all your preparation before you begin. Specify all your materials and get them costed so there's no nasty surprises. Prioritise your budget; spend where you will see the most benefit, such as the windows, kitchen and insulation, and save in other areas, like the bathrooms.

**BUILD** to the approved design and don't change your mind otherwise the costs will run away with you.

**HIDDEN DETAILS** such as the soundproofing for the ground floor, have made a big difference to our project. Lightweight resilient steel bars were fixed between the joists and the plasterboard of the ceiling to absorb the vibrations and reduce airborne sound from above.

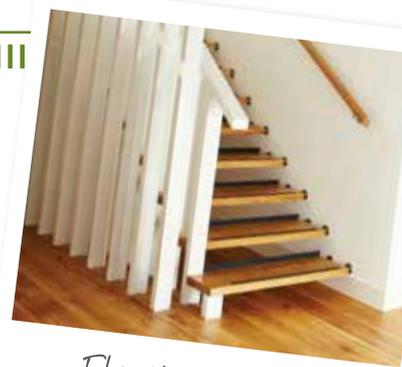
Elspeth and Fiona changed the original plans to expand the master bedroom and include an ensuite and walk-in wardrobe



## closer look

## Feature staircase...

In the original plans that Fiona and Elspeth inherited, the staircase had plasterboard guarding and closed timber treads – a design that kept costs down, but was not sympathetic to its light, open plan surroundings. The couple wanted the staircase to feel more airy, and asked their architect Conrad to redesign it: he came up with simple slatted balustrades with a plain handrail, all painted white to blend in with the walls. The treads are set away from the wall on stainless steel dowlings and appear to float; they're made from oak to match the flooring used throughout the ground floor. It cost an additional £6,000, a price that was well worth it, says Elspeth: "Every time I walk up here there's a lovely feeling of space and light."

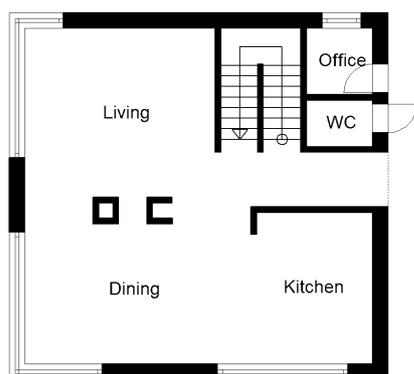


Floating treads

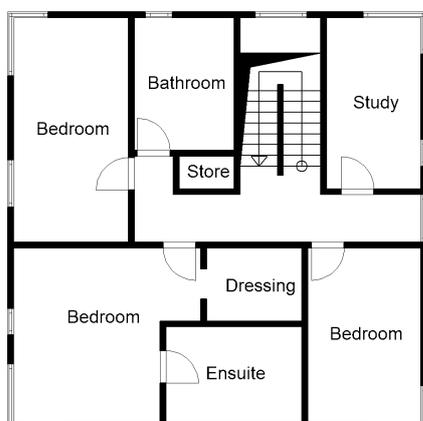


### Floor plans

Ground floor



First floor



House plans re-created using ARCON 3D Home Design Software. [www.3darchitect.co.uk](http://www.3darchitect.co.uk)  
Tel: 01252 267788 Email: [arconsales@eleco.com](mailto:arconsales@eleco.com)



### TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m <sup>2</sup>	Cost %	Total cost
Preliminaries	£128	9%	£34,297
Site clearance & house demolition	£67	5%	£17,880
Foundations	£42	3%	£11,205
External walls, windows, roof structure & covering	£511	37%	£136,390
Internal walls	£75	5%	£19,948
Floors, walls & ceiling finishes	£44	3%	£11,795
Joinery & fittings	£219	16%	£58,610
Plumbing & heating	£74	5%	£19,845
Electrics	£69	5%	£18,510
Decorating	£20	1%	£5,210
External works (inc septic tank, drainage & landscaping)	£125	9%	£33,310
<b>Grand total</b>			<b>£367,000</b>

### Useful contacts

ARCHITECTS **JMP Architects** 01524 60521 [www.jmp-architects.com](http://www.jmp-architects.com)  
BUILDING CONTRACTOR **Branstone Beck Development** 07815 182256 **TIMBER FRAME Lakeland Timber Frame** 01524 782596 [www.lakelandtimberframe.co.uk](http://www.lakelandtimberframe.co.uk) **TIMBER FRAME STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS Rawcliffe Associates** 01423 879808 **BLOCKS AND PAVING Plasmor** 01977 673221 [www.plasmor.co.uk](http://www.plasmor.co.uk) **ELECTRICIAN Jonny Lawson** 07786 222566 **PLUMBER Martin Cowgill** 07735 619991 **WINDOWS Velfac** 01223 897100 [www.velfac.co.uk](http://www.velfac.co.uk) **KITCHEN Webbs of Kendal** 01539 729632 [www.webbskitchens.co.uk](http://www.webbskitchens.co.uk) **STOVE BMF** 0113 266 0096 [www.bmfonline.co.uk](http://www.bmfonline.co.uk) **FLOORING RR Stone** 01539 822666 [www.rstone.co.uk](http://www.rstone.co.uk) **STAIRCASE Moorpark Joinery** 01539 561158 [www.moorparkjoinery.co.uk](http://www.moorparkjoinery.co.uk)