

Barn house



LUXURIOUS LOOKOUT

Story: Eleanor Wilde
Pictures: Steve Taylor

CRAIG AND KATE SMITH STRIPPED BACK THEIR TRADITIONAL BARN-STYLE HOUSE TO ITS BARE BONES TO CREATE AN EXCITING AND CONTEMPORARY FAMILY HOME WITH VIEWS TO DIE FOR...



When we first viewed Lamper Head we were captivated by the house and its setting," recalls Craig Smith of the unusual home he and his family purchased eight years ago. "It sits on a hilltop, and the views down over the estuary and towards the moors are incredible. The whole place has such a wonderfully calm, tranquil atmosphere that being here instantly makes you relax and unwind."

Craig and his wife, Kate, had been hunting for a more modest waterside home as a base for sailing, but when an estate agent took them to view Lamper Head they decided to splash out and buy the property, which was constructed using mediaeval jointing techniques.

Originally built back in 1991, the building was hailed as the first new full cruck dwelling in this country for the past three hundred years. A green oak frame for the barn-style sitting/dining room was erected using giant curving timbers, which rise from floor level to form the apex of the fifty foot long roof, and the overriding effect is of a typical 15th century hall house, complete with a huge fireplace presiding over the room.

The green oak barn was joined to another new Douglas fir barn, which contained the remaining accommodation, with the house positioned to overlook the River Dart – enjoying panoramic views across the water and lush green countryside. Located just outside the Devon village of Cornworthy, in

an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the property was specifically designed to fulfil the three Rs: rugged, rigorous and rural.

"Structurally, the building was in good condition, but the interiors felt unfinished," Craig recalls. "There were mattresses on the floors and nails banged into walls for hanging clothes. Everything was very basic, and many of the rooms weren't properly defined and had just been used as storage space. We wanted to create a cleaner and more minimalist look."

Before beginning work on the main house, however, the Smiths turned their attention to another demanding project.

The couple and their three children – Cordelia (13), Eleanor (11) and nine year →

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old Alexander – were keen to introduce a swimming pool to the site, and their ambitious design for an oak framed pool extension required planning permission and twelve months of hard labour.

“To be honest we had no idea just how difficult and expensive the pool would be,” admits Kate. “When the builders began digging down they hit solid rock, which took a huge amount of effort to shift and left the site looking terrible. We used the same craftsmen who had constructed the main house to build the new oak frame, which was made in the garden and then craned into place.

“Overall we’ve probably doubled the size of the original building with the addition of the pool, as well as a new bedroom suite on the ground floor.”



Lamper Head's roofscape presents a dramatic broken roofline, punctuated by glazed lanterns, chimneys, dormers and varying ridge heights – enabling the house to fit less obtrusively into its rural setting. The property has a dramatic outlook over the moor and estuary.

The Smiths also liaised with their neighbours and acquired further woodland and farmland which will protect their spectacular views – reputedly the best in the South Hams. With help from a landscape designer the couple have established gardens around the house, including a Mediterranean courtyard, using much of the stone excavated for the swimming pool.

The driveway has been relocated so that the property is now approached through the trees, and a partially underground garage has been dug into the hillside and roofed in turf to ensure that it blends seamlessly with the contours of the rolling landscape.

“We also decided to create a separate oak framed studio/guest lodge, with a slate roof and decking, which is



ideal for entertaining,” says Craig, a former software company director who now runs an art promotion business. “At around 90m² it was like building another house in miniature.”

The ground floor of the lodge is flagged in limestone and has folding glazed doors, which open directly onto the deck. There’s a kitchen, a utility area and wet-room as well as the main living space, with a bedroom/studio upstairs, and the building has proved perfect as an office and for parties.

With these major projects completed it was time for the Smiths to turn their attention to the house, which they planned to completely gut and remodel – introducing simple, contemporary finishes.

A luxurious heated infinity pool has been constructed inside a solid oak-framed barn extension, with folding glazed doors which may be pushed right back to open the pool to the garden. A decked area extends off the house to take advantage of the views.

“The windows and main fabric of the house were fine, although the turf roof on the oak barn had begun to slip, so we decided to re-cover it using slates to match the rest of the building,” says Craig. “In the past I’ve been very hands-on working on our homes, but this time I asked a builder who I’ve known and worked with for years to organise and supervise the refurbishment, which took about eight months to complete.”

The sumptuous house now boasts six bedrooms – two have en suite bathrooms – as well as three further bathrooms and even a treatment room for massages.

The labyrinth of rooms is laid out over several levels, so that there are ‘secret’ spaces such as the play area →

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Matching pairs of curved main timbers joined to an A-frame create the impression of a vast upturned boat in the oak barn room, which is used as a sitting and dining space. Full height glazed doors open onto the terrace and two roof lanterns drop additional light from above.



sleeping platform for the children, which has been built into the roof space. Internally every corner of the house has now changed, with terracotta and wooden floors, pale walls and Italian furniture complemented by Craig's collection of contemporary paintings. The huge expanses of glazing allow light to flood in, and frame views across the green fields and the glittering water below.



"About the only thing we kept was the red Aga," says Kate. "We took out all of the flimsy partition walls and redefined the rooms, plastering over the bare wood walls and leaving the oak frame exposed. There are new bedrooms, bathrooms and a utility downstairs, and we fitted an entertainment and lighting system. It is like a new house inside, but with all the charm of the original." ➔

FAR LEFT A new fireplace has been fitted in the living area with a solid granite hearth. ABOVE AND LEFT The light and airy kitchen/breakfast room features exposed beamed ceilings with glazed panels. Doors open out onto the decked balcony which enjoys stunning views over the water. TOP LEFT Giant rocks and a curved window add interest to the pool room.

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CONTACTS

ARCHITECT Roderick James Architects LLP (original architect) 01803 868000, roderickjamesarchitects.co.uk

BUILD AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT Shires Oak Buildings 01926 612812, shiresoak.co.uk

OAK FRAMING Carpenter Oak & Woodland 01225 743089, carpenteroakandwoodland.com

HOLIDAY LETS Unique Home Stays (self-catering stays at Lamper Head) uniquehomestays.com

★ THE BOTTOM LINE

Craig and Kate purchased Lamper Head for £700,000 in 1999, and spent £1.3 million buying additional land, building the pool and bedroom extension, creating a separate studio annexe, building an underground garage and landscaping the extensive grounds, as well as totally redesigning the interiors of the house. The property is on the market for £4 million through Jackson Stops & Staff www.jackson-stops.co.uk

WHAT WAS YOUR GREATEST EXTRAVAGANCE?

It has to be the new swimming pool building, but it's had a tremendous amount of use. We've also included some gadgets such as a retractable television at the bottom of the bed in the new Zen suite.

WHAT WAS YOUR WORST MOMENT?

Discovering that the space I'd earmarked for the new staircase actually contained the services was very disappointing, but the design required positioning the stairs to see the view, so all of the wires and pipework needed to be relocated.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE ROOM?

I like the fact that we were able to conceal a bar area behind the fireplace in the main oak barn, in what was previously wasted space. You can sit in the bar and still chat to people in the sitting room, and it even leads into a large underground wine store we've created.

WHAT WAS YOUR HIGH POINT?

Realising that we were right to minimise the exposed timberwork and make the whole house far less fussy. We've still kept the grandeur of the barn, but instead of lots of dusty woodwork the interiors are now far simpler and more contemporary, which actually highlights the frame and gives a better sense of the main structure.

The floorplan

The six bedroom house has been reconfigured internally and now includes a new bedroom suite and an oak framed swimming pool extension.

