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REAL PROJECT
RENOVATION AND EXTENSION

A woodland symphony

*Musicians Katerina Nazarova and Tim Hugh built
their own sustainable home in a truly wild setting*







M

ost people focus on the house

itself when looking for a new place to live, but for Katerina Nazarova and Tim Hugh, both classical musicians, it was the setting of their new home that really won their hearts.

“It’s all about the view. We feel like we’re inside a wildlife show all day, every day,” says Tim. Surrounded by two and a half acres of woodland, some marshland and even a lake with an island, it is the perfect place for quiet reflection away from their busy lives touring and performing. Their project to renovate and extend has created a contemporary retreat that is both restful and elegant.

Yet when Tim and Katerina first viewed the building, it had considerably less charm than the wider setting. Originally the tiny cottage of a water bailiff responsible for policing the river for salmon poachers, it was converted into a bungalow by the previous owners around 30 years ago.

“It was looking rather tired; it had lots of small dark rooms and the garden was so overgrown, you needed a chainsaw to get through,” says Katerina.

INSPIRED BY NATURE

Taking a characteristically hands-on approach, the couple re-designed the bungalow themselves and passed the plans over to a local architect to be formalised. “Our inspiration was finding a riverside property opposite a nature reserve, and we wanted to feel as much of the outside when inside, even in the most extreme of weather,” says Tim.

Their plans passed quickly under Permitted Development

HOMEOWNERS Katerina Nazarova and Tim Hugh

LOCATION South Wales

SIZE 290m²

BUILD ROUTE Subcontractors and DIY

CONSTRUCTION Renovation and steel-framed extension

BUILD TIME Two years

BUILD COST £342,000

WORDS Alexandra Pratt

PHOTOS Simon Burt

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THE BUILD



ORIGINAL BUILDING The previous bungalow had itself been extended from the original water bailiff's cottage.



ROOF AND SUBFLOOR With the walls in place, the subfloor and roof framework were constructed.



FRAME CONSTRUCTION "Jon Price, our steelworker, put up the extension frame in two days, like a Meccano set," says Tim.



STEEL DORMER The dormer was clad in corrugated steel in dark grey to match the aluminium frames.



INSULATION SCAFFOLDING Internal scaffolding was required for the insulation and plasterboarding of the extension.



KITCHEN INSTALLATION Once the concrete floors had been laid, the kitchen units, from Howdens, could be installed.



The glazing throughout is framed in aluminium, which is powder-coated dark grey. The cladding around the dormer on the upper storey is steel, sourced from a local company.

rules, and they got to work knocking down most of the interior walls, keeping just the perimeter. The roof needed replacing, but they kept the original joists to be repurposed elsewhere inside the house as furniture, shelving, window sills and even the bathroom worktops, in a Japanese-influenced design.

To the rear of the building, overlooking the river, Katerina and Tim added a 4m x 8m glazed extension, which is framed in steel, to make the most of the water views. "We didn't knock the original house down, as that would have taken longer and been more costly," says Tim. "We made it work, and now you don't notice it's been changed."

SENSITIVE SOURCING

Reusing materials, such as the joists, as well as timber from their own land, was very important to Katerina and Tim. They also tried to source other materials as locally as possible, with the slate for the fireplace, entrance pillars and steps all coming from a quarry further up the river in Cilgerran. Most of the new insulation is sheep's wool, again supplied by a local company. The paint used for the bedrooms, although

not local, is eco-friendly limewash from Bauwerk Colour.

"It gives a beautifully soft and cloudy finish when dried and feels wonderfully natural," says Katerina, who did all of the decorating, with the help of an airless paint sprayer that was supplied by Tim as a somewhat unromantic birthday present!

Despite their DIY approach, Katerina and Tim realised it was more efficient financially to hire professionals to do certain jobs, and they chose local builder Aneurin Matthias. "My gut feeling was Aneurin was the right person to do the work," says Tim. "He was fantastic and quite happy to have me on site, so I helped with clearance, or fetching things."

In addition to an electrician and plumber, the couple also hired other trades, including a tiler, Carl Owen. "I can do the tiling," says Tim. "But it's nowhere near as good as Carl's. His work is just perfect."

The couple were keen to have as sustainable a project as possible and embraced advances in 'green' technology, but they thoughtfully approached the choices available. The 'low tech' solutions had huge appeal. "What is not generally accepted to be very effective is passive solar gain," says Tim. "But we are



south-facing, and we get sunshine all day, so we really notice the difference. I was worried it would be too hot, as the foot-deep concrete floors and insulation are a massive heat sink. We have underfloor heating downstairs, with an oil-fired boiler as back-up, but our main heating is the sun and if it's too hot, we open the windows!"


LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Katerina and Tim installed a solar thermal system to heat the hot water, which they describe as being very effective. The technology they refused was an air or ground source heat pump, as the costs were "eye-wateringly expensive," according to Tim. "There are limited grants in Wales and none of them were applicable to us, so the cost would have been double the price of the plumbing for the entire house." More recently, the couple have installed an 8kW photovoltaic system, and supply electricity to the grid as well as being almost self-sufficient.

"Our woodburning stove is our most self-sufficient asset of all," adds Katerina. "We have three sheds full of our timber that will probably last us 10 years."

As with the design of the building itself, the interiors are a reflection of Katerina and Tim's lives. "We have a very warm, modern interior style, which has a mixture of Asian and European influences," says Katerina. "We like calming styles that are clutter-free, and we kept the elements of wood, steel, slate and other raw materials on view."

Many of the interior fittings and finishes were made by Tim himself, who has enjoyed doing carpentry since childhood and who reused the old joists, as well as timber from the woodland. "Any timber that was in good condition is in the house — the rest is firewood," he says.

Now, with a 90th birthday and a family wedding reception to host later in the year, Katerina and Tim's new home is at the heart of their extended family's life. Looking back, Tim says his favourite moment of the build was when the steelwork went in "and we could see the home we had been dreaming of finally taking shape. We felt it would be quite something when completed." And without a doubt, it certainly is.  When Katerina and Tim are on tour, their home is available for holidays through www.uniquehomestays.com 01637 881183.



SPOTLIGHT ON: MANAGING LARGER GROUNDS DURING A BUILD PROJECT

The two and a half acres of woodland, marshland and even a lake were the main reason Katerina and Tim bought this property, but extended grounds of this size bring their own challenges, particularly when they have been neglected for some time.

“The biggest job was trying to sort out the garden, which has taken two years,” says Katerina. “We had to remove a huge amount of fallen trees and debris from the lake, along with digging a new driveway and putting in new paths.”

Ash dieback was a significant cause of the fallen trees in their woodland and to deal with it, Katerina and Tim hired a team with a bandsaw on a trailer to process the huge quantities of timber, then sorted it to be dried and reused. Their garage became a kiln and after a year, Tim used the better timbers in the house for various items, including stair treads, floorboards, benches and even the beautiful dining table. “We now have semi-managed woodland,” says Katerina. “We wanted to keep it as natural as possible.”

Their proximity to the river also caused issues. Having cleared a bank around the house back to around 5m, Tim and Katerina used those hundreds of tonnes of soil to bring up the levels of the lower garden (the house sits on much higher ground). This area, which lies next to their marshland, had previously flooded repeatedly.

Access to the bungalow was also Tim and Katerina's priority and they used the hiatus during the first Covid lockdown to hire a digger. Katerina then learnt how to drive it and created a circular driveway so their tradesmen could have easy access to the project site.



Stone, steel, and timber are all on show in the rear extension, plus the floors are finished in concrete. "You don't need to cover natural materials, as they are so beautiful," says Katerina.

