

In brief

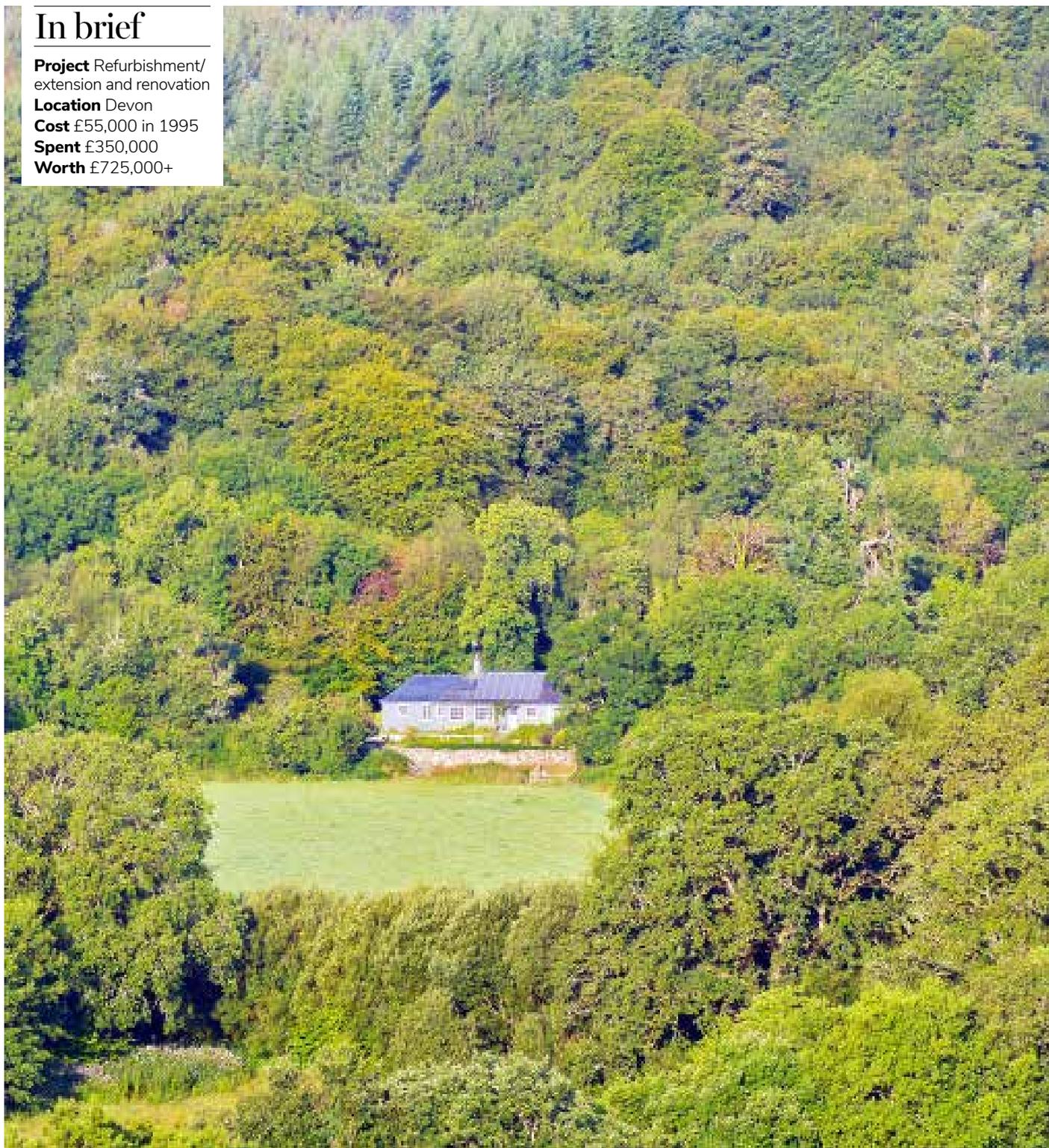
Project Refurbishment/
extension and renovation

Location Devon

Cost £55,000 in 1995

Spent £350,000

Worth £725,000+



Park life

Adam Sawers and Stephen Atkins have painstakingly restored and extended a 1920s timber kit home in the foothills of the Dartmoor National Park.

STORY: **DEBBIE JEFFERY** PICTURES: **MATT AUSTIN/ ADAM SAWERS/ STEPHEN ATKINS**



EXTERIOR

One Gidleigh Park is now a fully insulated and luxurious two-bedroom, two-bathroom home. A great deal of money has been spent on the garden, as only certain hardy plants will survive on the moor due to the altitude.

When Adam Sawers and Stephen Atkins first bought One Gidleigh Park over 20 years ago, it was an uninsulated kit home which was little more than a tumbledown shack. The couple fell in love with the stunning location, though, situated within the estate of world famous two Michelin star-Gidleigh Park Hotel.

“We found the house purely by chance when we were out walking one day,” says Stephen. “All the bluebells in the wood were out and we thought it was a really amazing location – then we spotted a for sale sign that had been knocked over.

“We ran straight down to the local estate agent and discovered that a number of other people were also interested in buying the property, but at that time it was almost impossible in England to secure a mortgage on a timber-framed house. A year later the place was still on the market, so we made a lower offer

**STAIRS**

Spiral stairs lead up to a mezzanine.

LOUNGE

Located in the original part of the house, the cosy living room has a wood-burning stove.

“The house had a history which we wanted to save, and we spent a year installing insulation and central heating, replacing floors and generally restoring the building.”



and managed to secure a small mortgage through a Scottish lender, because timber frame was already viewed as an acceptable form of building in Scotland.”

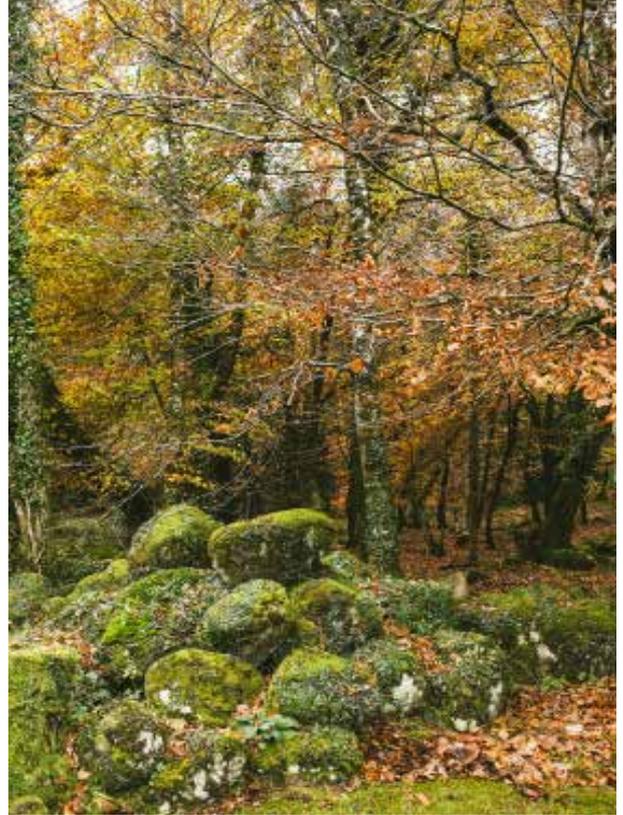
The house had originally been constructed in 1929 as the cook’s residence on the estate. It was built by Norwich-based Boulton and Paul – a company specialising in British aircraft manufacturing, construction engineering and shepherds’ huts – and was one of three identical timber-framed kit homes.

“The wood was extremely well-seasoned Norwegian pine, and each property had a solid fuel Rayburn in the kitchen for cooking and heating, and a small radiator in the sitting room,” says Stephen, a costume stylist and lecturer. “This supplemented the small fires in each room for heating, but without any insulation it wasn’t the warmest of homes when we first moved in.”

The couple used their cottage for holidays, and enjoyed virtually camping out in the building, which is totally surrounded by almost one acre of lawns, terraces, herbaceous borders and ancient oak and ash woodland.

“We were in our early 30s when we first bought the house, and Adam grew up in the area so we were always visiting family and friends,” says Stephen. “Most of our time was spent in London back then, so Devon felt like a real escape when we weren’t working. The house is completely secluded, but it’s only a five-minute drive to the nearest village of Chagford, so we’re not in the middle of nowhere.”

The couple spent much of their time in Devon tackling renovation work to the house and



“Think very hard if a renovation is worth it, or whether it might be better to build from scratch.”

ADAM AND STEPHEN'S TOP TIP

reorganising the internal layout. Originally, the bathroom was accessed through the kitchen, there were three small bedrooms and a sitting room.

“We loved staying there, although with no heating or insulation it was extremely cold,” says Adam, a film commercials producer. “The first thing we did was to install a wood-burner, and whenever we had enough spare money we’d put it towards another job at the house, which we did up over a number of years.”

The building was gutted and all internal ceilings and floors removed by a local builder. Fortunately, the timber frame was still in incredibly good condition – a fact which convinced the couple to restore the existing structure rather than replacing it.



FLOORPLAN

The original house (left) has been extended to the rear and side, creating a spacious open-plan kitchen/diner and a new bedroom, en suite and garden room. A spiral staircase leads up to the mezzanine level.

In detail

PROJECT

Architects: Rud Sawers Architects: rudsawersarchitects.com and David Hayes Architect Ltd: dharchitect.com

STRUCTURE

Plaster walls Knauf: knauf.co.uk

Doors Marshall Specialist Joinery Ltd: 01837 54189

Metal roofing (Falzinc) Kalzip: kalzip.com

Rear extension sloping roof supply Zincworks Roofing Ltd: zincworks.co.uk

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Radiators Stelrad: stelrad.com

Kitchen Intoto: intoto.co.uk

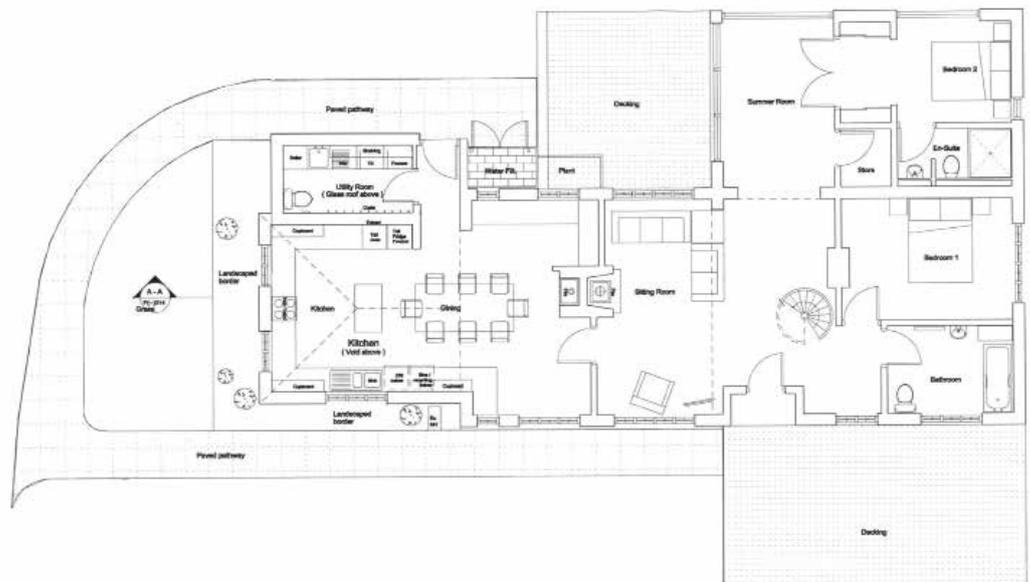
Wood-burners Elaine's Stoves and Flues: 01837 52244

Sanitaryware CP Hart: cphart.co.uk

Engineered oak flooring

Jewson: Jewson.co.uk

Spiral staircase Spiral UK: spiral.uk.com





“The house had a history which we wanted to save, and we spent a year installing insulation and central heating, replacing floors and generally restoring the building,” explains Stephen.

Most of the internal walls were removed to create a large open-plan space linking the kitchen with the sitting room. A steel frame was introduced which runs right through the middle of the house and a spiral staircase has been added leading up to a new mezzanine level study area.

The next stage of the project involved designing and building a rear extension to contain a new bedroom, en suite bathroom, and a glazed summer room overlooking the bluebell wood.

Stephen says: “Much of the structure is glass in a self-supporting steel frame, with the rest clad in



KITCHEN

The new kitchen/dining extension was the latest phase of work to be completed, with an Intoto kitchen and island, teamed with Corian worktops. Engineered oak flooring has been laid over underfloor heating.



horizontal hardwood weatherboarding that's been left untreated. We realised that you have to be careful using timber and steel, because wood moves and steel doesn't, so building the extension as an independent structure avoided this problem."

More recently, the house has been extended again with a kitchen/diner and utility room addition to one side. Externally, although the extension is stepped back from and slightly lower than the main house, it has been carefully matched to the original, with a pitched slate roof, weatherboarding cut to the original profile, and bespoke timber double-glazed windows copied from the older part of the house.

"We wanted to keep the front elevation looking traditional, but at the back it's far more contemporary, with a Falzinc roof to the extension and powder-coated aluminium glazing," says Stephen. "Everything needed to be approved by the National Park Authority, which can be tricky, but fortunately it went through really smoothly."

A builder was employed to complete the kitchen extension, and whenever the couple visited the site they would work as labourers, installing roof insulation during one of the hottest summers on record. Access to the house is along a single-track lane, which limited the size of delivery lorries and machinery, but generally the final stage of the project ran smoothly and without drama.

The original house had been painted white with yellow window frames, but Adam and Stephen have finished the exterior in a dark grey timber boarding, reminiscent of wooden Scandinavian houses.

"The cladding had been creosoted and was later painted over with lead gloss paint," says Stephen. "We covered this with water-based paint, but during the summer months the paintwork would bubble. Adam and I ended up using heat guns in freezing conditions last January, spending two weeks stripping it right back, sanding and repainting with water-based permeable paint. I've never been so cold or miserable."

Underfloor heating has been installed in the new parts of the house, and photovoltaic panels are mounted on the main roof, with two wood-burners supplementing the radiators and underfloor heating. "We're so high up here on the moor, with clean air and strong sun rays, that the solar panels work really well," says Stephen. "We also have a well with a filtration system, providing our own natural mineral water."

BEDROOMS

One of the bedrooms is located in the older part of the house and has a wooden floor; the other is in the new glazed rear extension with a slate floor. Internal walls are finished in a natural plaster finish with a silicon-based sealant.

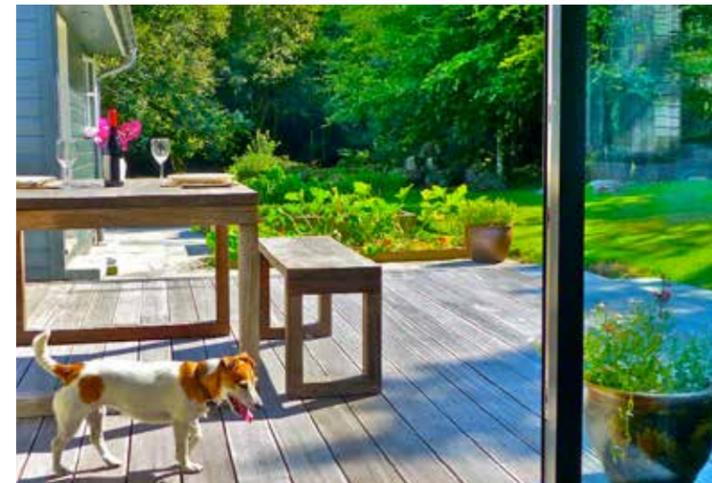


EN SUITES

Both bedrooms have spacious en suite shower rooms, with porcelain slate tiles laid in the new extension and limestone in the master en suite.

The large, previously overgrown, garden has also been lovingly landscaped and planted, with two hardwood sun decks now adjoining the property at the front and rear from which to admire the wildlife and birds which are attracted to the site. The garden has been laid mainly to lawn with herbaceous borders, and leads on to bluebell woods that stretch up to Dartmoor. "We had the old tumbledown drystone wall on our boundary completely rebuilt to five feet high by an expert local craftsman," says Adam.

To the front, the sitting room enjoys stunning uninterrupted views over the garden and fields, while the glass room at the rear looks directly into bluebell woodland that plays host to deer, foxes and badgers.



GARDEN

A great deal of money has been spent on the garden, as only certain hardy plants will survive on the moor due to the altitude.

MEZZANINE
A mezzanine level offers flexible space, which can be used as a home office, snug or bedroom.



"What's interesting is that none of the three original kit homes have been knocked down and replaced," says Adam. "They were in varying states of disrepair, but the owners all decided to renovate. Each one now has a very distinct style and layout, and couldn't be more different from the original identical log cabin-style homes."

One Gidleigh Park has been available as a vacation home since 2016 and has achieved a high level of reservations. "People love staying in wooden houses," says Adam. "There is a great warmth about them, and this place conjures up a feeling of a little log cabin in the woods, which is essentially what it is – albeit a luxury one!"

Final word

What was the high point?
Realising how much we use the new kitchen/dining extension – being able to sit, eat and cook in the same space – it's the most used part of the house.

...and the low point?
The slate floor in the rear extension had to be taken up and re-laid because it was uneven and looked terrible. Minimal design needs to be perfect – it's not forgiving and you can't hide anything.

The best buy?
Our bespoke furniture was made by a real craftsman, and we love the engineered wood flooring.



...and the biggest extravagance?
Our beautiful curved dry-stone wall was built by a skilled local expert, and is known as the Great Wall of Chagford!
Would you change anything?
We might consider extending the glass room across the entire back of the house in future.