

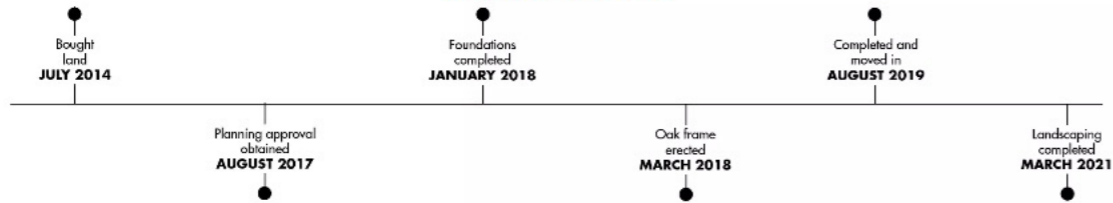
REAL PROJECT
OAK FRAME SELF-BUILD



Rescue remedy

After a series of frustrating setbacks with planning permission, Gary and Sue Hilton came up with the ideal formula for building their new home

TIMELINE



HOMEOWNERS Gary and Sue Hilton

PROJECT Oak frame self-build

LOCATION Ormskirk, Lancashire

SIZE 245m²

BUILD ROUTE Project management and subcontractors

BUILD TIME 19 months

PLOT COST £250,000

BUILD COST £290,000

VALUE Circa £1.2m

WORDS Jane Crittenden

PHOTOGRAPHY Nikhilesh Haval

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ary and Sue Hilton have always renovated houses, moving from one project to the next since they got married in the 1980s. Back in 2013, in the run-up to Gary retiring from the police force, a piece of land caught their eye – but they didn't expect it to take eight years for the project to come to fruition.

"We instantly liked the unusual quarter-acre plot in Lancashire at the foot of a long drive leading to a factory," says Gary. "Two derelict houses had been built there for workers in the 1960s, but you couldn't see the industrial buildings, only lovely south-facing views across farmland."

The couple put in an offer and were disappointed when they weren't successful so they looked elsewhere. They were 18 months into building another house, 10 miles away, when the seller asked if they were still interested in the plot.

"I was just a month away from retiring by then, so I was lucky to be in a position to buy the land," says Gary. "Sue and I worked out that we could finish the first house and live in it while we built the second one, then sell it to fund the rest of the build."

NAVIGATING THE PLANNING SYSTEM

Buying the green belt plot in a conservation area with no planning permission could be seen as risky, but Gary and Sue weren't unduly worried as consent had been given – albeit expired – in 2007 to build two houses. The couple thought it made planning sense to do the same, thinking they'd sell one, so they had an architect prepare similar 'standard' masonry build designs. But when they submitted their application in January 2015, they were advised to withdraw.

"We worked out that we could finish the first house and live in it while we built the second one"

The couple enjoy views over fields from their bedroom balcony. "We have fantastic double doors surrounded by glazing and in summer the covered balcony protects the room from overheating," says Gary.





In the snug and dining areas, adjacent to the kitchen, tumbled travertine floor tiles create a unified feel. Simple oak framing has allowed Sue to go bold and modern with her Orla Kiely decoration.



There is underfloor heating on both floors but on cooler days in the changing seasons, the sitting room is kept warm and cosy by burning wood from their land on the logburner.



“We were told the two houses had to be on the same footprint as the old properties,” Gary explains. “We were taken back as we didn’t want a small house, and it didn’t make sense because the plot was so big. We hired a planning consultant to see if we could reverse the decision.”

After an informal meeting with planning, they were advised a single, contemporary house would be looked upon more favourably. Gary and Sue resubmitted a new design that August — but were knocked back again in October. They got their local MP involved and after more conversations, the planners pivoted and said they’d prefer a traditional-looking property.

DECIDING ON OAK FRAME

“The whole process was extremely frustrating,” says Gary. “By now, we’d already been to the Homebuilding & Renovating Show and liked the look of oak frame houses. We were impressed with Welsh Oak Frame’s small, personal setup. It’s one thing being shown pictures and plans, but until you’ve been inside one of their oak frame buildings, you can’t appreciate how beautiful and structurally strong the oak feels.”

One of Welsh Oak Frame’s off-the-shelf designs inspired the couple, who were looking for a cottage-style home with a porch, front gable dormers and a double-height living room at the back. Meanwhile, Sue was keen for modern interiors.

“We didn’t want to be overwhelmed with oak inside as we felt that was too traditional for us,” says Gary. “The skeleton of the frame is on display, rather than all the ribs, which has a contemporary Scandinavian feel.”

The couple went back to planning in December 2016, but things still weren’t straightforward as the local authority had

now decided they didn’t want the site developed at all. Gary and Sue elevated the dispute on the basis consent had been given in the past. In the end, the legal argument swung 85% in their favour and in August 2017, the couple finally had permission to go ahead with the project.

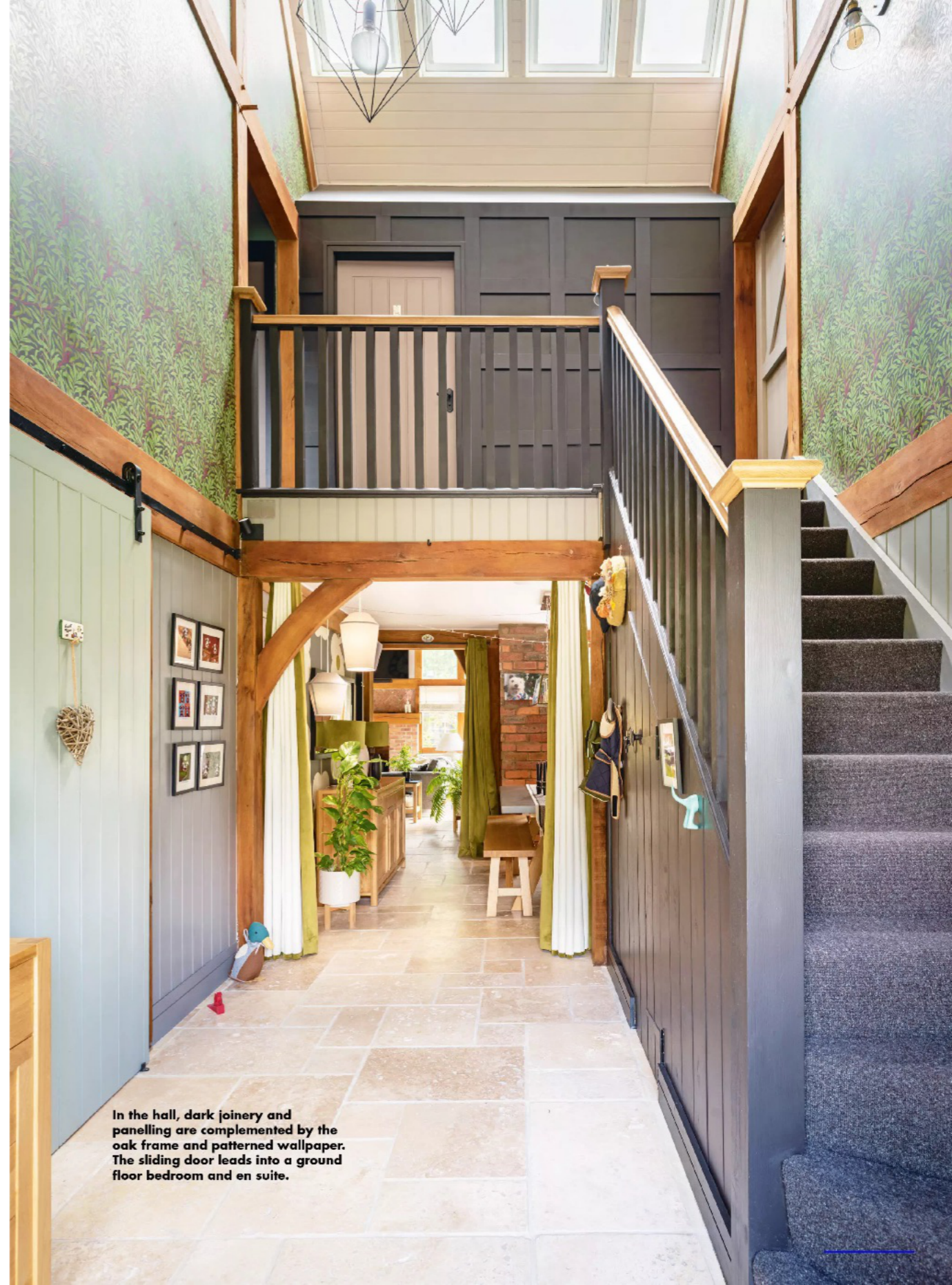
AN ENERGY-EFFICIENT BUILD

Now both retired, Gary took on the project management, drawing on his experience from managing teams in the police. He hired local firms so he could have face-to-face conversations and build up good relationships. With the goal being to live in an energy-efficient home, the build consisted of an insulated polystyrene concrete slab and structural insulated panels (SIPs) wrapped around the oak frame.

“I coordinated Future Found, Sipco and Welsh Oak Frame to make sure the engineering and timeline of these three key build elements ran smoothly,” Gary explains. “Afterwards, I erected the SIPs with a local joiner and SIPs erector who had recently gone self-employed.”

The couple moved in to their newly completed home in August 2019 and Gary then concentrated on the landscaping while Sue, who is a keen gardener, undertook most of the planting. Over the next 18 months the couple completed the outstanding work on the home with Sue doing the interior design. “We were always keen to get hands-on during this build, plus it was a way of saving on labour costs,” she says.

“Sue and I both knew our home was going to be good, but we didn’t expect it to be this good,” says Gary. “We’re proud of what we’ve achieved here — this is a fantastic house project to end on. We certainly won’t need to move again.” 



In the hall, dark joinery and panelling are complemented by the oak frame and patterned wallpaper. The sliding door leads into a ground floor bedroom and en suite.

**SPOTLIGHT ON:
STRUCTURAL
INSULATED
PANELS (SIPS)**

SIPs are an energy-efficient construction method formed of an insulating foam core sandwiched between structural facings and prefabricated in a factory. It provides excellent airtightness and reduced thermal bridging as tight connectors provide continuous insulation across the surfaces. Panels can be lifted into place individually to build walls, floors and roofs or slotted together on the ground first to form larger sections.

“They’re quick to construct so using in tandem with an oak frame means the core structure of the build can take a matter of weeks to put up,” says Gareth Edmunds, director at Welsh Oak Frame. “The oak remains the structural component while sitting inside the SIPs shell so you get the full effect of the oak internally.”

One of the reasons Gary chose SIPs was his prior experience of building with an open timber frame where he manually added insulation. “It was messy work but for an extra £2,000 we bought SIPs that we slid onto a footplate, slotted together and attached to the oak frame,” he says. “The house is warm in winter and cool in summer, everyone self-building should use SIPs if they can.”



UNIQUE SPACES

Each of Gary and Sue’s upstairs rooms enjoys distinct looks through style, colour, and shape.

THE PLANS



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



THE DETAILS

Two derelict factory workers' houses, built in the 1960s, occupied the land where Gary and Sue intended to build their oak frame house.

SUPPLIERS

OAK FRAME DESIGN AND MANUFACTURE Welsh Oak Frame: www.welshoakframe.com

FOUNDATIONS Future Found: www.futurefound.co.uk

SIPS Sipco: www.thesipcompany.com

BRICKS Furness Brick: www.furnessbrick.co.uk

WINDOWS AND DOORS IDC Construction: www.idcgroup.co.uk

FLOOR JOISTS Truss Form: www.trussform.co.uk

KITCHEN The Shaker Workshop: www.theshakerworkshop.com

BATHROOMS Lusso: www.lussostone.com

WOODBURNER Esse: www.esse.com

FLOOR TILES Stoneworld: www.stoneworld.co.uk

COSTS

GROUNDWORKS £4,000

FOUNDATIONS £8,800

OAK FRAME £71,000

SIPS £46,000

BRICKWORK AND RENDER £14,000

ROOF £13,200

FLOOR JOISTS £3,500

WINDOWS AND DOORS £21,000

ELECTRICS £12,000

PLASTERING £15,000

PLUMBING £21,500

SEWAGE PLANT £2,500

BATHROOMS £25,000

KITCHEN £30,000

MISCELLANEOUS £2,500

TOTAL £290,000