

Dream come true

A couple with no DIY experience decided to take on a self-build and now live in a beautiful oak-framed cottage

WORDS JANE CRITTENDEN | PHOTOGRAPHY NIKHILESH HAVAL



SITTING AREA

Exposed beams and a low ceiling give this new build a traditional cottage feel, while the oak frame zones the open-plan space.

House and frame design, Welsh Oak Frame. Brighton wall lights, Pooky. Try Kayu Home for a similar coffee table

HOME TRUTHS

THE PROPERTY

Oak frame new build

ROOMS Open-plan living area, kitchen, four bedrooms, three bathrooms

LOCATION Essex



Katy and Alan Pateman found themselves unexpectedly taking on a self-build after a sudden move from their previous home due to problems with neighbours. After temporarily staying with friends in a pretty village on the Blackwater Estuary, they found a plot. But it was in a conservation area with a history of planning refusals and lapsed planning for a specific design. 'Approval had been given for a two-bedroom timber frame cottage, designed to look old with white weatherboarding,' Katy explains. 'Alan and I liked the look of it but were very unsure if a self-build project was for us -- we are a couple who didn't even do DIY!'

While debating the idea, the couple did some research. Katy got a quote for a softwood structural frame but thought the cottage would look bland. Friends suggested building in oak.

'One of them lived in a beautiful oak house built by Welsh Oak Frame and we really loved it,' says Katy. 'At this stage, we hadn't bought the land but were pleasantly surprised by the company's quote and realised we could afford to do this. 'The final decision came when I went back to visit the site and all the trees were in blossom. I suddenly had this wonderful vision of a property called Blossom Cottage with touches of pink in every room.'

Katy and Alan, an accountant, came to an arrangement with the landowners, allowing them first refusal to buy the plot if they got planning permission. Welsh Oak Frame's designer came to site and they discussed how the structural oak frame might look.

While they waited, the couple began to consider the interior of their potential new home. 'For planning, the outside had to look the

'Our modest cottage maximises space and shows oak framing is affordable and not just for millionaires'



HALLWAY

Ceramic floor tiles that look like stone run throughout the downstairs where underfloor heating is powered by an air source heat pump.

Try Loire Beige tiles, Porcelain Superstore. The Green, Richmond artwork by Susie West



KITCHEN

'For the design, I was inspired by a pink pantry cupboard I'd seen in a kitchen advertisement,' says Katy.

Turco 12-light wagon wheel chandelier is similar, Wayfair. Cabinetry, JN Interiors



SITTING AREA

Pink sofas tie in with the pink pantry cupboard in the kitchen, helping to keep the open-plan space cohesive.

Sydney sofa in Pink, DFS. Find a similar scallop-edge tray on eBay

same but inside we could do what we liked,' says Katy. 'My feeling was less oak would make our home feel more open and although I wanted beams, I didn't want rooms to feel overwhelmed.'

Changes were made to create more bedrooms to accommodate the couple's son, Frank, and their adult children and partners who would stay. One of the two upstairs bedrooms was split into two, while space from the second one created an en-suite bedroom. The ground floor dining room became the couple's en-suite bedroom. Planning approval finally came through and Alan hired a builder client of his, Greg Marston from Marston Contracts, to take on the build.

When it came to the interiors, Katy, who used to run a cupcake business, already knew pinks with a warm tone would be central to the colour scheme to complement the oak. 'The

inspiration for the palette actually came from a cushion I bought in TK Maxx, which had the exact shade of pink, cream and blue I loved,' she explains. 'It became a reference point for everything from the colour palette of the kitchen to the sofas. I took it everywhere – my builders thought I was bonkers!'

Katy had sold all the furniture from their previous townhouse because it didn't suit the cottage-style property. She became creative, buying pieces on Facebook Marketplace and borrowing the builders' tools to refresh and upcycle her purchases. 'I had this idea that I wanted the cottage to be perfect for the festive season – a sense of family, sharing and entertaining – so I was delighted when we moved in the week before Christmas,' she says. 'We never thought we'd be self-builders yet now we're living in the house of our dreams.' 25

'We're accidental self-builders and the pre-approved design of our chocolate-box cottage is just what we would have chosen'



MAIN EN SUITE

'I fell in love with the tiles in a high-end shop and sourced them locally for a fraction of the price,' says Katy. Botanical Hexagon tiles, Tiles DIY. Try British Ceramic's Hexagon Cream tile, Tiles Direct. Basin, The Stone Sink Company



MAIN BEDROOM

Pink and green tones reflect the garden and the colours in the tiles in the adjoining bathroom. For a similar wall paint colour, try Granny Chic, Coat. Peacock Gardenia duvet cover set, Dunelm, would work here



GUEST BEDROOM

Layers of creamy neutrals create a calming environment. Vienna quilted satin bedspread in Champagne is similar, Dusk. Shell-back mink velvet dining chair in Cream, Picture Perfect Home, has this look