


FRAMED IN

A photograph of the rear of a one and a half storey house. The house has a red brick chimney on the left and a large glass extension on the right. The roof is made of red tiles. In the foreground, there are red roses and yellow flowers. A patio with a table and chairs is visible in front of the glass extension.

The rear of the one and a half storey house features large expanses of glazing and overlooks the newly landscaped garden, which was designed by Tony to include a number of existing plants.

OAK FRAME NEW BUILD

OAK...

When Tony and Liz Holden decided to build a new oak framed house for their retirement they already had the perfect building plot at the bottom of their garden.

STORY: **ELEANOR WILDE**

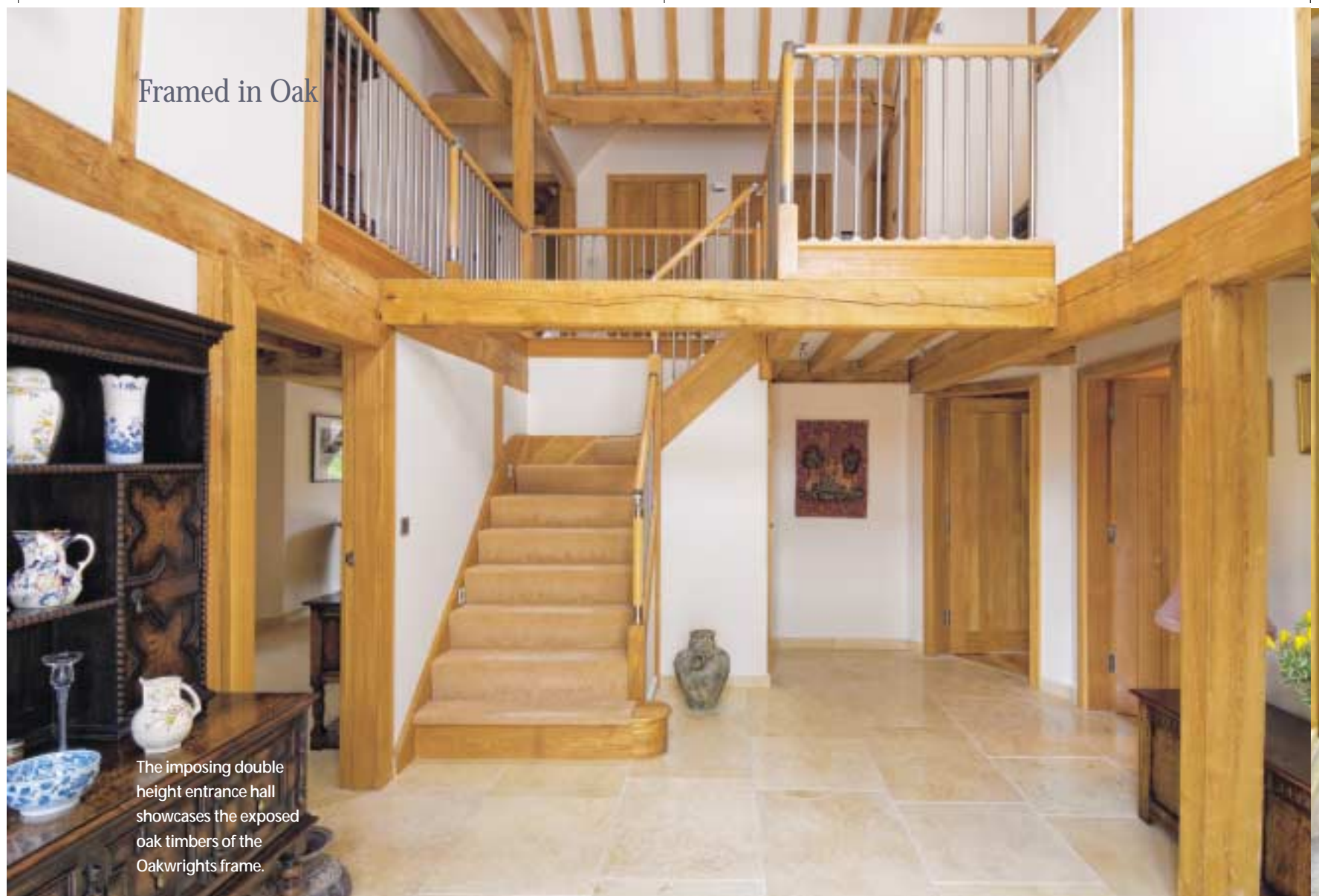
For 25 years Tony and Liz Holden had lived in the same pretty Hampshire village, bringing up their family in the kind of traditional thatched property frequently seen gracing the lids of chocolate boxes. They loved the character of their listed 16th century house, but time spent in the States convinced them to build a far more contemporary, open plan home.

"We were in Connecticut for four years in an extremely modern, glass-fronted house on Long Island Sound, and became accustomed to a very different way of life," recalls Tony. "When we returned to the UK we grew restless, and wanted to experience the same space and light we'd grown used to."

The Holdens began hunting for a building plot without success, but were then alerted to the fact that the boundary for the local development plan had recently been moved, and now included part of their large L-shaped garden. ➔



Framed in Oak



The imposing double height entrance hall showcases the exposed oak timbers of the Oakwrights frame.

"The council had previously told us that there was absolutely no possibility of building in our garden because it fell outside the plan," Tony explains. "Then we discovered that this line had been moved, and suddenly the bottom half of our garden was included in the plan."

Aware that building in a conservation area within the curtilage of a listed building could prove challenging, Tony and Liz were nevertheless encouraged by the council's response to their informal enquiries.

"We love the look, feel and smell of oak, so building a new oak-framed house was always our aim," says Liz. "On the other hand we didn't want to end up with a fake, olde worlde replica of our previous home."

The couple contacted several specialist oak framing companies and found TJ Crump Oakwrights Ltd to be

extremely approachable. Based in Hereford, the company operates nationwide and abroad, designing and constructing bespoke, traditionally jointed and pegged oak homes.

"We were very impressed by the precision of their construction method and the fact that every house is totally bespoke – designed on a blank sheet of paper specifically for the clients and their plots rather than just adapted from existing plans," comments Tony.

Working with Oakwrights, the Holdens weighed up numerous options and devised a building which would appear traditional from the front, with relatively small oak-framed windows, a handmade brick ground floor and oak-framed upper storey.

To the rear, however, the intention was to include far larger areas of glazing downstairs, which would draw light into the open plan living spaces and enable views of the low-maintenance garden to be enjoyed from virtually every room.

The resulting design has been formulated to maximise the relatively narrow plot, with a sitting room, study and separate utility room on the ground floor. A spacious kitchen opens directly into a dining area with the projecting single-storey sunroom beyond.

"It was important to bring the colour of the garden right into the house, and having a sun-room leading off from the open plan dining room has really helped us achieve this," says Liz. "It juts right out into the garden, which gives the impression that you are actually sitting outside."



Liz on... colour

"It was important to bring the colour of the garden right into the house."





Liz on... **the build**

“Building an oak-framed house was always our aim.”



An Aga has been fitted in the traditional kitchen, where painted cabinets are teamed with matt black granite work-tops. The single storey vaulted sunroom acts as a summer sitting room, overlooking the colourful rear garden.

Even the planned doorway between the dining area and sitting room has been omitted, so that all of the main living spaces now flow and connect naturally. “When we first lived in America we were sceptical about such an open plan layout, but we soon became very comfortable with the lack of doors,” Tony remarks.

The overall height of the house has been minimised by building four bedrooms and three bathrooms into the roof – creating high vaulted spaces where the oak framing may be fully displayed and enjoyed.

“We definitely wanted more room downstairs than we did upstairs, so this was the perfect solution,” explains



Tony. “There was easily enough space for six bedrooms, but we preferred the idea of four generous-sized rooms – one of which doubles as a home cinema.”

Armed with some sketches, the couple then spent the next few months talking to neighbours and councillors to glean their reactions, and found that the majority of people were extremely positive and happy to be consulted. With no objections lodged their design went on to be granted planning permission, and building work started soon after in January 2006.

Tony and Liz continued to live in the house next-door, which meant that Tony was able to oversee the build. ➔



Liz on... **finishes**

“Seeing the quality of the finishes and the enthusiasm of the various craftsmen who worked on the house was extremely satisfying.”

He undertook a great deal of reading and research before work began on site, and his contracted builder gave much useful advice, but he admits that building such a large and complex design proved extremely challenging.

“I was on site every day, and I really don’t know how people manage to organise building projects around full time jobs because it took all of my time and concentration,” he says. “I gave the best part of a year of my life to this house.”

The property has been built on the site of a former garden pond, and test drillings into the clay soil revealed that the new structure would require piled foundations, which were completed by a specialist company. “This was our first major overspend,” recalls Tony.

A local building contractor completed the brick and block ground floor construction, omitting the chimney stack which was built once the Oakwrights’ team had erected the oak frame and fitted the render panels.

“The precision of the manufacturing process meant that everything fitted at exactly the right angle, with pre-drilled holes for the oak pegs,” says Tony. “A couple of the timbers were rejected by the erection team, who inspected every piece as if it were their own house. The benefit of the CAD system was that they could ring up Oakwrights, quote a number, and the replacement would arrive promptly the following morning.”



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Handmade bricks and roof tiles were chosen which echo the colours of older buildings in the neighbourhood, but the complicated and beautiful roof structure proved more expensive to complete than the Holdens had first anticipated.

Internally the double height hallway is a particular feature, with a contemporary staircase of oak and brushed stainless steel rising up to a galleried landing, above which are the exposed oak roof timbers – all of which have been carefully acid-cleaned by Tony.

Building a new oak framed house has enabled the Holdens to conceal all of their lighting, sound and vision cables within the fabric of the building, and the couple have also incorporated a ventilation and heat recovery system. Radiators were installed in the first floor rooms with underfloor heating laid throughout the ground floor.

All of the bespoke oak joinery – including skirtings, windows and doors – was produced by a local joinery ➔

Apricot white paint has been used throughout the house, and emphasises the soaring oak timbers in the vaulted master bedroom. The painted tongue and groove boarding in the family bathroom was inspired by time spent in New England.

Framed in Oak

Contacts

DESIGN & FRAME

Oakwrights 01432 353353,
www.oakwrights.co.uk

EARTHWORKS &

DRAINAGE Richard

Knight 01256 324588

FOUNDATIONS Abbey

Pynford Ltd 0870 085 8400

BRICKWORK/STUDWORK

Stenmarc Developments

01256 882819

PATIO Garden Solutions

07768 105488

JOINERY WORK Mike

Brookfield 01256 324672

ROOF TILING Duncan

King 07770 886516

PLUMBING CKS Plumbing

& Heating 01256 466767

SANITARYWARE

Littlejohn Bathrooms Ltd

01730 231050

PLASTERING T. Byrne

Plastering Ltd 01256 357022

ELECTRICS Able 2

Electrical: 0118 9979 1079

GLAZING Glass Centre Ltd

01256 353515

NETWORKING Tectone

Ltd 01242 821583

LIGHTING Lightmaster

Ltd 01608 682115

KITCHEN 1 Two 1 Kitchen

Company 01256 842121

HEAT RECOVERY ADM

Systems 01756 701051

ALARM Care Guard

Security Ltd 01256 477472

OAK FLOORING

The Wood Floor Gallery

0870 766 4117

FIREPLACE Rudloe

Stoneworks

01225 816400

LIMESTONE FLOORS

Indigenous 01993 824200

BRICKS York Handmade

Brick Company Ltd

01347 838881

ROOF TILES Heritage Tiles

01303 268811

DOUGLAS FIR

CLADDING

East Brothers 01794 340270

INTERNAL

SOUNDPROOFING

Acoustiblok Ltd

01622 840289

CAST IRON RAINWATER

GOODS Hargreaves

Foundry 01422 330607

FUSION OAK AND

BRUSHED STEEL

STAIRCASE AND

BALUSTRADES Richard

Burbridge Ltd 01691 655131

OUTDOOR PAVING

Miles Stone Ltd

023 8061 3178



company, and luxurious limestone flooring runs throughout the kitchen, dining room and sunroom.

Liz took responsibility for much of the interior design, choosing flooring and sanitaryware and planning the kitchen, which includes details such as a window seat with built-in storage specifically designed for the grandchildren's toys.

"Our friends were stunned when they realised we were trading our listed thatched cottage for such an open plan and contemporary new home," she says.



"It really is a total contrast, but we're certain we've made the right decision. It was time to move on and experience a different lifestyle, and we still have all the charm and character of an oak framed building but without any of the attendant draughts!"

THE BOTTOM LINE

Tony and Liz already owned their garden plot, valued at approximately £250,000, and spent £540,000 building the 293m² house, which is currently valued at £950,000.

Ground floor



First floor



THE FLOORPLAN

A double height entrance hallway opens into the open plan kitchen/dining room with the sunroom beyond. There's a winter sitting room, a separate study, a WC, utility room and walk-in pantry on the ground floor, with four bedrooms, two en suites, a dressing room and family bathroom upstairs.

SPOTLIGHT

WHAT WAS THE HIGH POINT OF THE PROJECT?

Seeing the quality of the finishes and the enthusiasm of the various craftsmen who worked on the house was extremely satisfying.

...AND THE LOW POINT?

Acting as labourer on site and man-handling materials was exhausting, and by the end I was very, very tired, but we managed to complete the house in just nine months – something which our tradesmen had thought couldn't be done.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WISH YOU'D DONE DIFFERENTLY?

The house has significantly exceeded our expectations, although had the plot allowed we would probably have widened the floorplan slightly which would have given us a bigger utility room.

WHAT WAS YOUR BEST BUY?

We met a supplier at one of the self build shows who was able to provide our creamy Jerusalem Gold limestone flooring at less than half the usual price. We needed 160m² of large format tiles, and he only just had enough for a one-off purchase, but it was exactly the colour we wanted.

AND YOUR BIGGEST EXTRAVAGANCE?

The technology was expensive, and the lighting design was costly, but illuminating the oak frame correctly creates a really magical effect and really brings the house alive.