

Cliffhanger

Our Home of Year is more than just a spectacular design — Glyn and Jane Martin's contemporary, eco-friendly new house is entirely at one with the landscape, and was a true family affair, with everyone pitching in to lend a hand

Words: Debbie Jeffery Photography: Nigel Rigden

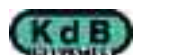


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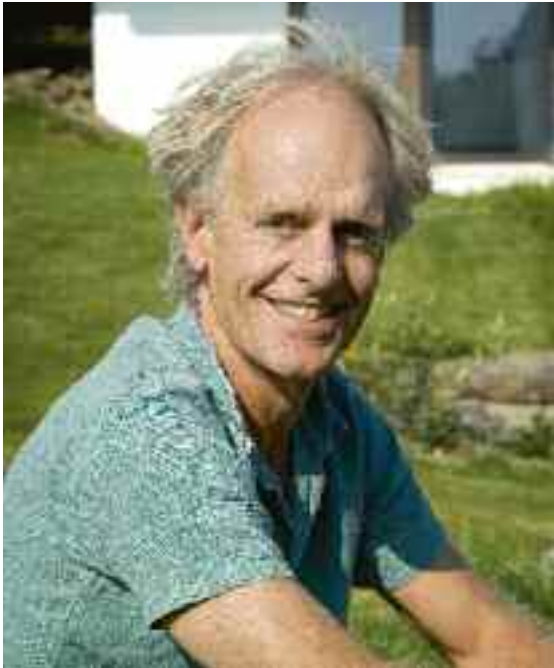
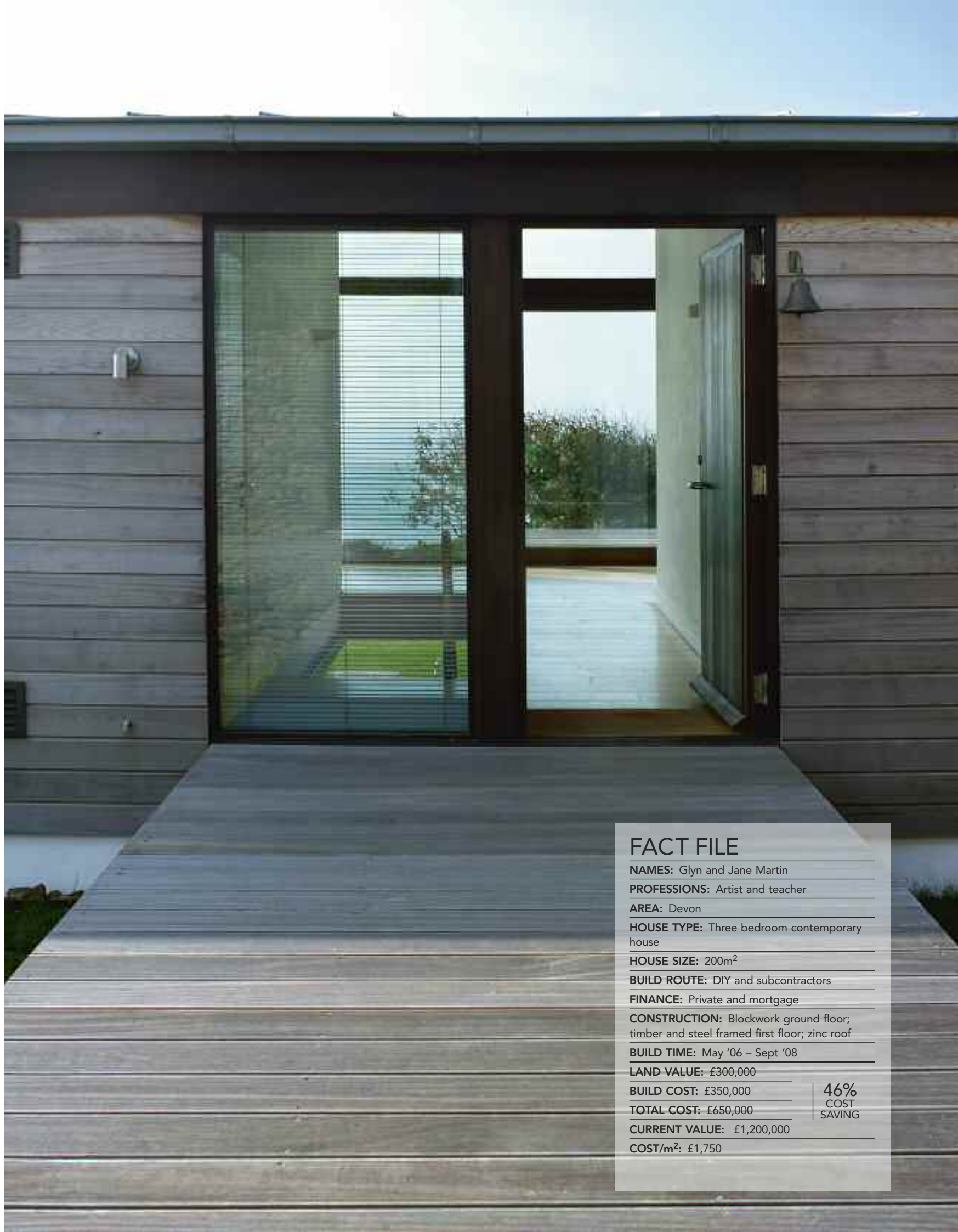
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ABOVE AND OPPOSITE:
Seacombe stands alone in
open countryside and is
embedded into the hillside —
appearing single storey from
the driveway, where a bridge
leads across to the cedar-clad
rear entrance. Glyn (LEFT) and
his wife, Jane, commissioned
their architect daughter,
Annie, to design the structure

For Annie Martin and her younger brothers, Will and Joe, Seacombe will always hold fond memories of childhood holidays and long, hot summers spent playing on the nearby beach. Back then, however, their parents’ seaside holiday home in East Portlemouth, Devon, was little more than a timber shack with a corrugated tin roof and absolutely no mod cons — a far cry from its newly built successor.

Glyn and Jane Martin were initially attracted to the property’s totally secluded setting and the incredible sea views which may be enjoyed from its elevated 1.5-acre site. Accessed by an unassuming stone track off the lane between East Prawle and East Portlemouth it stands above sandy Seacombe beach in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with spectacular coastal scenery spreading out below.

“We loved spending time at the house, despite the fact that it was literally falling down, with just a

FACT FILE

NAMES: Glyn and Jane Martin	
PROFESSIONS: Artist and teacher	
AREA: Devon	
HOUSE TYPE: Three bedroom contemporary house	
HOUSE SIZE: 200m ²	
BUILD ROUTE: DIY and subcontractors	
FINANCE: Private and mortgage	
CONSTRUCTION: Blockwork ground floor; timber and steel framed first floor; zinc roof	
BUILD TIME: May '06 – Sept '08	
LAND VALUE: £300,000	
BUILD COST: £350,000	
TOTAL COST: £650,000	
CURRENT VALUE: £1,200,000	
COST/m ² : £1,750	

46%
COST
SAVING



generator for electricity, gas lighting, no phone and rotten floors,” Annie, now 31, recalls. “My parents originally bought it at auction more than 20 years ago, and over time we extended the 1930s chalet and did it up on a DIY basis.”

Years passed, and when Annie qualified as an architect the family began to consider the possibility of replacing their old single storey holiday home with a new dwelling, specifically designed to take full advantage of the south-facing panoramic views and to provide more comfortable accommodation.

ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: The ground floor has been constructed in rendered blockwork with a cedar-clad timber framed first floor and large areas of south-facing glazing

In order to reduce the impact of the new two storey building it has been positioned further back on the site and the ground floor was excavated into an existing steep bank. The garage is constructed so that its planted roof is a continuation of the boundary bank — ensuring that the house only comes into view from the track near the entrance gate.

From the north and west it appears to be a modest bungalow, accessed from the driveway by crossing a timber bridge to the cedar-clad entrance. Walk inside, ►

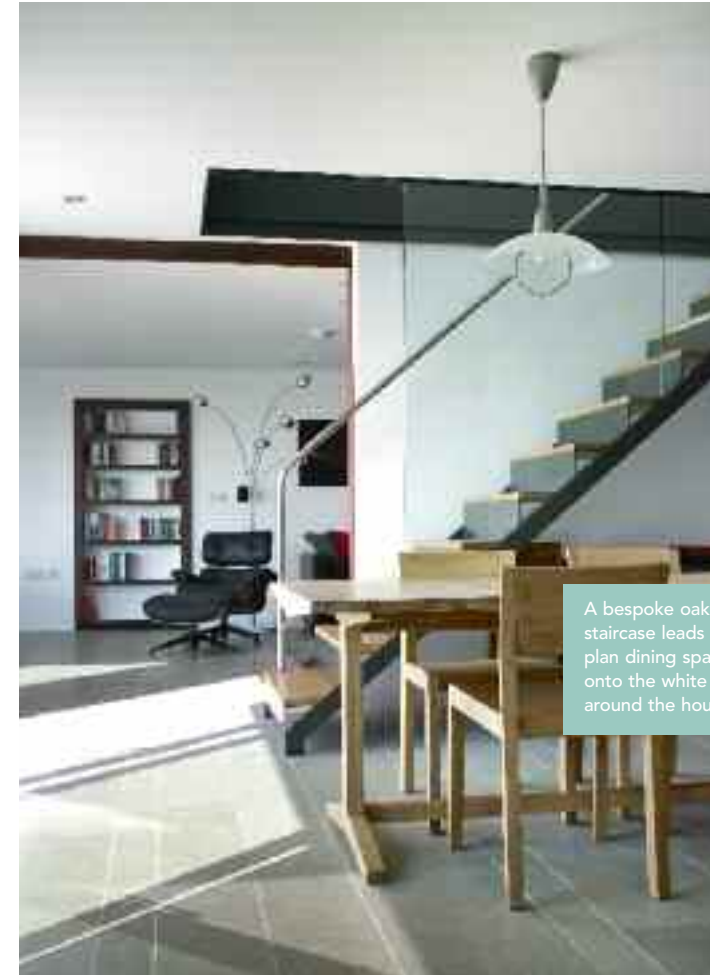
“We wanted to reference the original building, such as with the timber boarding”

“With no near neighbours we hoped the planners would allow us to build something contemporary,” explains Jane, “but we’re surrounded by National Trust land and there was a covenant which restricted the height of the property, so there were numerous hurdles to overcome before our plans were finally approved after about a year of negotiations.”

Why it Won

It wasn’t just the site that swayed the judges — spectacular though it was. Any old house wouldn’t have made such perfect use of this unique and awe-inspiring setting so the plaudits have to go to the architect — Glyn and Jane’s daughter Annie. Getting coastal homes right isn’t easy — the traditional design solution is to go for an ‘upside-down’ layout but this usually sacrifices the bedrooms to be small, poky and dark. Here, every room feels like it’s outside and it’s something that works with the site rather than railing against it. This wasn’t simply a spectacular design on an awesome site, but a real gritty self-build story, and a family affair at that. Glyn and Jane spent many hard days on site themselves and that mix of contemporary craft, sustainability and DIY work is very rare, especially in a design of this quality. We also got the distinct impression that this is a home that would be as cosy in winter as it would be serene on summer nights. We don’t know why Glyn and Jane should feel luckier — having a house like this to use when they feel like it or an architect like Annie on tap!





A bespoke oak, steel and glass folded staircase leads down into the open plan dining space, casting rainbows onto the white walls as the sun tracks around the house



“Our plans were finally approved after about a year of negotiations”

however, and the true nature of the house reveals itself, with huge windows and glazed balconies offering stunning sea views.

Three bedrooms are located on the first floor with two en suites and a family bathroom, which take full advantage of the elevated view. The two main bedrooms both have recessed balconies, which provide sheltered external areas as well as helping to reduce the apparent weight of the first floor by cutting away the corners.

An oak staircase leads downstairs from the main entrance to the spacious living area and a large private walled garden beyond. Finishes are luxurious, with oak and limestone floors, underfloor heating and an air purification system. There's wi-fi throughout, a bespoke kitchen and a state-of-the-art cinema concealed behind a wheeled 'bookcase' door.

“My brothers insisted on a cinema as part of the brief, and we liked the idea of building it within a secret room because the old bungalow had a bedroom extension which could be accessed through a doorway



Made to a bespoke design from solid fumed oak, with black African granite work surfaces, the open plan kitchen benefits from a walk-in larder



hidden inside a cupboard,” says Annie. “We wanted to keep some references to the original building, such as the external timber boarding, and to choose materials which would be in sympathy with the site.”

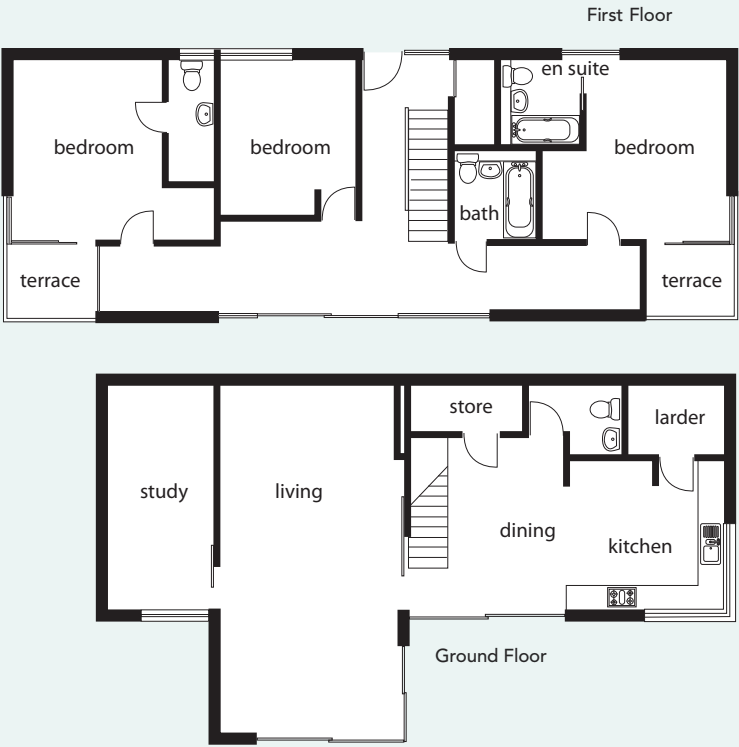
The ground floor of the new building is embedded into the bank and has been constructed in solid rendered masonry, with the first floor structure in steel and timber, clad with untreated horizontal cedar boarding. Large areas of glazing are restricted to the south façade and durable zinc was chosen for the monopitch roof which will weather to an inconspicuous matt grey.

“My partner, Mark, is a carpenter who worked full-time on site during the build, so we decided to move into the old timber bungalow and lived there for 18 months while the new house was completed,” recalls Annie. “It wasn’t too bad during the summer, but in the winter it became really cold and damp, and we were glad to move out in the end.”



Linking to the Landscape

On the ground floor, a striking contemporary staircase with a glass wall leads down to the open plan kitchen/dining room and neighbouring living room, where a bookcase door reveals the secret cinema. Doors from the kitchen/dining room open into a larder, WC and store to the rear of the house. A bridge leads to the first floor entrance, where three bedrooms, two en suites and a family bathroom are located. The spacious landing area acts as a suntrap conservatory leading out onto a terrace, with steps down to the garden, and two of the bedrooms have their own covered balconies



The double bed in the master bedroom was custom made and enjoys panoramic views and sunrises through full-height glazing which opens onto a sheltered balcony



Jane and Glyn purchased a caravan so that they too could stay on site and be involved in the build process, with Jane taking a year out from teaching in a further education college. Building was largely completed on a DIY basis with subcontractors used to excavate the site, erect the steel frame and clad the roof with zinc. A glazier, electrician and plumber were also employed.

“As children we’d helped to do up the old bungalow, painting windows and getting involved, and here we were all working together again on its replacement,” says Annie. “In summer it was fantastic to be outdoors in such a beautiful setting, but winter was a very different story in such an exposed location, and the weather could be quite wild.”

ABOVE: A sliding partition (not shown) divides the living room from the dining kitchen; the Iberian limestone flooring is continued outside
RIGHT: The dark-grey cinema room is concealed behind a secret door in the main living space (the handle positioned in a fake book, with an appropriate title) and has been furnished with comfortable seating, a 106” screen with surround sound and a high-definition projector



“The ground floor is largely underground which helps to keep it at a constant temperature throughout the year”

Access onto the site was also problematic, and at one stage it was left to Annie to drag a stranded Jewson lorry out of the muddy field using a tractor.

Progress was slower than expected, which encouraged Glyn, with help from the rest of the family, to tackle even more of the work — including installing the ground-source heating, tanking the blockwork, plasterboarding, cladding the retaining perimeter walls with stone, landscaping and much more.

Mark undertook the carpentry work while Jane helped out with insulating, applying anti-corrosion agents to the steel, decorating and replanting the garden.

Stone excavated from the site has been recycled and used for garden and garage walling, a ground-source heat pump from Kensa is employed for the underfloor heating and a ventilation heat exchange provides clean, warm air throughout the heavily insulated house.

“I’m particularly pleased with how well the overhanging roof shades the glass in summer, and yet still allows the lower winter sun to warm the rooms,” says Annie. “The ground floor is largely underground, so this also helps to keep the space at a fairly constant temperature throughout the year.”

It was Glyn who ordered many of the materials, negotiating hard for the best possible prices, while Annie obtained quotes from various subcontractors and Jane kept detailed financial records. “There was no designated project manager, we all worked well together,” says Glyn, an artist.



“Annie worked on site on Mondays, and her detailed plans were consulted to solve every issue. We were nervous about working with our daughter on a professional level, but we’ve been highly impressed with her abilities and, if anything, it has strengthened our relationship.”

With the new Seacombe completed the old timber bungalow could finally be demolished in accordance with planning conditions. At last the Martins are able to enjoy the beautiful coastal setting all year round, retreating to the sheltered balconies and first floor landing ‘lookout’ during particularly inclement weather.

Annie has recently given birth to her and Mark’s first baby, Leah, and can already envisage history repeating itself. “It’s lovely to think that Leah will enjoy the same kind of seaside holidays that we did as children, and we will look forward to spending time at Seacombe with the family,” she says. “Building the house has certainly brought us all closer, and it’s been rewarding to think just how much of the work we managed to complete ourselves.” 🏡

USEFUL CONTACTS: Architect [Annie Martin](#): 01626 773813 Steel frame [Torr View Forge](#): 01548 521445 Carpentry [MY Carpenter](#): 01626 773813 Olsen sliding glazed door system [SWS](#): 01777 871847 Zinc roof supply [Rheinzink](#): 01276 686725 Roofing contractor [A&S Roofing System](#): 07976 417245 Ground-source heat pump (supply only) [Kensa Engineering Ltd](#): 01326 377627 Underfloor heating (supply only) [Radiant Heating Solutions](#): 01400 250572 Kitchen, windows, front door [New British Design](#): 01363 777004 Ironmongery [South Western Supplies](#): 01626 333900 Glass [Paignton Glass Works](#): 01803 558096 Heat exchange ventilation system [Vent-Axia](#): 0844 856 0590 Structural engineer [Nicholls Basker Partners](#): 01626 776121 Sanitaryware [Ideal Standard](#): 01482 346461 Seacombe is available for holiday rental: [seacombe-devon.co.uk](#)



How They Did it



1. The steel frame structure is erected on the foundations.
2. The roof structure takes shape, with timber beams providing support.
3. Glyn and Jane spent the best part of two years on site, handling much of the labour themselves.
4. The new house begins to overshadow the existing bungalow.
5. The existing bungalow is then knocked down and the space is used for the extensive patio.
6. Glyn laid the stone wall himself, following it round to the garage (see large image above).