

landscape DESIGN

Melissa Brooks and James Warner's new home is designed to have minimal impact on its beautiful and secluded site within Dartmoor National Park ▶

SELF-BUILD | DEVON | JUL 11 - DEC 12 | SIZE: 240M²
PLOT VALUE: £200,000 | BUILD COST: £500,000 (£2,083/M²) | VALUE: £800,000

WORDS: DEBBIE JEFFERY | PHOTOGRAPHY: NIGEL RIGDEN

Exterior

At entrance level, the house appears to be single storey, and has a decked seating area, sheltered beneath the oversailing roof. (The rear reveals a different view, with a lower ground floor - housing the bedrooms - built into the hillside.) Granite walling lends an air of solidity to the moorland home





South Elevation

Standing on an elevated site, the new house has been partially buried into the hillside and is framed with granite-clad walls to reduce its impact. The garden – previously a muddy field – now features a small pond and cultivated lawn



Open Plan Living

The open plan living, kitchen and dining space at entrance level is divided into zones thanks to the clever placing of furniture. Corner sliding doors (from Olsen UK) in the dining area open completely to the raised terrace, creating an indoor/outdoor feel during meal times, while glazing in the living space continues James and Melissa's moorland views



Kitchen

The open plan kitchen benefits from a separate pantry and utility room. Cabinets were designed and made by Ben Huggins, including a large central island with an oak counter and plinth-level lighting



Living Area

Melissa has a large collection of books which is now housed in a purpose-made, double-sided oak bookcase that wraps around the living area. A woodburning stove and wood store have been inset into the granite-clad wall





Thoughtful Details

Beautifully crafted, the suspended steel staircase is clad in oak and appears to float up to the entrance level. Extensive use of full-height glazing provides views to the surrounding countryside from the bedrooms, with access on to a slate terrace. Amtico floor tiles bring an unexpected touch of vibrant colour to the master en suite



Melissa Brooks and her husband, James Warner, didn't have far to travel when they left their much-loved family home to move into the brand new house they had built in their garden — but the two properties could not be more different from one another. One is a rambling Edwardian country pile, complete with associated draughts, endless maintenance and sky-high bills. The other is a compact, contemporary and energy-efficient new build which has been sunk into the hillside to ensure minimal visual impact.

The couple moved from their home in the Cotswolds to live in Devon 22 years ago, purchasing Gledswood House which stands in 13 acres of fields and woodland on the north-eastern edge of Dartmoor. "It was a wonderful family home, but very expensive to run," recalls Melissa.

"When our daughter, Chloe, left home we really needed to scale down to somewhere more manageable, but leaving the area simply wasn't an option."

Fortunately, a solution was close at hand in the form of a small, run-down 1930s bungalow which stood in the grounds of the couple's home. Originally built for the gardener, this property had been rented out in recent years which meant that a planning submission for a replacement dwelling within Dartmoor National Park could legitimately be made.

The couple approached local architect Annie Martin, whom they had known since she was a girl. Impressed



Blending In

When Melissa and James decided to downsize, they were determined to create a home that suited their lifestyle. More importantly, they wanted a building that was at home in its environment

by Annie's other award-winning projects, Melissa and James met with her to discuss their brief for a more modestly scaled, contemporary home, which would feel both open and light.

"We're in our sixties now, and needed somewhere smaller and easier to maintain, with large windows, good access to outdoor space and plenty of storage," explains Melissa of the couple's wishes. "Fitting into the environment was absolutely key, and Annie had great vision and really brought together all of our ideas into one fantastic design."

It was essential that any proposal should be sensitive to the surrounding landscape, while embracing the tranquil country views from the elevated site. Lengthy negotiations with Dartmoor National Park followed — which included employing a planning consultant and producing artist's impressions — and planning permission for a replacement dwelling was granted in May 2010.

A detailed tender package was then created and a main contractor appointed to undertake the project through a JCT Minor Works Contract. Annie Martin took on the role of contract administrator, working closely with James, Melissa and the contractors.

Access to the rural site along narrow lanes proved awkward, however, for large vehicles, and the builder encountered rock during the extensive excavation process — as well as enduring harsh weather conditions while building on the moor through the winter months.

Bedrooms and bathrooms on the ground floor are mainly below ground level, and this element of the house was constructed with concrete and blockwork retaining walls. In contrast, the top floor living space was formed with a more lightweight steel and timber frame.

Many of the materials have been chosen for their durability and sustainable nature: low-maintenance aluminium windows and sliding doors from Olsen UK, granite stone walling, a zinc roof and sustainably sourced cedar cladding. Both structural and cladding materials (excluding the zinc roof) were non-specialist and could be completed by the main contractor, which was beneficial to both the build time and the budget.

A host of energy-saving and generating measures have also been introduced to the house. The roof and timber frame walls are heavily insulated beyond Building Regulations requirements, and as the lower ground floor is predominantly underground, the temperature is regulated all year round with the fully glazed south-west façade bringing in natural light, solar gain and ventilation. As the ground floor is cantilevered over ▶

Melissa & James's Suppliers

Architect	Annie Martin	.....	anniemartin.co.uk	01647 272839
Builder	RM Builders & Contractors	.....		01822 610509
Consulting engineer	John Grimes Partnership	.....		01752 690533
Landscaping	Green Earth Landscape	.....		01803 866635
Kitchen and bookcase	Ben Huggins	.....	newbritishdesign.com	
Underfloor heating	Continental	.....		0845 108 7001
Tiles	Amtico	.....	amtico.com	
Sanitaryware	Ideal Standard	.....		01482 346461
Lighting	Amos Lighting	.....		01392 677030
Air-source heat pump	Danfoss	.....	danfoss.com	
Blinds	Inside Spaces	.....		01395 222525
Heat store	Akvaterm	.....	akvaterm.fi	
Zinc roof	Rheinzink	.....		01276 686725
Sliding doors and windows	Olsen UK	.....		01777 874510
Solar panels	Viessmann	.....		01952 675000
Solar panels, air-source heat pump and heat store installation	Atlantic Renewable Energy	.....		01548 857768
Ventilation and heat recovery system	Nuaire	.....		029 2088 5911
Aquatherm woodburner	Stoves Online	.....		0845 226 5754
Boiling water tap	Zip Heaters (UK)	.....		0845 600 5005

"It was essential that any proposal should be sensitive to the surrounding landscape"

the lower ground floor glazing, this provides shading for the bedrooms during high summer, and helps keep the rooms feeling cool and inviting.

A mechanical ventilation heat recovery system introduces clean, warm air throughout the house, and the underfloor heating and hot water are fed by a 1,000-litre cylinder which is heated by either the woodburning stove, air-source heat pump or roof-mounted hot water solar panels, depending on outside conditions. Water for the property is provided via a borehole (with ultraviolet treatment), foul drainage is taken to a new septic tank on site, and surface water from the roof is collected and used for the WCs, dishwasher and washing machine.

"We did a lot of research into these technologies," states Melissa. "Our old house was heated by an expensive oil-fired Aga, which we don't miss at all because this house is just so warm."

It's all a far cry from Melissa and James' previous high-maintenance home. "It was always going to be a difficult house to leave, and I was adamant that I would only move into the new house if I really loved it," concludes Melissa. It is testament to Annie Martin's thoughtful design that, despite their high expectations, the couple are now happily ensconced in their newly completed home, and sent a note to her stating: "We wanted to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for creating this truly gorgeous home for us. We so love it." ■

What We've Learned

What surprised you most about this project?

We managed to stick to our original budget, thanks to Annie — although we did spend more on building a separate garage.

What was your best buy?

The beautiful natural materials — granite, slate, cedar and oak — because they blend so well with the surroundings.

What is your favourite feature of the house?

The bespoke kitchen cabinets and bookcase were luxuries, but they are our principal pieces of furniture, so we were happy to invest in them. Really, the whole house has turned out better than we ever expected.

Did you find anything surprisingly easy?

The lighting could have been an issue — with the high ceilings and open plan layout — but it was carefully designed.

Is there anything you would change?

We're gradually introducing splashes of colour to the house, although it's very toned down compared to our previous home.

What advice would you pass on to others?

Find an architect who listens to what you want and then go for it! We had weekly meetings with Annie, who was extremely thorough on every detail. We wish we'd built this house five years ago; we dithered for a long time.

CONSIDERED DESIGN

The design of James and Melissa's new home was inspired by the natural contours of their site, which was previously part of a field and attracts a multitude of wildlife and birds. The sloping ground adjacent to the new house remains unchanged, giving the opportunity to conceal the building, and a gravel track branching off the existing drive follows the contour of the sloping ground.

From the parking and drop-off point, the house appears to be a single storey building reminiscent of a discreet agricultural barn. Untreated cedar-clad walls help to reduce its visual impact and the simple, pre-weathered zinc roof echoes the grey shades of local granite and slate which feature so prominently in the design.

The entrance and sliding glazed doors to the south-east are set back to provide

weather protection and to further reduce the apparent weight of the top floor.

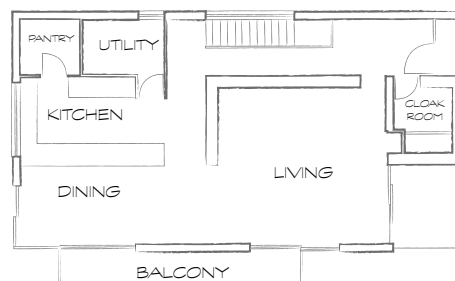
A granite-walled cloakroom defines the entrance, and grounds the building by linking it to the granite-clad retaining walls below. These two sloping retaining walls enclose a levelled grass area, and allow the lower ground floor bedrooms and study to enjoy easy access to the garden. The walls also provide a clear division between the cultivated lawned area and the surrounding landscape, which has been retained as natural grassland.

The largely glazed façade of the lower ground floor is set back by a metre to the south-west to provide solar shading and to lessen its visual impact. The house is obscured from the north-east by trees and connects completely with its moorland setting.

Floorplans

The reverse-level house has been partially buried into the existing hillside, with bedrooms opening on to a private slate terrace through walls of sliding glass doors. Upstairs, the open plan kitchen, dining and living space enjoys far-reaching views across rolling fields, and opens on to sheltered seating areas at either end of the building. A useful pantry and utility room are tucked behind the kitchen to the north and the cloakroom is encased in granite-clad walls.

GROUND FLOOR



LOWER GROUND FLOOR

