



LOUNGE, DINING ROOM AND KITCHEN ARE COMBINED, IDEAL FOR ENTERTAINING



LAURIE AND HEIDI UPSHON

Before they applied for planning permission to build on their plot – a chunk of what had been Laurie and Heidi Upshon's back garden – they knew their neighbours in the Cotswold location wouldn't appreciate a sprawling home or a third floor towering over them. So to get the space they wanted, they dug downwards.

Laurie and Heidi had moved into a period property with a huge garden in 2002 and loved the old house. But simply managing the garden with its productive vegetable plot and fruit trees was becoming a chore by 2008 and the couple decided they'd look at a low-maintenance lifestyle.

The plot wasn't a problem – the huge garden had an overgrown wilderness corner, which cleared, they felt would be ideal and would still

leave their buyers with plenty of garden. So they planned a house they could slot into the space.

However, the Upshons' house had to have a split personality; on the one hand, it needed to be cosy for the couple while providing an office for Laurie and a craft workshop for Heidi, but on the other hand, they wanted space for the occasions when their children and grandchildren descended upon them.

It certainly meant cramming a lot into a house with only a 110m² footprint. The answer was to build downwards. Houses with basements are commonplace in Heidi's native Austria, and indeed across mainland Europe, so Heidi had no doubts it could be achieved. All they needed was a builder they could trust to do the work.

"We're by no means tree-hugging greens," Heidi told *Selfbuilder & Homemaker*. "But we wanted a simple and low-cost lifestyle and from what we could see, a pre-engineered, timber-framed home was the way to go."

The Upshons looked at all the suppliers, even visiting a European home show, but eventually narrowed their choice to four potential companies: "We felt it was important to use a supplier with experience of building in the UK because of the need to understand our regulations," said Heidi. "Eventually, we settled on Hanse Haus, simply because they seemed more on the ball." One 'flat pack' home supplier, she said, had even failed to return calls. But that still left the problem of who they'd choose to build the basement.

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HEIDI'S BASEMENT WORKSHOP, COMPLETE WITH 'DAYLIGHT' LIGHTING, IS AN IDEAL PLACE FOR QUIET STUDY

THE OPEN-TREAD OAK STAIRCASE
CONNECTS ALL THREE FLOORS AND
PROVIDES A GALLERY FOR THE UPSHONS' ART

German basement specialists Glatthaar came recommended so they went with the widely experienced company. However, identifying their builders was only the start.

The planning didn't go without a hitch. An early application proposing a very modern home got approval from the planning officers, but the planning committee heard several objections. Rather than appeal the decision, the Upshons modified their plans to a more traditional looking home and reduced the footprint to the current 110m². This time the design was approved, though they also had to pay to have a long-standing covenant on the property removed.

Once planning permission had been granted, the couple had a trip to Germany to select all the interior fittings



The home they planned is on three floors. The basement contains a gym, office, Heidi's craft workshop, a shower room, two storage rooms, a library and a room housing rainwater harvesting pumps, controlled air ventilation system, air-source heat pump and control systems – the home has no mains gas supply.

The ground floor has an impressive open-plan kitchen-diner and living room, an en suite master bedroom and a further WC. An impressive open-tread oak staircase near the front door connects all three floors. Upstairs, four bedrooms – two with en suite – and a family bathroom provide the space for the Upshons' family when they arrive to celebrate special occasions.

Designing the living space alongside Hanse Haus had just been the start. Once planning permission had been granted, the couple had a trip to Germany to select all the interior fittings and decide on everything from door handles to the height of the wall-hung toilets. Laurie and Heidi had almost everything supplied by Hanse Haus with the exception of the kitchen.

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ONLY THE KITCHEN WAS SOURCED IN THE UK – THE REST OF THE FITTINGS WERE SELECTED IN GERMANY BEFORE THE HOUSE WAS BUILT



cutting it in the cotswolds

Squeezing a 270 square metre house on to a 600 square metre plot left Laurie and Heidi Upshon with only one option...

Words and pictures: Mark Williams



ALL SANITARYWARE WAS SELECTED AT HANSE HAUS BEFORE THE BUILD BEGAN

PLENTY OF LIGHT FLOODS THE STAIRWELL



THE MULTI-FUEL STOVE HAS BEEN LIT JUST ONCE: "IT GOT SO HOT IN HERE, WE HAD TO OPEN THE WINDOWS," SAYS HEIDI

The house is exactly what we wanted

– Laurie Upshon

The groundworks were fairly complex. In addition to digging the huge pit in which the basement would sit when delivered, the Upshons had to have sewerage for a pumped sewage system installed, and have the two 5,000 litre rain-water tanks sunk into the ground. The plans allowed a gap of about a metre around the basement walls, which would be covered by eco-friendly, wood-plastic decking at the rear with grated light wells to take some natural light down to the basement.

The basement was installed quickly when it arrived, and covered with the slab, which would eventually take the house itself four weeks later. Although the engineered structural insulated panels that would form the walls, the staircase, the doors and all the timber structure arrived from Germany on one truck, the Upshons' narrow driveway meant Hanse Haus had to park at a nearby services and transfer them on to smaller lorries.

The build was completed in 10 weeks and the Upshons were ready to move in when a problem surfaced; the basement had sprung a leak: "We cannot fault Glatthaar," said Laurie. "As soon as the problem was discovered, they gave it their full attention and constantly reassured us that they would remedy it. It necessitated the entire basement being dug out again and re-tanked."

The work lasted several months: "We spoke to the MD at Glatthaar, who said he'd worried right through Christmas about us. He genuinely meant it."



THE STOCK OF LOGS MAY LAST A WHILE – SO FAR, THE NEAR-PASSIVHAUS HOME HASN'T NEEDED HEATING

The basement restored, the decking was then rebuilt by German craftsmen from new material, despite the fact that the original material had been saved.

Outside, Laurie and Heidi have a modest garden with minimum borders to reduce the workload. An outhouse includes a substantial log store to feed the contemporary log burner the Upshons had installed in the main living room.

"The log stove meant we had to have a chimney installed through the middle of the house and to be honest, that led to a small compromise on the first floor," said Laurie. "But other than that, the house is exactly what we wanted."

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THE WINDOWS HAVE SNAP-ON FLYSCREENS SO THE UPSHONS CAN LET THE SUMMER INTO THE LIVING ROOM



THE UPSHONS SELECTED GALVANISED GUTTERING. THE GRATING IN THE DECKING IS OVER THE LIGHT TUNNELS TO THE BASEMENT

The house is really lovely and warm (and not drafty) even through the cold winter months – Heidi Upshon



WOOD FLOORING FEATURES THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE AND SITS ATOP UNDERFLOOR HEATING POWERED BY AN AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP

It's too early to tell whether the house will achieve all the Upshons' aims in keeping their energy bills low but it scores very close to Passivhaus standards. It has underfloor heating in every room, powered by the air-source heat pump and two solar water panels on the roof, coupled with 4kWh of photovoltaic panels producing electricity at feed-in tariff rates.

In common with many Passivhaus designs, the house is designed to be kept air-tight – a com-

plete opposite to their old home, which leaked its heat like a sieve. To avoid problems with stale air and humidity, the house has a controlled air ventilation system that extracts stale air and allows just enough fresh air to 'bleed' back into the building to maintain a comfortable temperature.

"The house is really lovely and warm (and not drafty) even through the cold winter months," said Heidi. "We did light our woodburning

stove just once when we first moved in but it quickly became too hot and we found ourselves opening the windows."

Indeed, the Upshons doubt that the underfloor heating on the ground and first floors will get much use, although the chillier basement may need it in cold weather.

The rainwater recycling has already impressed Laurie and Heidi. It's currently plumbed to the toilets but the washing machine, which resides with the system's controls and pump, will also be used with softer rainwater in due course.

Since they've moved in and sold their old house next door, Laurie and Heidi have added their own refinements. For example, the low light levels in the basement needed supplementing for Heidi's craft workshop, where she creates gorgeous stained glass among other art for the house, so a daylight-balanced strip light has been installed so that she not only ensures the colours of her work show true, but she can avoid SAD (seasonal affective disorder) in the long winter months!

Laurie and Heidi both say the decision to embark on the project, despite taking over two years to reach fruition, was worthwhile. The house, say the Upshons, is truly all theirs and matches their lifestyle perfectly, something that can seem impossible even when buying a house from a developer.

project costs

Overall cost of project: £428,000

Value of property now: circa £650,000

What was the high point of the project?

"The high point was when the first panels of the new house arrived. It was astonishing to see how fast the build moved forward, and all our friends and neighbours stood together watching the house being erected," said Heidi.

The low point was: "When we found the leak in the basement, and knowing that, having seen the house complete including the decking, we'd be back to walking around it on scaffolding planks."

Contacts

- Turnkey home: Hanse Haus www.hanse-haus.co.uk
- Kitchen: Mayflower Kitchens www.mayflowergroupuk.co.uk
- Log stove: Nibe Contura from Hagley Stoves www.nibe.co.uk www.hagleystoves.co.uk
- Flat rooflight: IonGlass www.ionglass.co.uk
- Rainwater harvesting tanks: Rewatec www.rewatec.co.uk
- Sewage and pumping systems: Direct Pumps and Tanks www.directpumpsandtanks.co.uk