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SAME PLOT NEW LIFE

Tom and Jayne Ogilvie loved where they lived, but it had become impractical for the needs of their young family. The solution was to build a space rich, eco-friendly house in its place

WORDS **AILEEN O'BRIEN** PHOTOS **RICHARD GADSBY**



THE OGILVIE FILE

NAMES Tom & Jayne Ogilvie
OCCUPATIONS MD of a manufacturing company & maths teacher
LOCATION Thurlaston, Warwickshire
TYPE OF BUILD Self build
STYLE Contemporary
CONSTRUCTION METHOD Timber frame
PLOT SIZE 0.33 acres
LAND COST £225,000 in 1997
HOUSE SIZE 300m² (3,230ft²)
BUILD COST £541,500
COST PER M² £1,805 (£168 per ft²)
TOTAL COST £766,500
BUILDING WORK COMMENCED March 2011
BUILDING WORK TOOK Nine months
CURRENT VALUE £950,000

While Tom and Jayne Ogilvie didn't exactly fall in love with the first house they bought together as a newly married couple in 1997, they were enamoured with its location. "It's in a beautiful village in rural Warwickshire, with views for miles over open countryside," says Tom. "We also liked the fact that it's right on the edge of Draycote Water, which is a big reservoir. We had both lived near the coast as children – Jayne is from Port Talbot and I grew up in Southport – so being near water was a bonus for us."





At the time, Tom was living in Cambridge while Jayne was in London. “We were looking in that area because my parents lived nearby and I was starting a new job with the family company,” he says. “We got married and bought the house all within the space of a few months. Neither of us had ever owned a property before.”

While the location was stunning, the building itself was another matter, and was clearly a bit of a project. “It was a rather odd house, a prefabricated Swedish log cabin that had been architect-designed in the 1960s,” says Tom. “We bought it knowing it needed a lot of work.”

But it wasn't until a decade later, after the birth of their three sons, Fred (13), Hari (11) and Tommy (9) that the Ogilvies realised they'd outgrown their home, and started thinking about extending. “We did quite a lot of work trying to figure out how to modernise it, and tried everything short of knocking it down before we concluded that was all we could do,” says Tom. “Both Jayne and I were keen on the idea of building something ourselves.”

A preference for prefab

Having decided to self build on their existing plot, the speed and efficiency of prefabrication was very appealing. “We live in a private road of seven houses and I didn't want to impose too much on the neighbours with a project that could take years,” says Tom, who runs a manufacturing company making roof lights. “I also wanted to build an energy-efficient house.”

During a visit to a self build show in 2009, Tom and Lynda saw a stand for Stommel Haus and were immediately impressed with the German company's bespoke timber houses, which are made from polar spruce. “On the Stommel stand was a model showing a cross-



A five-metre-long run of folding glass doors opens up the dining area to the garden. At first, package builders Stommel Haus said that the feature wouldn't work structurally, but the firm eventually found a way to incorporate it



The Howdens kitchen, with its simple units and wraparound timber worktops, chimes well with the pared-down aesthetic of the house. Deep drawers replace cupboards in the run along the back wall



section of an external wall, which is made of beautiful Scandinavian wood in two layers. I thought it was a lovely way to build a house," says Tom. "The Stommel representative talked about the fact that the wood isn't treated, that it's nicely seasoned and cut the right way. She also discussed their eco-credentials, the levels of air-tightness and insulation that can be achieved and it all just seemed to fall into place." To make sure, the Ogilvies took a trip to Germany to see some houses in situ. "We fell in love with the whole concept," says Tom.

The couple chose the standard Maple design and adapted it to their needs. "We tweaked the internal partitions to achieve what we wanted," explains Tom. "That was open-plan living, three decent bedrooms for the boys – identically sized so there's no arguments – a study for me and enough bathrooms so there isn't a morning queue."

Budgets and finance

Although the Ogilvies didn't need a loan to finance the build, they kept everything pretty much within budget by making savings where they could. When they paid a second visit to Germany to choose their fixtures and fittings – everything from taps and tiles to bathroom suites – they opted mainly for the standard specifications included in the price of the house, rather than upgrading to more expensive designs. However, they also felt that some elements were worth the extra cost, such as the addition of a double-sided feature fireplace to create an attractive focal point, plus a five-metre-long stretch of folding/sliding glass doors, which open up the dining room to the garden. "Originally Stommel Haus said it couldn't do the glass wall because the bedroom and gable roof above it needed to be supported. But for us it was a significant feature that was sacrosanct, and eventually we found a way," says Tom. Apart from the installation of the Howdens kitchen (Stommel Haus doesn't supply kitchens as part of its build package), the biggest additional cost was the building a basement. "We didn't want a loft in the house as we wanted to keep

62 readers' homes

A stone-clad fireplace wall breaks up the space between the living area and the kitchen-diner. Because the house was prefabricated, a hole needed to be cut in the roof to accommodate the stainless-steel flue



the roof open rather than adding a false ceiling," says Tom, "but then we thought, 'Where are we going to put all our stuff, like the camping equipment?' Plus, I'd always wanted a basement."

With the design finalised and the price agreed, the next step was planning permission. The couple had decided to play it safe with the design in the hope that they would get a quick decision. "We bent over backwards to fit within the footprint of the original house," says Tom. "From the roadside it looks quite similar to the old one, but it's much smarter. We may have got away with something much more radical, which I would have liked, but I didn't want to give the planners any excuse to say no."

Saying goodbye

If getting consent was relatively easy, saying farewell to their old family home was not. "We moved out in December 2010 and the demolition started the following March," says Tom. "I remember it was cold and dark, and I'd come back from work to see the gutting of the house that Jayne and I had sort of grown to love. We were living in chaos in a rented house and it was quite a depressing, very emotional time."

The local company that demolished the building and did the groundworks also dug the hole for the basement, which was supplied by German company Glatthaar. "It's a prefabricated basement made of concrete panels, which is then tanked, sealed and insulated. Then the ground slab for the house was laid on top of that," says Tom.

After weeks of preparation and planning, the actual building work was impressively speedy. At the end of August, two cranes arrived on site, along with the lorries from Germany carrying the flat-pack house. The panels already had the double-glazed windows in place

WE LEARNED...

THINK ABOUT ventilation. The only thing we would do differently would be to put in a heat recovery system to provide fresh air without cooling the temperature. With such an air-tight house you need to let it breathe, but the only way to do that is by opening windows, which is a security risk as well as letting out heat. We didn't install ventilation because of the cost and time needed to sort it out. It's our one regret

CONSIDER re-siting your utilities. Instead of paying to have our electricity disconnected and then reconnected we moved the meter from inside the old house to a little hut in the garden. It allowed us to keep electricity on site, so when we wanted to reconnect we just had to run a cable – your contractors can do this for you. We should have done the same with the gas, water and phone, then we wouldn't have been beholden to third parties that don't understand customer service

DON'T FORGET that last-minute changes can have a knock-on effect. For example, the light switch in our downstairs toilet is on the wrong side of the door because we decided to change the way the door was hinged. It's a constant nuisance

KEEP UP the momentum once you've moved in. We still haven't unpacked all the boxes, finished the garden or built a garage. Family life impinges and it's hard to keep up the energy and focus needed to finally complete the house



A wash of paint on all the exposed timber gives a subtle finish to the wood, and works really well against the flashes of bright colour in the bedroom and bathroom. A warm roof means that the design also incorporates some dramatic eaves

and the 350mm-thick timber walls were insulated with Knauf Ecose, which is made from recycled glass. "It was very impressive watching the panels just being dropped into place by the cranes, and the fit was millimetre perfect," says Tom. "After four days, the whole house was up, the roof was on and it was watertight."

The entire build was scheduled for three months, beginning with the first-fix electrics, then the roof insulation, the installation of the underfloor heating and the final fix when the kitchen and bathrooms were fitted, the tiling laid, the decorating completed. Under the meticulous eye of the Stommel project manager, it all ran pretty smoothly despite the odd hiccup. "We had a bit of jiggery-pokery fitting the fireplace, because it involved cutting a hole through the roof for the chimney," says Tom. "We also had a battle with British Gas to get the service reconnected, which meant we overran the schedule by just a couple of weeks. And somehow we also missed fitting smoke detectors in two rooms and couldn't get the building signed off without them, which was a problem because all the wires are run under the floors so we couldn't retrofit them. Luckily, though, we found some wireless devices."

Coming back

The family moved into their new home in mid-December, just in time for Christmas. Downstairs is a big open-plan living space, a study, utility room, TV room, hall and cloakroom, while upstairs is a master bedroom and guest bedroom, both with en suites, plus three good-sized bedrooms and a family bathroom – in short, everything that was on their original wish-list.

Having put all their funds into the build, the Olgivies found that there was not much left in the pot for interior styling. "We just put back the furniture we'd had in storage," says Tom. "It did look a bit tatty in our beautiful clean house, but we'd pretty much spent our money, so we had to live with it. We've gradually added a few bits from Ikea." Rather than leave the timber bare, the interior has been painted with a beeswax wash. "We were going to paint everywhere white, but then we saw this wash in a Stommel house in Germany and thought it was lovely – it shows off the grain of the wood without you feeling that you're living in a sauna," says Tom.

The house's superb insulation and double glazing fulfil Tom's dream of eco-friendly living and he also installed a rainwater harvesting tank, which supplies the toilets and so makes a big saving on water rates. "It's a very low-maintenance house with low running costs," he says. "It's so energy efficient that we turn on the heating for just an hour and a half every morning, and unless it's really cold that's enough to keep it at a nice temperature. We feel a bit smug about that."

For the Olgivies, the most rewarding aspect of their self build is the daily pleasure of living in the house. "In the winter, especially, it's an absolute joy to come home to," says Tom. "It feels very satisfying that we have designed the property we wanted and that everything works as we'd hoped, if not better. I don't know whether it's our 'forever house', but if circumstances don't force us to move we'd be quite happy to stay here. I think it would be an easy house to grow old in."

Useful contacts



PACKAGE BUILD **Stommel Haus** 0800 068 1611 www.stommel-haus.co.uk
 BASEMENT AND FOUNDATION SLAB **Glatthaar** 01932 344454 www.glatthaar.co.uk GROUNDWORKS AND DEMOLITION **Modern Plant Hire**
 01788 565186 www.modernplant.co.uk KITCHEN **Howdens** www.howdens.com

closer look

Design elements of this house...

The chimney and woodburning stove were some of the few 'added extras' that the Olgivies opted for, over and above the standard package of fixtures and fittings offered by Stommel Haus.



However, it's a feature that has had a big impact on the overall look of the carefully-planned interiors. The freestanding chimney wall helps to break up the open-plan space into clearly delineated zones, and because the fire is double-sided, it can be enjoyed from both the living area and the kitchen-diner.

Clad in mottled, textured stone, the partition also serves to create an attractive contrast with the whitewashed finish of the house's timber-panelled walls.

£ TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost %	Cost m ²	Total cost
Package build	74%	£1,333	£400,000
Groundworks	9%	£167	£50,000
Foundations/basement	11%	£193	£58,000
Kitchen	2%	£45	£13,500
Chimney & stove	1%	£20	£6,000
Rainwater harvesting system	1%	£17	£5,000
Fees	2%	£30	£9,000
Grand total			£541,500