



A family affair



Suzie and Andy Scholes have self built a bold and sustainable new property in the heart of the Surrey countryside thanks to the help of a newly qualified civil engineer – their son Tom

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Suzie and Andy Scholes wanted a house that suited how they lived as a family. And, appropriately, self building their remarkable property was a joint effort from various family members – even with Andy spending much of the project 6,000 miles away in Dubai.

Designing large buildings had been Andy's work for decades, and the couple were fed up of living in an inefficient home. "I have a passion for low-energy properties and architecture, and I'd always wanted to construct my own house," he says. "Our previous homes have had a compromise some way, and to build our own home was one way of finding somewhere that suits how we live as a family. It was a long-held ambition – if we could find right plot."

An internet find

In the end, locating the perfect patch of land came down to pure luck. It was important to the couple to find a project that would make the most of its surroundings, and Suzie and Andy were eager to create a home that allowed them to feel a part of the countryside. They sold their old house and, with Andy working in Dubai, Suzie turned to property website Rightmove to find something to invest in. "I didn't find the tired retirement dwelling that we were expecting, but the plot I came across – two acres in the middle of Surrey – was an instant yes," she says.

The land they purchased had a rundown stable block on it, and was positioned within an area of outstanding natural beauty. Their starting point was that they wanted a low-energy, sustainable home; it also needed to sit on the same footprint as the existing structure in



The front of the house features an almost-symmetrical appearance



Sliding glazed doors sit opposite the front door in the entrance hall, allowing a view of the stunning surroundings as soon as you enter the house

The open-plan family kitchen-living area was designed to bring a flavour of Dubai to Surrey



FACT FILE

NAMES Andy & Suzie Scholes

OCCUPATIONS Consulting engineer & management accountant

LOCATION Surrey

TYPE OF PROJECT Self build

STYLE Contemporary

CONSTRUCTION METHOD

Steel frame & blockwork

BUILDING ROUTE

Homeowner project managed

PLOT SIZE 2 acres

LAND COST £750,000

HOUSE SIZE 464m²

PROJECT COST £1,057,050

PROJECT COST PER M² £2,278

TOTAL COST £1,807,050

VAT RECLAIM £12,400

BUILDING WORK COMMENCED

April 2016

BUILDING WORK TOOK

60 weeks

CURRENT VALUE

£2,900,000

“It’s been incredibly special being able to build a house with our son”



A free-standing helical staircase adds drama and architectural interest to the entrance hall

order to meet planning restrictions in the protected countryside location. Maximising rural views was also key: “We wanted an inside-outside house with lots of glazing,” says Andy. “Then, once we knew the building’s shape, the layout flowed from there.”

Years of planning

When they bought the property, it had basic planning permission to convert the stable into a single-storey dwelling, but for Andy this wasn’t enough. “Because of my aspirations for an ultra-efficient home, a conversion project was never going to achieve high enough standards,” he says. Getting more consent to build another floor would have taken time, and ended up hinging on two things: the couple would have to adhere to the permitted footprint to the millimetre; and they’d have to lower the property’s foundations in order to squeeze in an upper storey.



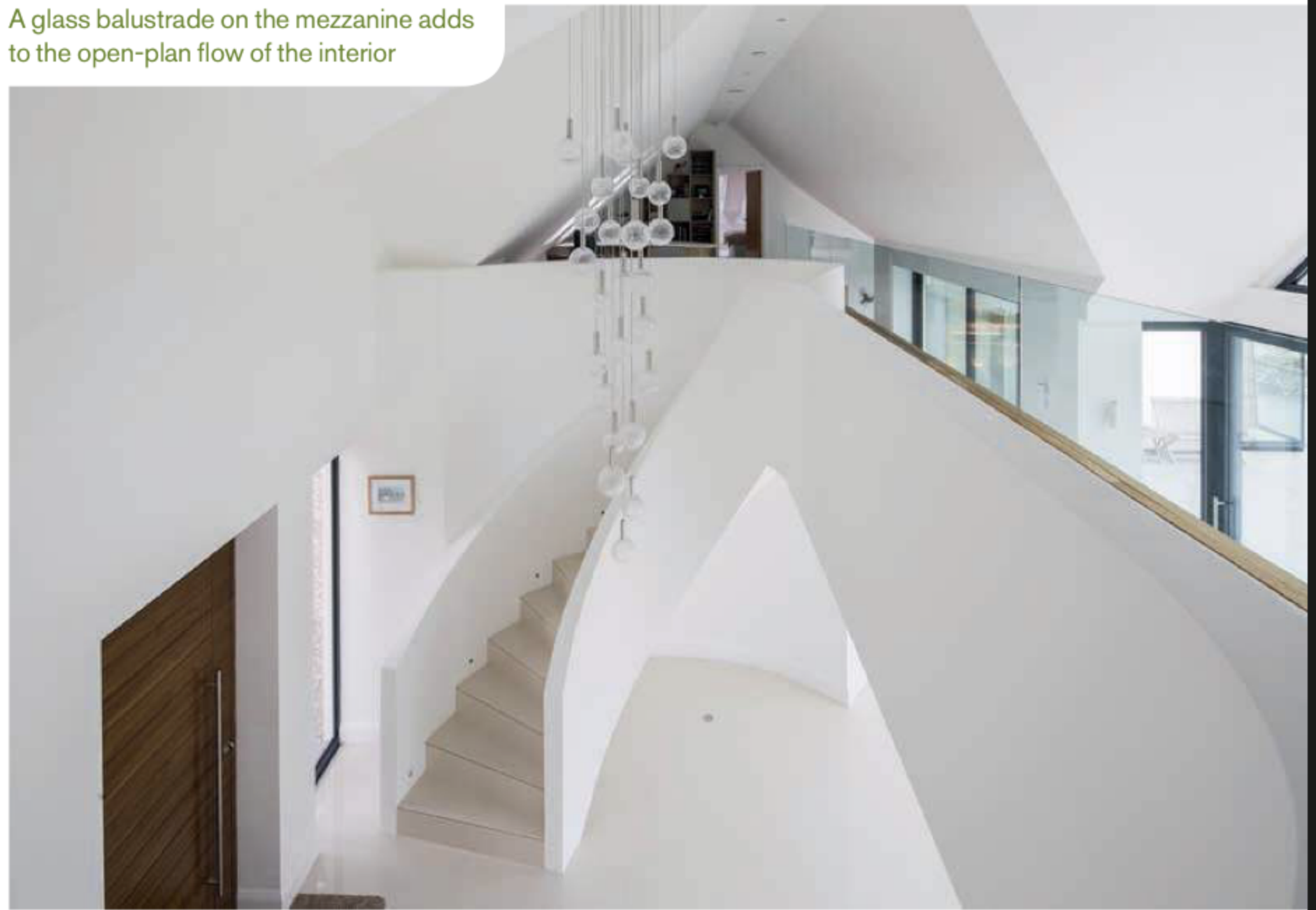
WE LEARNED...

IF YOU WANT to get your proposal approved by the planning department, you must take professional advice and understand the potential concerns around your scheme. We knew that building in an area of outstanding natural beauty would have challenges, so we made sure we conducted the recommended ecological surveys, as the old property had bats.

THINK THROUGH the implications of your grand ideas. The double-height windows in our home's living spaces have automatic blinds, but we didn't bargain for how difficult closing the big curtains in our bedroom would be, for instance.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE how long decorating takes. We did this ourselves, and Suzie was painting desperately to try to keep up with our excellent contractors. These things take time and can be stressful, so make sure to plan ahead.

A glass balustrade on the mezzanine adds to the open-plan flow of the interior



In total, Suzie and Andy spent the best part of three years working with planners from Waverley Council to get their bold ideas approved. This collaborative approach was important in achieving success. "We demonstrated to the authorities that the quality of the stable block was so poor that it was better for all concerned to demolish it and build a new high-quality sustainable dwelling," says Andy. This finally yielded the green light that the couple needed to put their dream plans into action.

Architectural flair

The new house has a U-shaped footprint and features double-height ceilings, an imposing gable and an innovative helical staircase, with a bridge that links both sides of the U. Coming up with the design – with the help of architectural designer Tim Cherrill – was a labour of love for Andy. "We knew how we lived, so the layout was very much

built around that," he says. "I had my own ideas, but as an engineer I tend to think in straight lines, so our designer added some flair, particularly in the entrance hall."

Once they were finally in a position to break ground on the project, funding had to be found. "The finances were difficult because we are ex-pats," Suzie says. In the end, continues Andy, "we found some lenders with help from BuildStore, but they had some fairly stringent conditions. For example, we had to change the method of construction to steel and masonry."

With the concept taking shape, Andy knew that he'd need some help with the engineering aspects of the project. Conveniently, the couple's son Tom was a newly-employed graduate engineer at London firm Davies Maguire, who suggested Andy pitch his plans to the firm's directors. "I must admit I feared it would be quite expensive, but they put a very strong proposition together," says Andy. "Then the director asked if I'd be happy with Tom

working on the project." His involvement became one of the most rewarding aspects of the build for the couple, and the rest of the family pitched in, too. "Tom, my daughter, Tom's girlfriend... they've all lent a hand, and they all use the house if and when we're away. It's a superb place for entertaining," says Andy.

Splitting the workload

The project team was completed by foreman Gordon Stevenson of JRB Construction, who Andy and Suzie cannot speak highly enough of. Gordon ran the site on a day-to-day basis and JRB took on the bulk of the construction work as main contractors.

The couple decided to coordinate several elements of the build themselves, principally the glazing. This was a huge job for them, given the amount of glass in their home. The installation was arranged so that Andy would be on leave and, most importantly,

in the country. The pair say that being there to oversee such a large element of their home being fitted was a great moment.

When it came to innovation, Andy feels that the key is to be systematic. "I always start looking at the passive things," he says. "The facade was important. I know we've got a lot of glass but the insulation was essential. The high-performance solar control glazing prevents overheating." Additionally, two mechanical ventilation heat

engineering, they also connect inside and out, as per the pair's original wish-list. "We've got 3m-high windows and a glazed balustrade across that mezzanine, so you can sit up there and look through the large gable. We get some stunning views from upstairs as well as downstairs," says Suzie. "We're very lucky to have the most magnificent walnut tree, which is framed by the gable window. It's beautiful when it's lit up at night."



Each modern bathroom in the property was fitted out with high quality products

recovery systems, plus underfloor heating, maximise the property's efficiency. There was already a gas supply, so Andy decided on a high-efficiency boiler. He says the alternatives weren't going to be the best fit for them: "We considered ground and air source heat pumps, but when we looked at the payback, it just wasn't worth it."

Cosy & comfortable

The couple carefully designed the layout so that, despite the vast, open-plan spaces and contemporary finish, the house still has a warm and homely feel. For example, their kitchen was inspired by a beautiful painting of Dubai that's close to the couple's heart. "We love it," Suzie says of the space. "The kitchen designer from Farnham Furnishers did a fantastic job of incorporating the artwork – he included it in his renders and used the same colour palette."

The kitchen opens out onto a large family room that the couple love using, and while the staircase and the mezzanine are feats of

Somewhere to entertain

The lighting was another element of the house that Andy and Suzie agonised over. "We spent lots of time researching and finally settled on an automatic system for the interior. The outside illumination was equally important as we have so much glass. A remote system means we can change the ambience very easily. And of course we have solar lights everywhere."

Andy says making his home smart was a huge attraction. "I love the internet of things and the lights, heating, security systems and even the sprinklers can be controlled remotely when I'm away in Dubai." His love of technology adds a luxury touch, too. "We have a more formal sitting room, which has a projector and cinema screen hidden in the roof. That's another of my favourite aspects."

Outside, the couple were careful to ensure the landscaping complemented the surrounding woodland. To the south of the

house lies an impressive formal garden with a large granite terrace, heated pool and outdoor entertaining space, ideal for family parties.

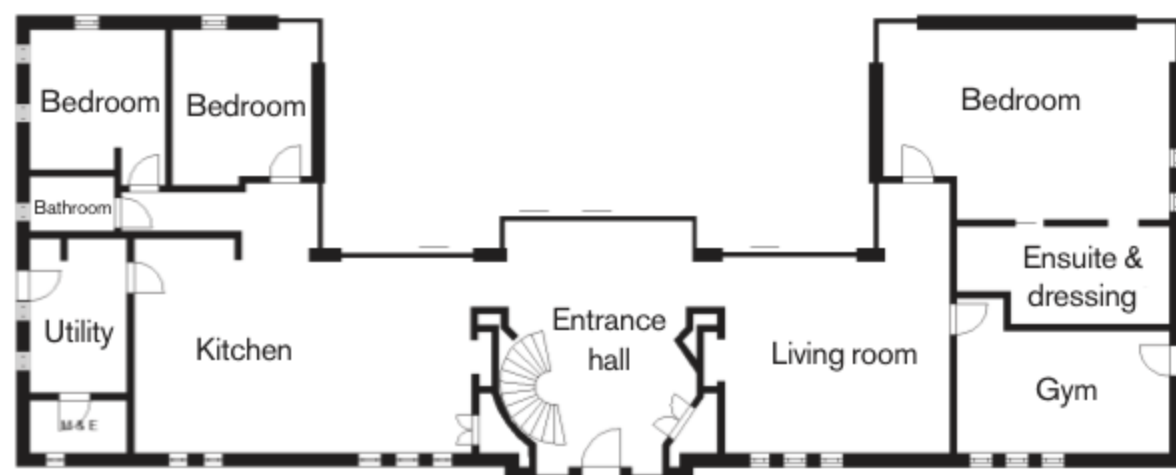
"The quality of the environment is so much better than our old family home, which was draughty, expensive to heat and required lots of maintenance," says Suzie. Andy adds, "It's a very easy home to live in, and I love that the views are always changing."

Building a property from scratch is always an achievement, but for Andy and Suzie it has been something more intangible, too – this was an opportunity to work together with their grownup children and create something they can all be proud of. The pair currently split their time between Dubai and the Surrey countryside, and when they're not in the UK their son and daughter – who both live in London – take advantage of the house as an easy-to-reach luxury bolthole. Andy sums up, "From my point of view, it's been incredibly special being able to build a property with our son. The project has very much been a family affair."

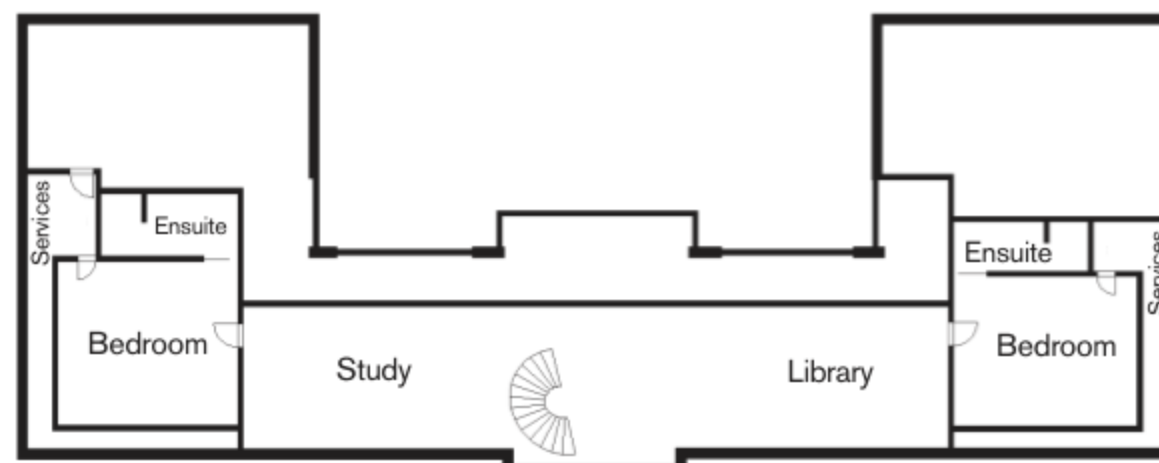


Floor plans

Ground floor



First floor



Build It
3D HOME DESIGNER

House plans re-created using
Build It 3D Home Designer software.
www.buildit.co.uk/3dsoftware

closer look

Helical staircase...

The staircase is a statement-making sculptural centrepiece for the house. It's a reinforced concrete freestanding helical design that



Curvy in concrete

joins on to a steel bridge, linking the two halves of the mezzanine above. Andy and Suzie's son Tom, an engineer, did the fantastic design work, drawing the structure in 3D.

Finding a contractor that could build a concrete helical staircase was extremely difficult. In the end, the couple only found one company that was willing to quote, but the installation did not go smoothly and the staircase was initially sited incorrectly. However, Andy and Suzie had it moved into place and the end product is incredible. "Much of that is down to a superb team of finishers. We had some excellent plasterers and tilers, but it was a real challenge," says Andy.



TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m ²	Cost %	Total cost
Preliminaries	£46	2%	£21,410
Demolition, excavation & filling	£77	3%	£35,960
Concrete construction	£169	7%	£78,580
External walls & windows	£546	24%	£253,360
Roof structure & covering	£127	6%	£59,000
Internal walls	£128	6%	£59,440
Floor, wall & ceiling finishes	£113	5%	£52,340
Joinery & fittings	£152	7%	£70,330
Plumbing & heating (incl. MVHR)	£129	6%	£59,890
Drainage	£97	4%	£45,020
Kitchen	£94	4%	£43,490
Electrics	£211	9%	£98,000
External works	£136	6%	£62,970
Fees	£253	11%	£117,260
Grand total			£1,057,050

Note: The costs shown here reflect the original prices for materials, labour and services at the time this project was undertaken. As a general guide, inflation in the construction market runs at about 3%-4% per annum.

Useful contacts

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER **Sherbrooke Design** 07976 271460
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER **Dale Roberts Design** 01722 322600
www.drdesigns.co.uk **Davies Maguire** 020 7388 9406 www.dmag.com
MAIN CONTRACTOR **JRB Building** 01252 851675 www.jrbbuildingltd.co.uk ELECTRICIAN, AV & SECURITY **CTS Systems** 01483 489440 www.cts-systems.co.uk FRONT DOOR **Urban Front** 01494 778787 www.urbanfront.com INTERNAL DOORS **JB Kind** 01283 554197 www.jbkind.com WINDOWS **ID Systems** 01603 408804 www.idsystems.co.uk TILES **Acorn Tiles** 01442 252560 www.acorntiles.com KITCHEN & FITTED FURNITURE **Farnham Furnishers** 01252 715000 www.farnhamfurnishers.co.uk WORKTOPS **First Stone Worktops** 01420 408787 www.firststoneworktops.co.uk PLUMBING **CPM Plumbing & Heating** 0845 621 5050 www.cpm-plumbheat.co.uk LANDSCAPE DESIGN **Zelkova design** 07752 583121 www.zelkovadesign.com