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IN BRIEF

PROJECT New build
LOCATION Kent
COST £450,000
SPENT £485,000
WORTH For sale for £125m:
 themodernhouse.com

BACK in
BLACK



Flint is a striking, new contemporary home with views of North Foreland Lighthouse and designed with privacy in mind.

STORY: DEBBIE JEFFERY PICTURES: THE MODERN HOUSE

“Everyone was clamouring over the building plots being sold on the North Foreland Estate but we noticed there was a tiny, run-down gardener’s cottage for sale, which had been overlooked,” recalls Teresa

Ralph. She and her husband, Anthony, realised that the tucked-away cottage could offer a more private setting, away from the road, and negotiated to buy the building.

The couple had previously built their own home and were looking for another project when they spotted the cottage. “I originally come from a retail background, and Anthony was in marketing but we now run a property development business together,” Teresa continues. “We started small, with a tiny flat which we sold for a profit, but then moved on to new builds and larger projects. From knowing nothing, we’ve had to learn everything in quite a short space of time.”

Teresa and Anthony have two children – Zachary, now 14, and Scarlet, 13 – and planned to create a family home for themselves on the renowned North Foreland Estate, which stands in a stunning clifftop location in Broadstairs, a coastal town on the Isle of Thanet in Kent.

EXTERIOR

North Foreland Estate is a gated community and Flint is set back from the main road. The two-storey blockwork element is clad externally in timber, while the timber-framed single-storey wing is clad in black bricks.





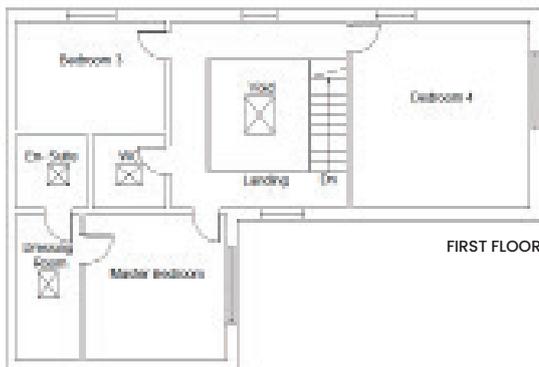
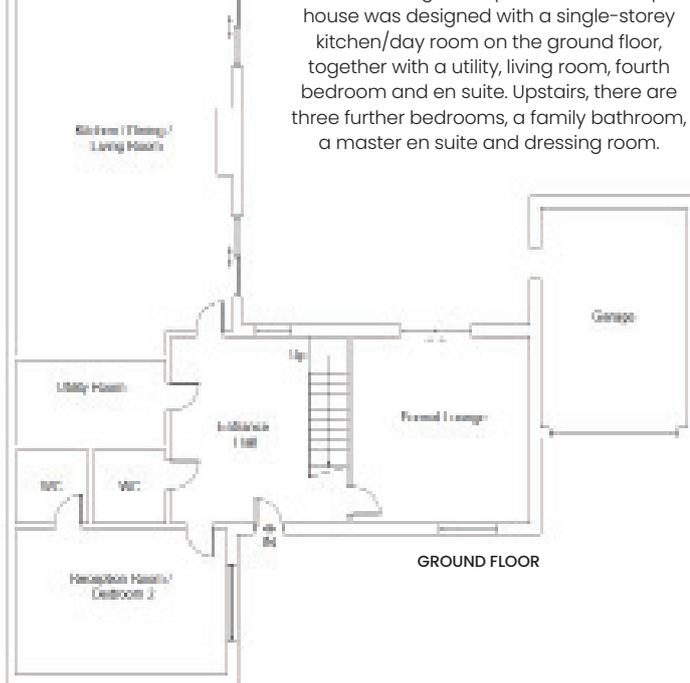
THE FORMER COTTAGE

Formerly a gardener's cottage, the building has been extended and remodelled beyond recognition. Existing services to the cottage were able to be used, but only three of the original walls were left standing on the ground floor. These have been insulated and clad.



The floorplan

Now measuring 248 sqm the new L-shaped house was designed with a single-storey kitchen/day room on the ground floor, together with a utility, living room, fourth bedroom and en suite. Upstairs, there are three further bedrooms, a family bathroom, a master en suite and dressing room.



“The estate has resident-only access to a beach and looks out to the lighthouse which is a real talking point.”

The relaxed and unspoiled resort, famous for its links with Charles Dickens, retains a nostalgic seaside charm, with picturesque beaches, and many of the self-build plots being sold on the North Foreland Estate boast direct sea views. “Our plot doesn’t have those views, but its peace and privacy were very appealing,” says Teresa. “The estate also has resident-only access to a beach and looks out to the lighthouse, which is a real talking point.”

Built in 1691 on a promontory of the almost perpendicular cliffs of the Isle of Thanet, North Foreland Lighthouse replaced the original octagonal lighthouse after it was destroyed by fire. The white tower makes a striking backdrop to the Ralphs’ newly completed four-bedroom property, Flint – the exterior of which has been clad in black materials.

Named after the flint pieces that line the beaches and cliffs along the coastline, the house has been carefully composed in a restricted palette of black brick and vertical stained timber cladding.

A bold yellow door leads inside to a double-height atrium, where birch plywood cabinetry conceals a WC and utility room. At the heart of the house is a bespoke staircase and gallery, designed by architect Carl Trenfield, which is perforated with a series of T-shaped makers’ marks. Two sets of sliding doors open onto the garden from an impressive open-plan kitchen/day room, where the custom-made kitchen cabinetry uses the same pale-toned ply as the staircase and extends to a built-in dining area with a large table and bench, which has been christened the b-island.

“It works really well, and we had several meetings there with trades during the project where someone would go to make cups of tea in the kitchen and could still be involved in the conversation,” says Teresa.

A wood-burner stands on a floating concrete plinth that echoes the sweeping polished-concrete floors.



STAIRS
Ribbed ply drawers have been incorporated into the concrete plinth of the plywood staircase and gallery, which arrived like a jigsaw, ready for carpenters to build on site. A void with a roof light above brings additional natural light into the heart of the house.

“The staircase was a huge investment and is like an art installation in its own right.”

These have been laid over underfloor heating throughout the ground floor rooms, with parquet upstairs.

On the ground floor is a separate living room/snug and a fourth en suite bedroom, with a pull-down guest bed and concealed desk area hidden behind doors and made from birch plywood. Upstairs there is a family bathroom along with three further bedrooms, the largest of which has a dressing room and en suite.

“We did consider renovating and extending the original gardener’s cottage but it was so poorly built that when we started work only three viable walls were left standing,” says Teresa. “We knew we were going to change the look quite radically and worked with On Architecture to design the house.”

On Architecture is an award-winning practice with extensive experience in architecture, planning and property, operating from two studios located in Kent and London and working on projects across the UK.

They extended the original floorplan to 248 sqm, plus an attached garage, making most of the building two-storey with a single-storey kitchen/dining/living wing. A sedum roof reduces the visual impact for neighbours and allows the house to fit seamlessly within the existing landscape and vegetation.

Various parts of the facade are defined by changes in materials, with the exterior of black brickwork and stained timber cladding accentuating the

strong geometry - complemented by the bright yellow front door and pop-out window.

“We were building this for ourselves and wanted a flexible layout with bright, spacious rooms and high ceilings,” says Teresa. “The black exterior makes it a Marmite house - people either love or hate it - and many are astonished when they walk inside, as they’re expecting the interior to be dark as well, whereas we’ve chosen pale materials and neutral colours.”

The Ralphs are constantly looking for ways to add texture and interest to their designs, with panels of decorative brickwork, bespoke furniture and fittings. Everything is robust and hard wearing in order to withstand family life, pets and even skateboards on the floors.

“We wanted to create something which would stand the test of time,” explains Teresa, who took care of the accounting, interior design and paperwork, while Anthony oversaw the build and project managed various subcontractors.

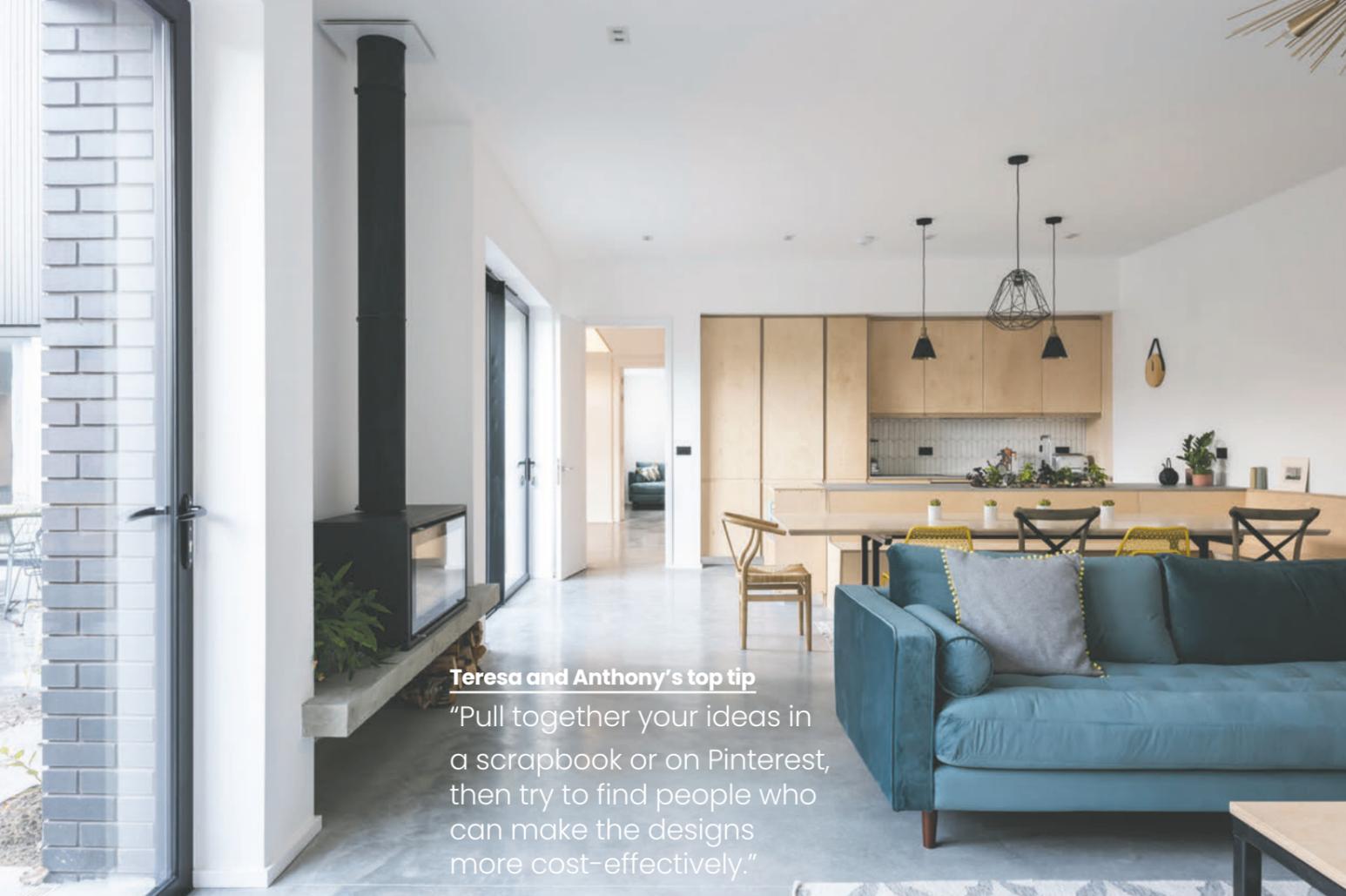
In addition, a carpentry company was commissioned to stick-build the timber-frame element on site using raw materials - a process which Anthony and Teresa feel works well and is economical for small, one-off projects instead of purchasing factory-made panels. The same company then moved inside to complete the internal carpentry, with bespoke items made by specialist craftspeople.

“The only real restriction imposed by the estate was a duty of care while building, and we had to contribute to the road repair once work was complete,” Teresa continues. “It’s all coming to an end now, but everyone has been building in the area at the same



KITCHEN
Designed by Teresa and Anthony, the kitchen was made from birch ply along with the space-saving dining table and bench.





Teresa and Anthony's top tip
 "Pull together your ideas in a scrapbook or on Pinterest, then try to find people who can make the designs more cost-effectively."



"We generally like the same design ideas, but have no practical skills, so we leave the building work to others," laughs Teresa. "Anthony always works flat out, and sometimes the pace can be very intense as so many decisions need to be made quickly, but we thoroughly enjoyed the project and are delighted with the outcome. It's a bit different, and that makes us smile."



THE SNUG
 A separate snug opens onto the courtyard garden though sliding glass doors.

WC
 Unusually coloured sanitaryware was chosen for the ground floor WC.

BEDROOM
 The bedroom on the ground floor has a polished concrete floor, with a wall bed and quirky concealed desk area making the most of the space.

IN DETAIL

PROJECT
Project management and build
 TG Designer Homes: tgdesignerhomes.com

Architect
 On Architecture: onarchitecture.co.uk

Structural engineer
 MLM Engineers: mlmgroupp.com

Aluminium doors and windows
 Rhino Aluminium: rhinoaluminium.co.uk

Entrance door Urban Front: urbanfront.com

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS
Staircase Carl Trenfield: cartrenfieldarchitects.com

Woodburner Stovax: stovax.com

Sanitaryware Smallbone Interiors, Broadstairs: smallboneinteriors.co.uk

Kitchen, bespoke furniture Creative carpentry: creativcarpentry.co.uk

Parquet floor Danny Jeffery Interiors: dannyjefferyinteriors.co.uk

Polished concrete floors Contemporary Concrete Floors: contemporaryconcretefloors.co.uk

Tiles Rovic Tiles: rovictiles.com

Underfloor heating NDC Plumbing and Heating ndcplumbingheating.com

STRUCTURE
Timber frame single story elements
 Turners Carpentry: turners-carpentry.co.uk

Bricks MKM Building Supplies: mkmb.com

Larch cladding supply
 Wingham Timber: winghamtimber.com

Cladding finish
 SW Solutions Decorators Ltd: swsdecorators.co.uk

Sedum roof supply and installation
 Complete Roofing Contractors: completerooftingcontractors.com

LIVING AREA
 The open-plan living space features a contemporary wood-burning stove, mounted on a plinth, with wood storage beneath.

time, which was horrendous for existing residents. The properties have definitely enhanced the estate, though, so everyone will benefit long term."

Planning was granted for the extensive alterations to Flint, which involved building new blockwork walls on concrete strip foundations, with the single-storey element constructed using timber frame. Doors and windows are predominantly black powder-coated aluminium.

In addition, permission was also granted at appeal for the Ralphs to build a single-storey white property, standing back-to-back with their own black house, creating an unusual juxtaposition which does not impact on the private nature of the plot.

"We always intended to live in Flint and sell the white house once it was finished, but changed our minds as work drew to a close," says Teresa. "Now we're marketing Flint too, as it doesn't offer us the space to work from home which we currently enjoy. It will be difficult to part with, as we've become really attached to the house and put so much effort into making it our own. The staircase was a huge investment and is like an art installation in its own right."

Such attention to detail is evident throughout the house and garden, which has been landscaped to create flowing beds, planted with grasses, low-maintenance native shrubs and a mature olive tree. The polished concrete floor inside extends out to form a terrace and there is an outdoor shower and daybed, from which to enjoy superb views of the lighthouse.

"We thoroughly enjoyed the project and are delighted with the outcome. It's a bit different, and that makes us smile."

FINAL WORD

What was the high point of the project?

Enjoying the tranquillity of the site and seeing how windows frame views of the lighthouse, which looks especially beautiful at night.

...and the low points?

Feeling rushed to make decisions as the build took just seven months from start to finish – which is still quite a leisurely timescale compared to some of our other projects. Work started in May 2019, with demolition and taking off the roof, and the house was finished that November.



Your best buy?

Building the bespoke plywood kitchen cost about 10 per cent less than buying something off the shelf. We didn't scrimp, though, and overspent on almost everything else!

Biggest extravagance?

We would never normally spend so much on a bespoke staircase and gallery, which cost around £20,000, but the entrance warranted a major feature.

