

BRIGHT AND beautiful

Chris and Joyce Tarrant have built a practical home for their retirement, incorporating impressive lighting effects which bring the whole house to life.

STORY: ELEANOR WILDE PICTURES: STEVE TAYLOR





Instant character

The traditional exterior of the house has been clad in mellow brickwork and tile hanging, with handmade roof tiles creating an instantly aged effect. Hardwood windows to the front elevation were painted oyster white. The rear elevation, which is south-facing, has aluminium window frames and large bi-fold doors, which are finished in oyster white externally and are white internally.

In 2010 Chris and Joyce Tarrant made the decision to buy the bungalow next door to their Hampshire home in the heart of the New Forest National Park in order to build a new house that would better suit their needs in retirement. The unexceptional 1950s dormer bungalow was dated, but stood on a beautiful 0.7 acre plot overlooking a Site of Special Scientific Interest south of Lyndhurst and offered an ideal development opportunity. "We'd owned our previous house for 12 years and love this lane and the view, so we were very excited by the idea of designing a new home right next door," says Joyce.

Chris, a retired headmaster, drew up a rough floorplan with indicative measurements and asked their appointed architect to create a practical and attractive building that would fit into the country lane setting. "It took many late nights of tweaking his proposals and subsequent amendments before we were ready to submit our plans," he recalls.

Neighbours were generous in their support, but the parish council was strongly opposed to the scheme, and it became evident that the Tarrants were unlikely to be granted permission. Wanting to avoid a rejection on their file, they withdrew the application and redesigned the external appearance of the house, with only minimal adjustment to the floorplans.

"The next few months were very tense, as the planning regulations within the National Park were due to become much stricter, and would not allow us to add 30 per cent to the former floor space or raise the roofline sufficiently to have a full two-storey house as we wanted," Chris continues.

Fortunately the parish council agreed to accept the planning department's verdict on the revised submission, which was approved under delegated powers just four days before the new regulations came into force. The result is a traditional front elevation with hardwood window frames, handmade tiles, and a tile-hung gable. The rear elevation, which is south facing, features aluminium window frames and large bi-fold doors.

"Although unwelcome, the nine month delay in gaining permission gave us time to decide how we wanted to tackle the build," says Joyce. "We invited our son-in-law Joe to have a major role. He is a lighting consultant and had just finished designing a new lighting scheme for the set of BBC1's 'Silent Witness' by the time our groundworks had been completed. He was keen to accept the challenge of being our project manager, appointing and managing the sub-contractors and sourcing materials at competitive prices."

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CHRIS AND JOYCE'S TOP TIP

“Don't accept advice that rows of downlighters are the best way to light a room without examining the alternatives.”

Not only was Joe permanently on site in the role of project manager but he was also able to undertake the electrical work. "He proved very knowledgeable in all aspects of building, having worked on many film sets and building projects, and he thrived on the unpredictability of each day's work and challenges," says Chris.

The 1950s bungalow was demolished and new foundations excavated on the site in readiness for the highly insulated brick and block structure. Joyce suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, so a lift was an essential element of the planning. However, the couple did not want this to visually dominate the interior, so access is from the downstairs study and from a corridor connecting the master bedroom and its en suite upstairs.

Joe was excited at the prospect of having a relatively free hand to pursue his original lighting ideas, incorporating the cutting edge Helvar 'Imagine' control system which he had used several times before in commercial settings. The outcome is unique, and one of the highlights is the atrium hall which features a five metre tall stainless steel and glass tree which appears to grow out of the floor and up the wall and was designed by a leading British glass-blower. The flowers are lit by fibre optics, and as the light permeates the petals it casts patterned shadows across the ceiling.

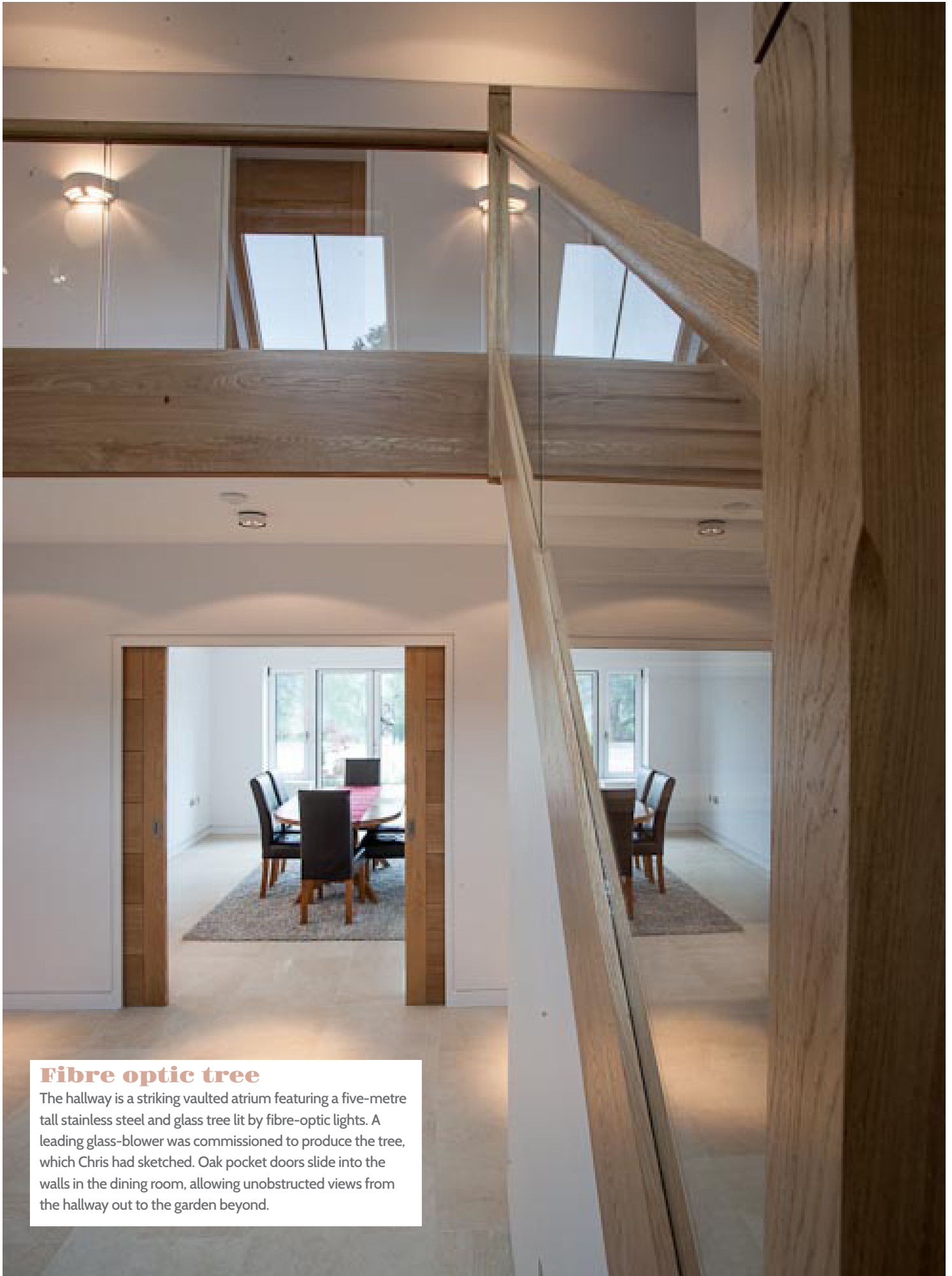
The kitchen/day room has unusual recessed lighting in the ceilings which the Tarrants are able to colour according to the occasion, and every room incorporates some interesting lighting effects. "Joe more than fulfilled our brief to avoid crowded ranks of downlighters," says Joyce. "The lighting is the main defining feature of our house, and it gives us pleasure every time the lights come on, either manually or automatically. It's easy to spend hours pondering how to cover floors, but to neglect the appearance of ceilings which are potentially exciting elements of a room."

In addition to controlling the lighting the Helvar system is also used to operate the electronic blinds and windows, and is integrated into the smoke alarm, burglar alarm, water heating and heat recovery systems.

When it came to designing the interiors the Tarrants preferred clean, simple lines. Skirting boards are recessed to be flush with the walls and shadow gaps have been used at ceiling and skirting levels, as well as around the doors, negating the need for coving and architraves. Doors are made of solid oak, with door furniture, kitchen appliances and some light fixings in stainless steel.

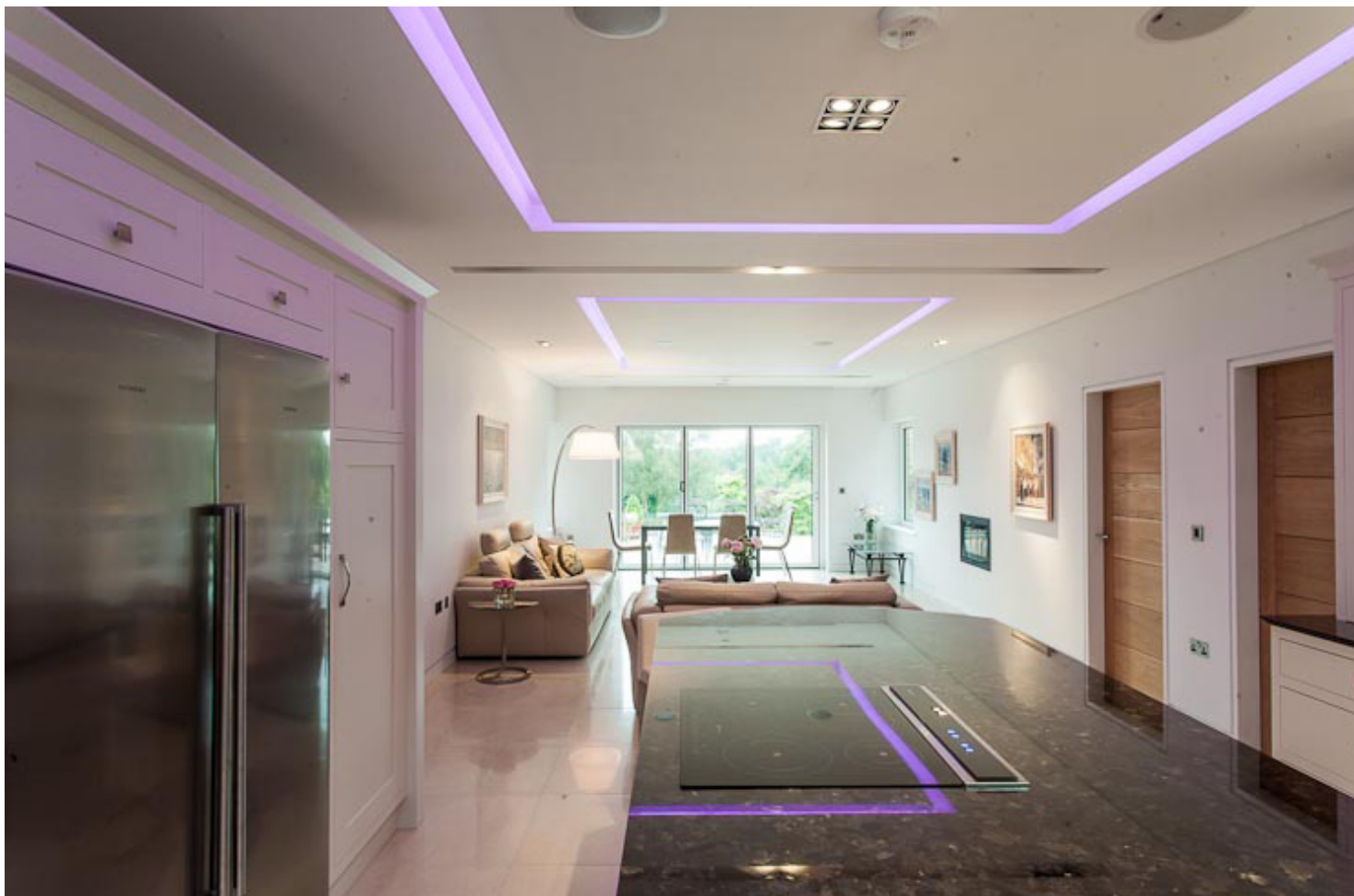
The oak banister and nosing on the landing and stairs hold the glass panels in place so that no other fixings are required, and the two glass panels on the balcony have no side or top fixings, ensuring that the view over the valley remains unobstructed. Maximising the wonderful south-facing views was a high priority, which has been achieved by installing bi-fold or French doors in all reception rooms, and by creating a vista straight through the hallway and the pocket sliding doors in the dining room to the garden beyond, where a bronze resin statue of 'Hope' is an attractive focal point.





Fibre optic tree

The hallway is a striking vaulted atrium featuring a five-metre tall stainless steel and glass tree lit by fibre-optic lights. A leading glass-blower was commissioned to produce the tree, which Chris had sketched. Oak pocket doors slide into the walls in the dining room, allowing unobstructed views from the hallway out to the garden beyond.



Bespoke kitchen

Chris designed and drew up the layout for the bespoke fitted kitchen, with hand-painted off-white cabinets and antique brown granite worktops – right down to the design detail for the cornice, which reflects the shark's nose edging on the granite. The open-plan day room beside the kitchen also features lighting effects, with recessed troughs set into the ceiling to conceal the light fittings.



"We were keen to incorporate eco-friendly elements wherever they proved cost-effective," Chris explains. Sixteen solar photovoltaic panels and two integral solar thermal panels have been located on the predominantly south-facing elevation. A 6,500 litre rainwater harvester is linked to a programmable irrigation system, so that rainwater collected from over half of the main roof is used to water the flower beds and newly planted trees in the back garden.

Underfloor heating has been installed, taking advantage of the block and beam construction at both levels, and a double-

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fronted woodburning stove provides additional heat and a welcoming glow in the day room and snug. A heat recovery system conserves heat generated in the kitchen and bathrooms and recycles fresh air throughout the house.

"We wanted to have a ground source heat pump, but the electricity board would have charged us £73,000 to provide the necessary three-phase supply as a new sub-station would have had to be constructed for the lane, at our expense," says Chris.

Throughout the construction the couple continued to live next-door and Chris was on site for much of the time, making innumerable decisions about design details which needed a prompt response. Each of the four double bedrooms has an ensuite with its own distinctive style, and these bathrooms took a great deal of time to design and source. Fittings were purchased from numerous bathroom stores across southern England, and vanity units with granite tops were specially made.

"After 14 months we were impatient to move in, and one of the highlights was spending our first night here," Joyce recalls. "We still had several people finishing off the internal fittings, boxes littered the floors and there were no curtains, but there was a definite shift from being a new house to becoming our home. This has been one of the most rewarding and worthwhile projects we've ever been involved in, and we've had great fun building and lighting the house."

The bottom line

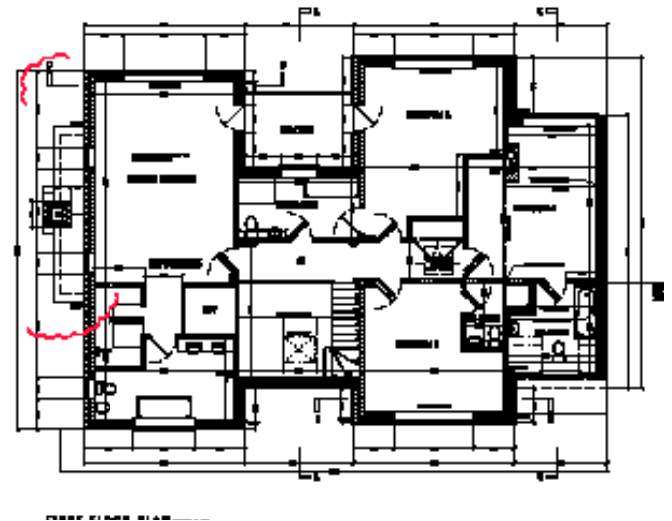
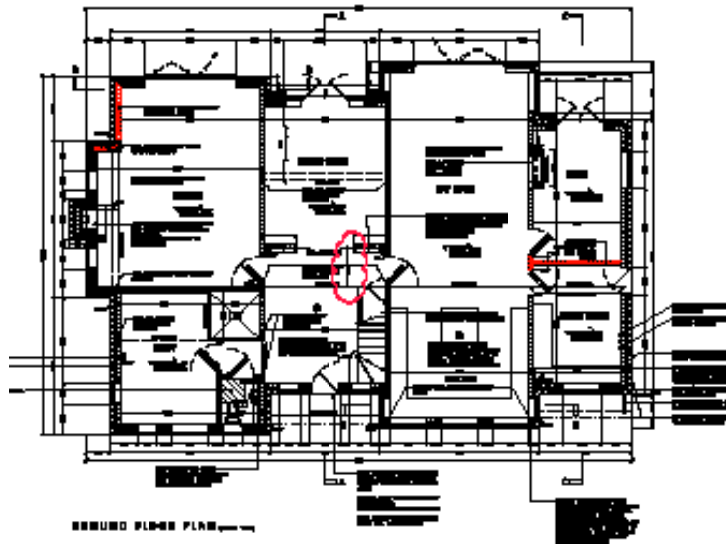
Chris and Joyce paid £780,000 for the original bungalow in 2010 and spent in the region of £600,000 building the replacement house. "I'm wading through over 500 invoices for our VAT return, in the hope of having nearly £50,000



The principal bedroom has a 2.7m ceiling created by raising the joists into the gable.



The principal en suite features a stand alone bath and bespoke vanity units, with Minoli Alaska tiles.



The Floorplan

The house has four first-floor bedrooms, each with an en suite. The total floor area, including the balcony and garage/workshop, is 380m². The ground floor has been designed so that views are maximised, with an open-plan kitchen/day room and pocket doors to the dining room which slide back into the wall.

Final thoughts

What was the high point of the project? Spending the first night in our new home, despite being surrounded by boxes.

...and the low point?

Having to withdraw our initial planning application, knowing that we had limited time to resubmit before the National Park regulations changed and made it even more difficult for us.

What was your best buy? The illuminated steel and glass tree sculpture in the hall. It creates a massive 'wow!' on entry to the house and helps to set the tone.

What was your biggest extravagance? The special light effects that have been incorporated into most of the rooms. However, they are also the defining feature, and therefore worth all we spent on them.



Contacts

PROJECT

Architect to planning permission Lionel Gregory: www.lionelgregoryarchitects.co.uk

Architect for Building Control Simpson Hilder Associates Ltd: www.simpsonhilder.co.uk

Project manager and electrician Joe Burke: www.joeburkelightingdesign.co.uk

STRUCTURE

Clay handmade roof tiles and hung tiles Sahtas: www.sahtas.co.uk

Joinery Dorset Joinery: www.dorsetjoineryltd.co.uk

Renewables and plumbing Barry Frampton Ltd: www.barryframpton.co.uk

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Lift Stannah Midilift XL: www.stannahlifts.co.uk

Lighting design Joe Burke Lighting Design: www.joeburkelightingdesign.co.uk

Lighting control system Helvar: www.helvar.com

Glass and steel sculpture Neil Wilkin: www.neilwilkin.com

Wall and floor tiles Minoli: www.minoli.co.uk

Fitted kitchen, utility and study Raynsford: www.raynsfordfurniture.co.uk