

Innovation and ideal location combine in timber self-build projects. By **Ann Wallace**

BUILDING your own home allows you the chance to create something unique, realising long-held dreams of living in exactly the space you have planned.

Fuelled by earnest Kevin McCloud and a succession of hapless and hopeful self-builders on long-running TV series *Grand Designs*, a boom in the number of people keen to build their own home shows no sign of abating.

Despite fears that Brexit would create a prolonged air of uncertainty in the property market, a recent survey revealed that 83 per cent of self-builders are continuing with their building projects and only 1.8 per cent have decided to cancel, signifying a more positive long-term outlook.

The research, undertaken by The Homebuilding and Renovating Show, which took place recently at the Royal Highland Centre in Edinburgh, also revealed that around a third of people – 33 per cent – were convinced the recently lowered interest rates have potentially boosted confidence.

More than 78 per cent of those questioned said they felt positive about current or future housebuilding projects and more than 64 per cent said they felt confident the housing market would remain stable post Brexit.

Michael Holmes, spokesperson for The Homebuilding & Renovating Show, said: “We initially predicted that the referendum would create a temporary lack of confidence and a slight pause while people sought more visibility on the direction of the economy and the housing market.”

“In addition, we knew that with the devaluing of the pound post-Brexit, imported materials were going to cost more which could potentially drive up construction costs.”

He added: “However, the research is more positive than we anticipated and demonstrates that those with a project already under way, or



very close to starting, have decided to carry on with their plans regardless.

“My advice for those that see their home as a long term project is to carry on. Fluctuations in costs are a secondary consideration, so having the right home should come first and foremost over any short-term gain.”

The Scottish Government is keen to encourage greater use of self-build across the country to help increase house supply. In its strategy document *Homes Fit for the 21st Century*, it emphasises the importance of self-build in rural areas, allowing people the opportunity to own a home and remain in their communities.

It has produced a Self Build Guide to help people who are new to self build understand

what is involved and where to go to find out more, outlining the issues, costs, and possibilities that need to be considered.

Architect Roderick James, who has been designing homes for more than 40 years, believes the appeal of building one’s own home will never fade.

“Self-build is always going to be around,” he explains. “It has been popular for a long time, of course, but nowadays we are getting better at the detailing and design.”

“It’s easy to build a square box, but much harder to live in it.”

Oak has been the preferred wood for luxury timber-framed homes but self-builders are increasingly using Douglas fir and glulam – short for glued, laminated timber. Manufactured by bonding together individual

MIGHTY OAKS GROW



SOAR AWAY SUCCESS: *Eagle Rock* was originally built as a holiday let ... but architect Roderick James fell in love with it. Pictures: Mark Nicholson



The enduring appeal of timber is its solidity, its texture. It blends the traditional with the contemporary to great effect



with gallery level above, forms the heart of the home, which is full of natural light, cosy nooks and crannies, sumptuous textures and soft furnishings and stylish interior design.

“I can’t stand modern, minimalist homes – who wants to live in a square, white box?” adds Mr James.

Eagle Rock sits well into the landscape too, another feature of timber-framed homes loved by self-builders.

“Timber frames allow homes to connect with the surrounding environment,” explains Mr James. “What sets us apart from other kit houses is that we have sloping walls, which are rooted into the ground and that has the effect of blending the house into the landscape.”

“Scotland has beautiful natural light, of course and I make sure I take advantage of that, with overhanging eaves, shadow lines and windows set slightly back – it all adds to the quality.”

“If you are lucky enough to live near water, you get that wonderful effect of light bouncing off the surface and creating a moving pattern of reflection – we call it ‘glinting’ – which is just beautiful.”

With self-build on the rise, Roderick James Architects – currently designing 21 homes near Lochaline – is about to open an office in Glasgow.

“We are expanding because of the huge demand,” he explains. “We are looking for a floating site – it’s a bit of a departure from timber-framed homes, but we don’t like to be pigeonholed....”

For more information on Roderick James Architects visit www.roderickjamesarchitects.co.uk or call 01803 868000.

For further details on *Carpenter Oak Scotland*, visit carpenteroakandwoodland.com/scotland-division/

To access the Scottish Government’s guide for self-builders, visit www.gov.scot/

laminations of solid timber, this is more stable than green oak, Mr James explains.

“One of the most basic reasons self-builders love a timber frame is, of course, because it is already a structure,” he adds.

“If you can have everything standing up to start with, it is very useful. Being able to have the frame in place and then build round it makes the process much easier.”

He explains: “The enduring appeal of timber is its solidity, its texture. It blends the traditional with the contemporary to great effect. You can fill a timber-framed home with antique furniture or modern furniture – both suit perfectly.” Mr James should know – as well as his professional expertise (he was founder and chairman of *Carpenter Oak* and *Carpenter Oak Scotland* before retiring to concentrate

on his multi-awardwinning practice, Roderick James Architects LLP, which specialises in contemporary timber buildings) he has personal experience of building his own home, the spectacular *Eagle Rock* near Lochaline in the Highlands.

“We built it to rent it out, originally, but it was so lovely we decided just to move in instead,” he smiles.

Eagle Rock is a design masterpiece, nestling into the hills with 20-mile panoramic views from all rooms down the Sound of Mull.

This 400-square-metre, four-bedroom, four-bathroom home includes a raft of state-of-the-art energy efficiency measures including recycled newspaper insulation, underfloor heating and air source heat pump.

A stunning open-plan living and dining space,



WARMTH: Wooden interiors shown to good effect at *Eagle Rock*. Tigh Darach, left, is *Carpenter Oak* model. Picture Nigel Rigden.