

## FACT FILE

**NAMES** Robert & Alison Coombs**OCCUPATIONS** Retired doctors**LOCATION** Devon**TYPE OF PROJECT** Renovation**STYLE** Contemporary with original heritage details**CONSTRUCTION METHOD** Oak frame**PROJECT ROUTE**

Architect designed and main contractor project managed

**PROPERTY COST** £700,000**BOUGHT** 2013**HOUSE SIZE** 486m<sup>2</sup> (incl. 77m<sup>2</sup> separate garage/workshop)**PROJECT COST** £950,000**PROJECT COST PER M<sup>2</sup>** £1,955**TOTAL COST** £1,650,000**BUILDING WORK COMMENCED** September 2016**BUILDING WORK TOOK** 19 months**CURRENT VALUE** £1,200,000

Left & above: The living area features an exposed oak frame and a spacious feel thanks to the open vaulted ceiling. At the far end of the room a staircase leads to the master bedroom. Positioned behind the headboard and beyond a dressing area is an ensuite, which is situated in the cantilevered timber extension shown in the image below



# Historic transformation

Respecting the former smelting work's heritage, **Alison and Robert Coombs** have renovated a tired and dilapidated property with a confused internal layout into a modern light-filled home

WORDS **SOPHIE VENING/THE HOUSE AGENCY**  
PHOTOS **RICHARD DOWNER**

**B**eing close to retirement and with their grown-up children no longer living at home, Robert and Alison Coombs decided it was the right time to relocate from their family home in the Peak District and move closer to Alison's mother in Devon. They tentatively began their search for the ideal property – somewhere close to the water where they could also enjoy their passion for sailing. In May 2013, after two years of searching, the couple finally came across Treyard in Weir Quay, which was ideal for a renovation project. "It took approximately two years, from us identifying this area to finding this house," says Alison. "There wasn't any particular hurry as we hadn't retired, but





Seen here from the adjoining road, the rendered elevation hosts the double-height living area and master suite, while the kitchen and guest spaces are positioned within the stone-clad part of the house

“At one point, there was just the front wall of the main house standing, with no windows”



The unconventional shape of the building has been utilised to create an innovative floor plan, which includes a three-bedroom annex with its own kitchen and living spaces. Beyond the property is an outbuilding to keep cars away from the patio areas

we wanted to find somewhere before we gave up work so we could have planning permission in place before we relocated,” says Alison.

Sited around eight miles from Tavistock in west Devon, the property overlooks the banks of the nearby River Tamar. Originally offices and outbuildings as part of a local Victorian smelting works, the front parts of the building facing the river had been converted into houses in the 1930s, creating a small self-contained dwelling (the gable-ended section facing the river) with the main house in the remaining buildings. More recent rear extensions to the smaller home had been built over and were partially obscuring the original, historic site entrance and cobbled track.

“We loved everything about the site, apart from the house,” remarks Alison. “With only 22 dwellings in the Hamlet, a secluded garden and access to the water, the property was in a really lovely location, but in a terrible state. However, we could see that it had fantastic potential.”

**Establishing a design**

After the purchase went through towards the end of 2013, the couple began looking for an architect who would be able to turn their vision for an exciting family home into reality. “We knew we needed a designer with an insight into local industrial heritage, who would be happy to create a more pared back, sympathetic scheme,” says Robert.

Having seen an example of a project that they liked on the Carpenter Oak website, Robert and Alison requested a brochure from the company which resulted in a site review with Roderick James Architects, who often collaborate with the green oak frame specialist. Mike Hope from the architectural practice, who was living a couple of villages away at the time, met with the couple to discuss their criteria and offer his expertise.

“Mike knew the building and local area well, and immediately came up with some imaginative ideas that we hadn’t initially considered,” says Robert. After the meeting, the couple were so impressed that they decided to employ Mike to design their dream



Above: A glazed door leads from the master ensuite onto the first storey balcony, which spans the length of the dwelling and connects with several bedrooms

**WE LEARNED...**

**TAKE YOUR TIME** at the design stage. We spent nearly two years getting the look and layout of our home correct.

**BEING POSITIONED IN AN** area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) and a World Heritage site made it especially important to get the right advice. We took on the expert guidance of the planning officer at a pre-planning meeting and sought expertise from a conservation and heritage officer. The regular meetings and back and forth conversations were really productive and gave us a good idea of what would and wouldn’t be approved.

**COMMUNICATE REGULARLY** with your team. We coordinated the start of our build with the start of our retirement. As we were unable to live on site, we stayed in a family friend’s house close by. It meant we were around nearly every day to check on the progress and answer any questions that arose throughout the renovation.

**WE HAD A GREAT** relationship with our main contractor who, in turn, built up a good rapport with all the individual trades to ensure the scheme ran smoothly.



The kitchen designer was a friend of Alison and Robert's son. He came up with a contemporary scheme featuring different shades of grey that would blend in with the oak interior. An open section of wall includes oak detailing and connects to the dining space



The open oak frame works to zone different areas



home. "We weren't in any rush as we were still working up in The Peak District, which gave us plenty of time to discuss different design ideas," says Robert. In fact, it took Mike and the Coombses nearly two years before they came up with a design that they were happy to submit to the local planning department.

Top of the couple's design requirements was a space that reflected the history of the property and the industrial heritage of the area by using good quality, natural materials, along with the incorporation of sustainable energy systems. They wanted to rework the existing layout to create a better flow with lots of natural light filtering throughout. "We needed a self-contained annex for if and when our mothers might live with us in the future," says Robert. "We also wanted separate accommodation, with a kitchen and bathroom, but which was also connected to the main part of the house," says Alison.

In June 2014, architect Mike Hope submitted a pre-application enquiry to the council. Two months later he, Robert and Alison met with the senior planning & conservation officer on site to discuss the

proposals. Following a productive meeting, discussions, drawings and proposals went backwards and forwards between Mike, the Coombses and the council until they were ready to submit an application in May 2015. Thanks to the good communication and a well-thought out design, permission was granted soon after.

With consent achieved, Robert and Alison put the project out to tender to three builders. "One firm pulled out, so we only had two quotes to choose from," says Robert. "We went with Jonathan Case Builders, who had more experience." The couple were thrilled with their choice of main contractor, with the firm taking on the project management. "They worked really hard and were really proud of the scheme," says Alison. "I think it helped that we were on site most days to oversee and answer any questions."

### Building begins

The first step was to clear the site, remove old timber outbuildings and strip back the house, including unsuitable rooflights and the

dilapidated conservatory and extension, ready for the mass concrete strip footing foundations. "At one point, there was just the front wall of the main house standing, with no windows," says Alison.

While demolition and site clearance took place, the frame was cut to size in the Carpenter Oak workshop. "We actually saw the beams being cut," says Robert. "It's amazing how quickly it's made, transported to site and erected by the same team," he says.

By 13th December, the main oak frame and steel frame was up and watertight, ready for the new characteristic domestic features to be brought back into the property. For example, bay windows were



A snug below the master suite offers a separate lounge to the main open-plan hub of the house



reintroduced on the roadside elevation after a neighbour showed Alison and Robert photos of the road frontage with two-storey bay window and a front porch, presumably from the 1930s, when the buildings were originally converted into houses.

The roof of the bay windows at the front and the large dormers that open onto the balcony were replaced with a zinc covering and a hidden gutter system. A kitchen window and rendered blockwork

was replaced with a larger area of glazing, plus stonework above on the side elevation and conservation rooflights. A much less invasive profile than what was previously there was installed.

Further building work consisted of the removal of the PVC oil tank and replacement of an outbuilding with a new structure for car parking and a workshop. This space ensures the historic track is clear of vehicles, allowing the house to enjoy a strong connection with the garden and historic setting of the old furnace walls.

Six bore holes were drilled down 85m for the ground source heat pump pipework. The system powers the underfloor heating setup and provides hot water throughout the home.

### Final layout

As you enter the front door and step into the large entrance hallway, the kitchen and larder is straight ahead with the utility and self-contained annex accommodation to the left of the kitchen. To the right of this is the dining area in the curved corner wall of the property, which leads into the living area and snug beyond.

Exposed oak frame beams create a distinction between the dining and living zones

within the open-plan space. And, although the snug has a door so that it can be closed off for privacy, a see-through woodburning stove placed within the wall between here and the main living area helps the private space still feel connected to the rest of the house.

There are three sets of staircases that lead up to the first floor. One from the living area which leads to the master bedroom, ensuite and dressing area. Another set of steps to the left of the kitchen take you



The annex has its own kitchen and staircase leading up to private bedroom accommodation on the first floor



to the three guest bedrooms and another flight in the annex leads up more sleeping areas. Upstairs, four bedrooms have access to an outdoor balcony that runs the length of the first floor, helping to unify the courtyard elevations with the rest of the building.

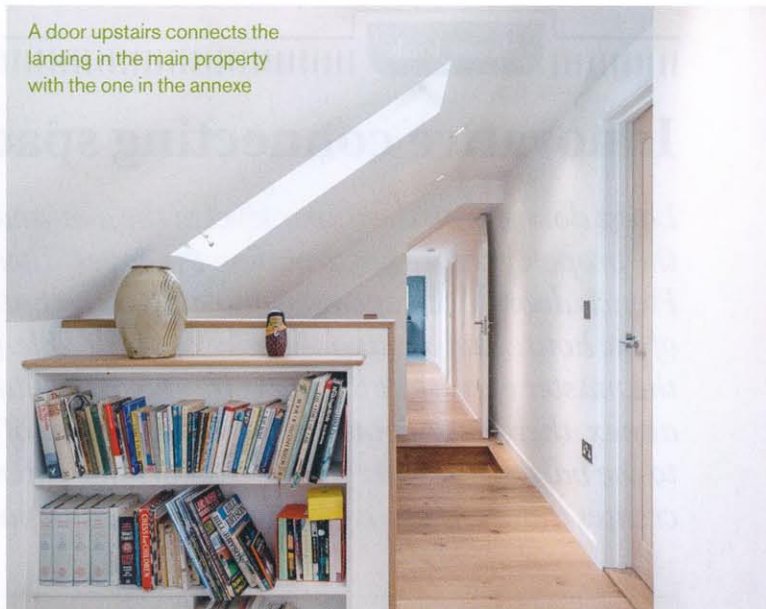
### Dream result

The finished home that Alison and Robert have created is simply stunning and the mixture of old and new works harmoniously. "If there is one thing we have learnt from our renovation project, it is to communicate well with your project team," says Robert. Alison adds: "We were so lucky with our trades, we never had any disagreement and, to this day, are still friends with the main contractors – we even threw a party for them and their families upon completion."

Alison and Robert liked the idea of being able to connect the bedrooms on the first floor via the outdoor balcony



A door upstairs connects the landing in the main property with the one in the annexe



### closer look

## Innovative connecting space...

Large dormers on the upper level of the one-and-a-half-storey span of the property create headroom in the eaves. These elevations feature French doors, each opening onto a balcony that stretches the length of the house and around the edge of the double-storey living space to the master ensuite at the opposite end of the building. Including the annex, there are a total of six bedrooms, four of which have access to the balcony. Timber pillars support this external feature, which also creates a sheltered area for the entrance and patio downstairs.



Feature balcony

### TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m <sup>2</sup>	Cost %	Total cost
Prelims, fees & consultants	£230	12%	£111,866
Architect's fees, kitchen & GSHP supply	£167	8%	£81,334
Demolition	£114	6%	£55,500
Foundations	£78	4%	£38,000
Superstructure, repairs & damp proofing	£121	6%	£59,000
Concrete floor slab	£52	3%	£25,500
Roofing & balcony	£198	10%	£96,000
Internal & external walls & insulation	£158	8%	£77,000
Windows & external doors	£121	6%	£59,000
Glass balustrades	£20	1%	£9,800
Rainwater drainage	£21	1%	£10,000
Plumbing, heating, underfloor heating & bore holes	£103	5%	£50,000
Electrics (incl. lighting fittings)	£70	4%	£34,000
Kitchens & utility fitting	£21	1%	£10,000
Bathrooms	£91	5%	£44,000
Floor & wall coverings	£62	3%	£30,000
Bespoke staircases, second fix joinery, bespoke cupboards	£128	7%	£62,000
Decoration	£37	2%	£18,000
Garage, workshop & studio	£86	4%	£42,000
Stoves	£25	1%	£12,000
Landscaping, cobbles & gate	£51	3%	£25,000

**Grand total** £950,000

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.

### Floor plans



Build It HOME DESIGNER

House plans re-created using Build It 3D Home Designer software. [www.buildit.co.uk/3dsoftware](http://www.buildit.co.uk/3dsoftware)

### Useful contacts

ARCHITECT Mike Hope & Sarah Leach at Roderick James Architects 01803 868000 [www.roderickjamesarchitects.com](http://www.roderickjamesarchitects.com) MAIN CONTRACTOR & PROJECT MANAGER Jonathan Case Builders and Contractors 01822 8555076 [www.jcasebuilders.co.uk](http://www.jcasebuilders.co.uk) DAMP PROOFING SPECIALIST Heritage Preservation 01752 336857 [www.heritagew.co.uk](http://www.heritagew.co.uk) GREEN OAK FRAME Carpenter Oak 01803 732900 [www.carpenteroak.com](http://www.carpenteroak.com) ELECTRICIAN GM Electrical Services 07810 646080 PLUMBING Bonnet Plumbing & Heating 07809 571239 GARAGE SUPPLIER Oak Frames Direct 01424 838500 WINDOWS AND DOORS Gowercroft Joinery 01773 300510 [www.gowercroft.co.uk](http://www.gowercroft.co.uk) PATENT GLAZING The Rooflight Company 01993 833155 [www.therooflightcompany.co.uk](http://www.therooflightcompany.co.uk) UNDERFLOOR HEATING Nu-Heat 01404 515867 [www.nu-heat.co.uk](http://www.nu-heat.co.uk) STAIRCASES Harvey Benfield 01566 776060 [www.harveybenfield.com](http://www.harveybenfield.com) GATE Tamar joinery 01822 840848 [www.tamarjoinerycompany.co.uk](http://www.tamarjoinerycompany.co.uk) BESPOKE WROUGHT IRON WORKS Ash Ironworks 0333 3350125 [wroughtirondevon.co.uk](http://wroughtirondevon.co.uk) KITCHEN Kettle Co Kitchens 01752 936104 [www.kettleco.co.uk](http://www.kettleco.co.uk) BATHROOMS C P Hart 0345 873 1100 [www.cphart.co.uk](http://www.cphart.co.uk)