



Words: Clive Fewins Photography: Andrew Priest



A BRAND NEW BARN

Justin and Kelly Goodheart dedicated over four years to building a new barn-style house clad in Cotswold stone, hiding a spectacular vaulted oak frame inside

Details Traditional self-build, Wiltshire, Apr 2004 – Aug 2008
Project Cost £2,604/m²
Designer Howard Waters, Matthewson Waters

Justin and Kelly Goodheart's new stone house may have taken nearly four-and-a-half years (including 12 months in the planning process) to complete, but they have no doubts that it was worth the trouble, as the finished property is built to the highest specification and succeeds in making the most of a highly unusual site.

They sold their previous house, a one bedroom barn conversion they had carried out largely

1: Masterwork in oak
 A waney-edged oak frame is the centrepiece of the vaulted kitchen, furnished with oak units by Mark Wilkinson — a luminary of luxury kitchens

Above: Cotswold charm
 Real stone from Cotswold Stone Quarries clads and roofs the barn-style property



themselves for £265,000, and were looking for another plot near to Swindon, where Justin works as a plumber and heating engineer and Kelly is a hairdresser. They knew it would be hard to find a really interesting plot, but time was on their side as they were able to live with family members for a while.

“One of the cardinal rules is not to rush things”

“Having spent five years on the barn conversion we had gained quite a lot of experience, and learned that with self-build one of the cardinal rules is not to rush things,” Justin says. “We also had the dual advantage of £120,000 in our bank after the sale of the barn and a great deal of local family support.”

They were prepared for a long search. However, good local networking paid off when they heard of an interesting plot in the historic heart of a sought-after village only three miles from the centre of Swindon.

It seemed the perfect plot — a quarter of an acre near a Mediaeval church and bounded on one side by the high wall of a former kitchen garden and on the other by a former manor house, now a large hotel. The only problem was that the site was just outside the village development boundary, and planning permission had previously been refused twice.

Justin and Kelly fought their way through roof-high undergrowth and the remains of old glasshouses and outbuildings to examine the site. “We were really convinced it was a viable plot, regardless of the previous refusals,” Justin says.

A Difficult Planning Situation

Despite seeking the advice of a planning consultant, who did not rate their chances very highly, Justin and Kelly came to an agreement with the plot owner that they would have an option on a sale at £100,000 — providing they could gain planning permission.

The couple then approached architect Howard Waters, with whom they struck an instant rapport and came to a deal: if he was successful in gaining planning permission for them, they would pay a fee of £8,000; if not they would pay him just £2,000.

As all Justin and Kelly stood to lose was £2,000 — plus the time and effort they had put into their planning application — they considered it a reasonable bet. Plus, with their twin advantages of cash in hand and excellent local contacts, they decided it was worth pressing ahead.

“We were convinced from the start that it was worth pursuing,” Justin says. “After all, the neighbouring property had only been built 12 years ▶

Above: Designed for a sloping site The house is largely on one level but in response to a south-easterly downslope, a three storey ‘dovecote-style’ section has been incorporated. Glazed gable ends within the oak frame were crafted by Simon Ely of Black Pig Frame Finishing, and are suggestive of barn-style cart door openings, while also maximising light inside. The other windows were made by Highwood Joinery

2: High volume Spotlights highlighting the timber frame, and solid walnut flooring from Cotswold Wood Floors set a warm, welcoming tone to the interiors

USEFUL CONTACTS: Design Matthewson Waters: 01488 73131 Structural engineer David Clark: 0118 971 0500 Substructure, main walls and roof Hall Homes: 01793 763801 Oak frame Green Oak Structures: 01458 833420 Oak frame glazing Black Pig Frame Finishing: 01761 420576 Plumbing and heating CW Goodheart: 01793 613393 Electricians Alexander Electrical: 01793 692669 Walnut floors Cotswold Wood Floors: 01242 222822 Stone floors Holley Hextall: 01380 850039 Flooring contractor, tiling and wetrooms Simon Hinic: 07979 855302 Roofing contractor Gary Tilton: 07708 70759 Stone roof tiles and walling stone Cotswold Stone Quarries: 01451 850775 Lighting John Cullen: 020 7371 5400 Sanitaryware Swindon Plumbing Supplies: 01793 420600; Tradsol: 01793 486800 Glass balustrade Complete Glazing Services: 01793 496880 Spiral staircase Graham Burgess: 01373 464241 Kitchen Mark Wilkinson: 01380 850004 Windows and doors Highwood Joinery: 01249 822057 Rooflights Velux: 01592 772211 Landscaping Stuart Murphy: 07870 168623 Audiovisual Audience of Bath: 01225 333310



ago and the adjoining mansion had been converted into a 100 bedroom hotel in the early 1990s — and both lay outside the development boundary.”

JUSTIN AND KELLY'S SELF-BUILD

Construction Masonry with stone facing; internal vaulted oak frame
Size 288m²
Build Time Four years
Build Route Self-managed
Plot Cost £100,000
Build Cost Undisclosed
Value on Completion £1,250,000

Justin and Kelly's theory was that if they drew up a scheme of the highest quality — to a far higher specification than the two schemes that had previously been rejected — then the planners would talk to them. They were proved correct — the planners willingly discussed the project with

them and even advised them to go 'over their heads' directly to the members of the Swindon Borough Planning Committee. That way the councillors might be impressed by the quality of the design and use their powers to overrule the officers. "It was obvious that when the head planner realised what we proposed he was very sympathetic, which is why he made this very helpful suggestion," Justin says.

Heartened by this they went to great lengths to produce 12 copies of a detailed application portfolio, including a full model of the proposed house, which Howard made himself. The portfolio also included full details of the materials to be used, including the new Cotswold stone roof, which, when eventually built, cost £98,000 including materials and labour.

"We even paid a friend with a microlight aircraft to take aerial shots that we included in the portfolio," Justin says. "All of this, however, took a lot of work and quite a long time to prepare and must have cost us at least £1,000."

Nevertheless it paid off, because at the crucial planning meeting, at which Justin and Kelly were represented by Howard, the committee members voted 11:1 in favour. "The committee members expressed

confidence in our scheme and particularly loved the materials," Justin says. "It entirely justified our determination to 'go natural'. We really didn't want an artificial stone roof — real stone is so superior. We felt the same about the external stonework, so we specified 20 per cent grey and the rest creamy and it all came from the same Cotswold quarry.

“*There was a stream beneath the site... it meant we virtually had to start again*”

"To be fair to the planning officers, they phoned to congratulate us and wished us well. They went out of their way to be helpful and now all is finished we have been approached by Swindon Borough Council to appear in its 'Good Design Guide.'"



Far left: Decorative dovecote Clad in waney elm boarding, the three storey section contains the master suite (5) and enriches the agricultural style of the house; **3: Dedicated fun zone** A large Velux rooflight pours light into the games room, which features retro arcade games such as *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong*; **4: Solid stone staircase** Housed within a circular tower, the Cotswold stone spiral stairs were crafted by Graham Burgess. LEDs highlight the treads; **5: Angular ceiling** The master bedroom is a striking funnel-like shape, tapering upwards within the dovecote and illuminated by spotlights. Steps lead up to an en suite; **6: Luxury family bathroom** Large-format stone tiles create a serene backdrop for the wetroom shower and curved sanitaryware



Right: The front approach High-level glazing is perfect for introducing light into the interior whilst maintaining privacy from passers by in the street



Fine Finishes in Spite of ‘Hiccups’

The finished house is largely as envisaged by Justin and Kelly, though they admit with a huge amount of input from Howard. He has made the most of the site, which slopes slightly downhill to the south-east to create a three storey section that houses the master bedroom, with their dressing room and walk-in shower beneath, and bathroom in the roof void, accessed by four steps from the bedroom. The floors – apart from this end the house is all on one level – are joined by a striking hand-wrought Cotswold stone staircase with a stunning curved glass balustrade.

“Howard also designed the circular stone buttress at the front of the house,” says Kelly. It marks the point at which the floorplan turns sharply to fit in with the site. “He also suggested the ‘dovecote’ feature with the waney elm exterior boarding upstairs in the south-east corner, and the glazed gable ends,” she adds.

“We didn’t want artificial stone — real stone is so superior”

There was a major hiccup halfway through digging the footings when a previously undiscovered spring made its presence felt. “Basically there was a complete underground stream beneath the site and it meant we virtually had to start again,” Justin says. “It cost us time, but especially money. I estimate that in additional labour, and also the steel shuttering we had to bring in, it added about £10,000 to the final total.”

The arrival of a baby boy, Finley, in December 2007 set things back a little, but by this time they had been in the house a year. “As things happened we timed things very well, but of course once Finley arrived the house took second place,” says Kelly.

Their policy was to move round the partially completed building, finishing off as money became available. “It worked well. It meant we could choose the quality of finish we wanted,” Justin says. “As it is we have gone for the highest possible specification — on a par with the outside. But if we had not had the money available we should have left part of the interior unfinished until a later date.

“We worked incredibly hard ourselves, doing all the jobs we could that did not need a professional skill,” recalls Justin.

“With its glistening Cotswold stone roof the house now looks magnificent,” he concludes. “But we would not have succeeded without that key piece of advice from the planners to take our case to the members — and tremendous support from our families.”

Single Storey Living

