



A LOW PROFILE

Faced with the prospect of an uncomfortable retirement in a period house, Pauline and Christopher Sparrow built a contemporary bungalow that responds perfectly to their needs and makes the most of a sloping site

Details Contemporary bungalow, Bath, 2002-2003
Project Cost £575,000 (£1,597/m²)
Designer David Hadfield

Pauline and Christopher Sparrow's new steel, timber and glass bungalow, built into the hillside in a village just outside Bath, could not be more of a contrast to their previous home: a large stone Georgian structure that had been home to the couple, who have seven children, for 40 years.

From his circular study window at the front of the house, Christopher, a retired solicitor, can peer through trees down at the old building, reminiscing of times past, while on the other side of the room there

is clear glazing through to a glorious new enclosed garden. When he wishes to cut himself off from the outside world, he can simply close the automated blinds that run between the dual panes of glass.

At the top of the flat-roofed building, three pyramidal rooflights open at the touch of a button, and tilt – each in a different direction – to provide effective ventilation — in particular, to avoid overheating in summer. There is also an automated thermostat-controlled underfloor heating system.

By far the biggest surprise of the house is the half-basement, which hides a double garage and storeroom; there is also a 'dumbwaiter' lifting mechanism, so Pauline

PAULINE & CHRISTOPHER'S SELF-BUILD

Construction Steel and timber frame with cedar cladding; masonry basement
Size 360m²
Build Time One year
Build Route Main contractor
Plot Cost Already owned
Build Cost £575,000
Value on Completion £1.6m

“We can just step out into the garden at almost any point”

and Christopher can transport their shopping easily to the floor above.

For the Sparrows, these are not so much examples of gadgetry for the sake of it, but a response from architect and old friend David Hadfield to their need to be comfortable in retirement, so that they can live in their home for as many years as possible.

The other 'surprise' element in the house is the number of entrances and exits. There are only three conventional doors: the front door, pivoted, extra-wide and glazed to the sides and over the top; the door through the utility room to the garden; and one from the rear of their son Simon's apartment. However, there are endless combinations of other means of entry through the sliding glass doors all round the single storey main block of the L-shaped house.

Above and middle right: A half-basement exploits the sloping site Built into the hillside, it conceals a garage, workshop and store at the rear, and allowed the remaining accommodation to be sprawled over a single L-shaped storey. With wall-to-wall glazing, almost every room opens onto the garden

Top right: One in, one out A pivoted, extra-wide front door, framed with glass, gives a welcoming first impression

Bottom right: Here to stay Pauline and Christopher filled the house with features that will make retirement easier



Words: Clive Fewins Photography: Nigel Rigden



- 1: Natural ventilation and temperature control** Three electronic pyramidal rooflights from Glazing Vision tilt to provide ventilation; outside, a canopied *brise soleil* prevents overheating through the huge sliding doors
- 2 & 4: Bath stone clads the living room** Its creamy colour matches the steel structural beams and creates a crisp backdrop for the woodburner. Stonell limestone flooring creates continuity throughout the house
- 3: A practical kitchen** Filled with wall-to-wall storage and a working island, the centrally positioned space is divided from the dining area by a low wall

Because the two wings of the house are long and thin, nearly every room is dual aspect, and there is a view of either the glorious surroundings or the garden from almost all of them. It was a plan devised to keep the Sparrows feeling they are at the heart of things. “David has got it absolutely correct,” says Pauline, a retired music teacher. “I think it comes from knowing us for many years; he knows our lifestyle. We have 18 grandchildren and as the farthest any of them lives from here is North Wales, they are always coming and going! He also knew that after living in a house with

“We found it extremely hard to visualise what it would look like”

many ups and downs for so long that we should be happy in a house which is basically one level, in which you can just step out into the garden at any point.”

It is no surprise, therefore, that the kitchen has no doors, and indeed no clearly defined entrances. It is divided from the dining area by a low wall, at which Pauline stands when she is cooking. On the other side, through the clear glazed doors, is the garden. Above sit two more pyramidal rooflights. The Sparrows call this area ‘the conservatory’.

David had visited the Sparrows many times in their old eight bedroom house at the bottom of the hill, so he had clear ideas of what they would need as they settled into retirement, while constantly being visited by members of their family. He even planned the two spare bedrooms to the eastern side so that they are almost independent of the rest of the house. “David arranged it so that if we ever need to have live-in carers – Chris is in his mid eighties now – these

USEFUL CONTACTS: Architect Hadfield Associates: 01249 714229 Structural engineer Paul Squibbs: 01884 34883 Groundworks GeMech: 0117 964 6040 Main contractor HC Case: 01793 822160 Carpenters Case & Robins: 01793 822160 Bathroom Cifial: 01933 402008; Ideal Standard: 01482 346461 Rooflights Glazing Vision: 01842 815581 Roof covering Bauder: 01473 257671 Underfloor heating Warmafloor: 01489 581787 Bath stone cladding The Bath Stone Group: 01225 723792 Limestone flooring Stonell: 01892 833500 Central vacuum VacuDuct: 0800 783 6264 Hearing aid system Loops: 01484 426700





Above: Natural materials meet manmade
Cedar cladding is a soft contrast to the hard glazing and structural steel posts. The flat 'warm roof' is topped with a sedum blanket

rooms could form an independent flat, as they have a separate water and heating system," Pauline explains.

Although it all seems to work effortlessly well, like all good design the house has a simple concept but went through many processes and refinements before it all came together. Gaining planning permission was a slow process. It took endless negotiation and five years from first submission to final approval. This was not only because of the sensitive nature of the site, but because there is a rare early 17th century stone bathhouse in what is now the front garden. Planning consent was granted on the condition that this building would be restored, and the Sparrows have recently employed specialist conservators to undertake the work for £50,000.

"Sometimes I still wonder how we gained planning consent," David says. "Especially as Pauline and Chris decided halfway through the build that they wanted two windows to the front above the basement garage, so they had a front view as well as a rear view out of the sitting room."

The house is built of both steel and timber frames, with the basement cast in concrete and lined with blockwork. The external cladding is of cedar, with a large expanse of ashlar-faced Bath stone at the front. Bath stone is also used internally in the hallway and in the main sitting room.

The flat roof is of 'warm roof' construction, with the insulation placed externally on top of the joists. There are three layers of membranes and the whole is covered by a sedum mat. There are no gutters – just

PAULINE & CHRISTOPHER'S COSTS

Preliminaries, fees, services	£39,000
Demolition and site clearance	£29,000
Groundworks and piling	£67,500
Main structure	£153,000
Carpentry	£92,000
Roof	£50,000
Kitchen	£15,000
Electrics	£32,500
Bathroom and plumbing	£27,000
Miscellaneous	£70,000

an aluminium edge trim – and the roof cantilevers out, supported at the rear by round steel posts. To the south and east, where the glass walls facing the courtyard are exposed to the sun all day, a canopied *brise soleil* is angled to reduce overheating in summer.

"Although it is highly contemporary, and we found it extremely hard to visualise from the plans what it would look like, it really is the perfect house for our purposes," Christopher says. "I even have a workshop in the basement where I plan to take up carpentry, which is something I have always wanted to do. We are so happy here." 🏡

Hidden Depths

At 360m², the house is not small but by lying low to the ground – hiding 80m² of accommodation below – it avoids dominating the plot. Most of the rooms run single file through the L-shaped floorplan, so that light penetrates fully. Two spare bedrooms on the eastern wing are almost independent, in case the couple require full-time carers in the future.

