

Listed Living - on stilts!

BY CLIVE FEWINS



 The old house was a pretty sorry sight. Neglected, but with the potential to be a wonderful traditional home after a thorough facelift.

Captions

The size and position were ideal for Chris and Joan Ferrer. It had four bedrooms and was sited on a wonderful one-acre plot with a large varied garden with views to the southwest over rolling Hampshire downland. They bought it in 2000 and spent five years renovating the Listed Grade II property, during this time Chris retired from his dentistry practice.

Originally timber-framed with wattle and daub infill, the rambling farmhouse stands on the edge of a hamlet a few miles from Bishops Waltham. Over the years it has been much added-to but the original parts are believed to be the remains of an open hall and to date from the late 15th century.

"For us the house presented a great deal of interest," Chris said. "There are some wonderful beams and late medieval panelling in the dining room."

Outside the garden was very bare. Chris and Joan, both keen gardeners, relished the prospect of completely redesigning and renovating it.

In short - partly because the house was run-down as the previous owner had lived there for 50 years - it was a project they could really get really stuck into.

They could see immediately that there were improvements that could be made to the long galley kitchen at the rear. It had a very primitive sink and draining board, and needed redecorating. But there was more to it than this. By demolishing the stud partition between the two and



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incorporating the former study, and also refurbishing the entire room, Chris and Joan believed they could create a light and practical kitchen/breakfast room.

They have done just this, raising the ceiling in the process to give the room a taller and more airy feel. They also knocked through a window to the entrance hall, which imported much-needed light.

In the sitting room they discovered an outbreak of deathwatch beetle in the oak wall plate that rang above the windows. They found this after they removed the steel windows, which they were in the process of replacing with timber ones. The advice was to strip off the plaster and leave the beam exposed both inside and out until it dried out. This left the beetles with

nothing to feed on.

“Eventually the dead beetles just fell out,” said Joan. “We have had no problems since. The treatment was entirely successful.”

The Ferrers also rebuilt the big inglenook fireplace in the dining room themselves one Easter weekend, ripping out an old brick 1940s fireplace. They found a new oak beam to support the chimneybreast at a reclamation yard and used their builder, Tony Short, to cut and fit it.

Outside they did a great deal to make the outside of the house more weatherproof and fit to face another 500 years. This mainly comprised tile hanging on areas where there was water ingress and replacing earlier inappropriate tile hanging with more suitable tiles. They also



renewed a section of roof on the south side where the eaves overhang was insufficient to keep the elements out.

However all these actions did not address the main problem: orientation. From the outset they could see that, except for the kitchen window, the house did not make the most of the beautiful views to the rear.

“We could see that the most imaginative thing to do would be to convert the large double garage at the rear into a garden room and give it a glazed wall, so that we could make the most of the views to the west,” Joan said.

They decided to retain the room at the rear of the garage, which Chris had been using as a study, and to connect it to a new timber-





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framed glazed room - the garden room - by means of a wide door, so both rooms could be used for parties. They had also come to the conclusion that what they would really like would be a self-contained guest suite above the garage - if there was room and they were able to gain permission.

"There were four bedrooms but only two bathrooms," Joan explains. "As we love entertaining and our three grown-up children plus partners often come to stay we thought it would be nice to use the roof space as a separate en-suite bedroom."

This is what they did. The roof did not need to be rebuilt, as the pitch was ideal. So they had to devise a means of jacking up the roof so the builders could rebuild the area beneath.

It was necessary to raise the roof by just under a metre in order to gain the upper storey they needed

to create an upstairs en-suite guest room.

"The whole thing was remarkably simple really," Joan said. "Tony Short and his team removed the tiles and propped the walls. They then removed the sides and over a weekend the oak framers came and slipped in the frame underneath.

They banged in the pegs and it was done. It was quite amazing!"

Throughout the project the Ferrers saved quite a lot of money by 'shopping around'. For example:

a national specialist ironwork company wanted £1,200 for the bespoke curtain rails they needed for the garden room. By means of some diligent enquiries they found someone who made them for £450.

Apart from the work on the dining room fireplace they also did quite a lot of other work themselves.

This included tiling, decorating and removing shiny gloss paint from the kitchen walls and replacing this with

a breathable lime-based paint

By tackling the project this way Chris and Joan reckoned they saved about 15 per cent. Although they are glad they took this route, it made them see that builders, if they are conscientious, earn their money because of the stress they absorb managing the project.

"The most stressful part was tying in all the tradesmen to fit in with Tony's schedule," Chris said. "And even then we had a six week gap when little could be done, awaiting for the arrival of the oak frame."

The job took nine months - about six weeks longer than they had hoped. Now all is finished they have splendid views across the garden from both the new garden room and the study. The front end with the open loggia on 'stilts' serves them as an evening 'snug' throughout the year

"On a summer's evening we can fold the oak doors right back, which



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is lovely," Chris said. "At the same time the loggia gives us protection if the weather goes cool. The job has been a great success, not least because we could easily have spent a great deal more money, and because we found the entire project very satisfying.

"The whole project was a huge success. But I don't think it would have been completed in the time or to the standard if we had not been on the spot all the time and able to and devote maximum attention to it."

The couple also did their 'homework'. Chris had already been on two Homeowners courses for owners of period house run by SPAB, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings.*

They also both read copious magazine articles on all aspects of design and self-build and kept a file of relevant cuttings.

Joan said: "It was so useful 'living on the job' all the time, because we were able to make small changes - things that just could not be spotted when the scheme was drawn up - as we went along.

"Examples of this were minor changes to the position of light switches, the use of lime mortar for the brickwork, the internal plaster finish, and - more importantly - the positioning of cupboards for storage. Chris likes to say that it is the extra five per cent that makes all the difference to the finished job, and he is quite correct."

*SPAB: 020 7377 1644.
www.spab.org.uk

