



Warmest welcome

Thermally efficient Farragon House makes the most of its glorious Perthshire location

Words **Fiona Reid**
Photographs **Phil Wilkinson**

In 2008, David and Pia England were searching for a property with a few acres of land in Perthshire when they spotted a farm in the hills above Aberfeldy that was for sale in three lots: the farmhouse, a steading conversion and two cottages. The location was perfect – David says it is his favourite valley in Scotland – so they bought the steading and cottages, and lived in one of the cottages while tackling the steading conversion.

The steading was a great home for the couple and their three children, Freya, now 14, Alice, 12, and Max, 10. But the story didn't end there. David says: "On that first viewing, I remember thinking, 'It would be great to build a house just there.'" He was referring to this site, which is now home to Farragon House and which commands glorious views along the valley to Schiehallion.

Having already completed a substantial project with the steading, the couple approached this new build with defined ideas of what they wanted (though being located on a greenfield site, it also needed to comply with the local council's Sustainable Development Policy). Working with Colin Potter of Architeco, a Certified Passive House Designer who specialises in sustainable design and low-energy buildings, Pia and David have created a highly efficient, carbon-neutral, five-bedroom home that features open plan living spaces with extensive glazing.

From the outset, the couple wanted to use ecologically friendly and thermally efficient Structural Insulated Panels (SIPs), with Auchterarder-based JML Contracts the main contractor for the build. John Langley, director of JML Contracts, says: "Having a property that includes lots of glazing can pose



The carbon-neutral home is open plan with extensive glazing, allowing the living, dining and kitchen spaces to be bathed in light. Externally, cladding gives a subtle nod to Scandinavian dwellings





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problems in terms of thermal loss through winter and overheating in the summer months. By using SIPs combined with a mechanical ventilation system, we were able to ensure that David and Pia’s home is thermally efficient all year round.

“The house presented us with a really interesting challenge – we needed to find a balance between design and functionality so that it was ecologically friendly but included plenty of glazing to make most of the stunning views down the valley.”

The SIPs kit was precision engineered and manufactured in JML Contracts’ factory before being erected on site in just two weeks. “That’s the exciting bit, when you see the bones of the house going up really quickly,” says David. The couple had sold their previous property and were living about 100 metres from the site, in the old farmhouse, while Farragon House was being built, which meant that he could be on site every day.

The design was influenced by the previous steading conversion as the couple had enjoyed so many elements of that house, from the big family kitchen and the colour palette to the feel and flow of the spaces, but there were different features that they wanted to introduce here. Pia is Swedish, and having a warm home was top of her wish list. “We installed a mechanical heat recovery system by Solarcrest which means the whole house is the same temperature, to within one degree,” says David, who grew up in Perthshire. “It was an investment, but it was worth it as this is the warmest house that Pia’s lived in since moving from Sweden over 20 years ago.”

They also wanted a sense of volume, with lofty roof heights, and again the SIPs’ construction enabled this as there was no need for roof trusses. Natural light floods into the rooms upstairs which have vaulted ceilings with skylights and windows, while the vaulted hallway creates a dramatic entrance. Every aspect of the design was considered to capture the views, from the corner window in the open plan living area to the glass-fronted balcony off the master bedroom.

There were a few design tweaks during

the process. The staircase was changed to the curved design, which leads up to the galleried landing, enhancing the sense of openness as you arrive. “We’d started on the foundations when we changed this, but this hallway is the fulcrum of the house,” says David. Also, in the master bathroom, the windows above the bath were a late addition. “We had the Veluxes, but adding the windows means that you can look out to the view from the bath.”

Externally, the use of materials ensures that this house sits well within its rural environment. Stone was reused from an old orchard wall that was on the site, while the cladding gives a subtle nod to Scandinavian homes and looks like painted timber, but is instead a cement fibre cladding (by James Hardie UK) which requires no maintenance. The windows are by Nordvest. Pia specified the astragal windows on the front of the house, preferring this more traditional aesthetic alongside the stone, while David wanted the floor-depth windows at the rear, so that the open plan living, dining and kitchen space would be bathed in light.

“We had a similar kitchen in our previous house, but this has a different layout, and we used different colours, with Stiffkey Blue from Farrow & Ball for the cabinetry and white worktops,” says David. “And we had a 2.3m island before and did the same here, as it works so well.” The couple used local companies wherever possible, including the Design House for the kitchen and the Bathroom Company and Terkan Lighting, all in Perth, with tiling from the Edinburgh Tile Studio and Fired Earth. Edinburgh-based James Morrow were consulted on the integrated home entertainment system.

When JML Contracts finished on site, David managed the remainder of the project, working with various trades to complete the interior fit out, and the family moved into the house in February last year. “I’d definitely go for a new build if I was doing another project because you have a blank canvas in terms of the design,” he says.

Contact JML Contracts on 01764 663 271 or visit www.jmlcontracts.co.uk



From top right: the living area; the curved staircase; the galleried landing; tiles came from the Edinburgh Tile Studio and Fired Earth; windows above the bath were a late addition

