





# *Built to last*

Gordon and Vanessa Lazaro's move to Gloucestershire became a very hands-on affair

WORDS BY VICTORIA JENKINS PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM GODDARD

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The big first-floor terrace has eco decking made from recycled plastic, which has no-slip, no-mould and no-scratch properties



The Lazaros' charming cottage extension is built of Cotswold stone and Bradstone roof tiles. To the right is their part of the original cottage which they bought from owners wanting to downsize. They have a half-acre garden, having bought extra land off the neighbouring farmer to avoid having cows looking through their windows

Not very long ago Gordon and Vanessa Lazaro lived in an old cottage near Tunbridge Wells in East Sussex. It sounds idyllic but Vanessa says, "It was cold, draughty and the heating bill was astronomical. Plus it was always a bit of a squeeze and when we entertained it was positively crowded."

The couple liked the idea of self-building and they also wanted to move to Gloucestershire where their daughter and her family lived. Then they discovered an old 1730s detached cottage tucked away in the hills behind Nailsworth and surprisingly, one end of the cottage was for sale. "The owners wanted to downsize but without actually moving!" says Gordon. "Their cottage was quite big and they were offering a sitting room with bathroom and bedroom above. Plus there was already planning in place for an extension to hold a

big kitchen and second bedroom above."

The couple were able to amend the plans to include an extra floor and a third bedroom so went ahead with the purchase, renting nearby for eight months while the work was underway. "When we saw the land with its amazing views we knew it was the right move," says Vanessa.

Gordon project managed the build and was on site every day. "He got involved wherever he could and loved being part of the whole process," says Vanessa. "He did everything from laying the insulation, to helping the RSJs go in, to driving the digger and digging the drainage tracts."

Meanwhile Vanessa was landscaping the garden which was overgrown and on a slope. "The first thing we did was to dig a huge hole for a pond. Then more topsoil was added, kindly donated by a local farmer who let us have his old potato soil. Unfortunately, within weeks, potatoes ►



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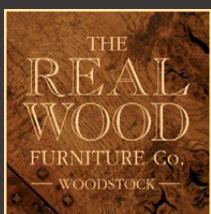


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The bespoke bi-fold doors and windows, all in oak, were made by Arbor, and Vanessa made the kitchen-diner blinds from Multiyork remnants



The sleigh bed in the main bedroom is made of leather and is teamed with a Neptune chest of drawers and a reupholstered old chair



In the sitting room, the couple installed new oak flooring, a new chimney and a wood burner

were growing where a lovely flat lawn was supposed to be. I spent weeks and weeks pulling up the blooming plants!"

The couple planted lots of fruit trees, shrubs and flowers, especially ones to attract bees and other insects. "We are both keen on wildlife and already the pond has attracted frogs, newts and beautiful dragon flies," she says.

One of the reasons for self-building a house was so that they would not be dependent on oil or gas. "We wanted to be eco-friendly, so we opted for an air sourced heating system. We put in underfloor heating on the ground and first floors and insulated beyond the minimum requirements."

To save money, the Lazaros decided to lay the under floor pipe work themselves. "On a particularly wet, cold and very windy weekend we clipped in the pipes exactly as we had been told. It was long and laborious work, but we were very pleased with

ourselves when we finished. Monday morning came and the heating engineer took one look and said, 'It's all got to come up! You forgot to put a protective sheet between the pipes and the insulation blocks!' So we had to do it all over again!"

The ground floor of the new three-storey extension is taken up by a huge open-plan kitchen-living-dining room as the Lazaros wanted as much glass and light as possible and used oak on the bi-fold doors and windows to get the look they wanted.

Above, over two floors, are two en suite bedrooms and in the old end-section of the original cottage are their sitting room and another bedroom and bathroom.

For the flooring in the extension the couple chose limestone as a complete change from the uneven slate floors in their old cottage in Sussex. "It's also very practical as it's easy to clean - luckily, as being so light it shows up the dog's paw prints. Now Bailey the beagle has to come ▶

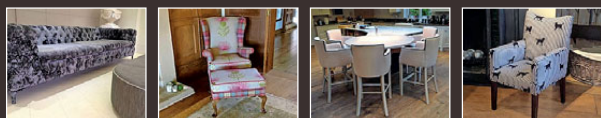
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The chest of drawers in the guest bedroom is Regency



The Pegasus bath is fitted with a whirlpool, and there is a Jacuzzi basin

in via the front door and sit on a coir mat while we wipe his paws,” says Vanessa.

“We were going to buy an off the shelf kitchen but everything changed while choosing the flooring. Jamie of Precious Stone wanted us to see our choice already in situ as he had another client with the same limestone tiles,” says Gordon.

“When we went to her house we not only loved the floor we loved the kitchen units too, which were hand made and hand painted by a small local firm in a nearby valley. The very same day we went off to see Tim Buckingham, one of the directors of Woodchester Cabinet Makers and loved his style of cabinetry,” says Vanessa.

Now the focal point of the ground floor extension is the glamorous Shaker style kitchen, the units of which are hand-painted in two modern shades of grey with sparking quartz work surfaces.

Finally the couple and Bailey the beagle were able to move in just before Christmas

Vanessa at the island which has an underhang to allow guests to sit and talk to the couple when cooking. The island also contains the recycling bins facing the cooker, which Vanessa says, are “brilliant, but they have to be emptied very frequently or there are ‘aromas’ every time you open them!”



2013 and invited the whole family round for Christmas dinner in their brand-new extension. “The only hitch was just before Christmas when John Lewis told us they couldn’t deliver our Smeg range cooker until the New Year. Then Tim from Woodchester Cabinet Makers offered to sell us his display Mercury range cooker model in his workshop. It was two years old but of course never used, so we jumped at the chance and bought it for a very good price. And John Lewis refunded us.”

Since then Coco the kitten has joined the family too and thoroughly enjoys the underfloor heating for, as Vanessa says, “Air source heating only really works in well insulated houses - which this one is - so it’s always as warm as toast. In fact, sometimes maybe a little too warm!”

And Gordon adds, “Best of all is the light which floods into our home all day long. You really couldn’t ask for a more pleasant spot.” ■

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