

# FROM acorns grow

Sue Crowe, with help from her son Matthew, has created a new oak frame home that simply oozes charm and light

SELF-BUILD | SUFFOLK | MAY 10 - JUNE 11 | SIZE: 160M<sup>2</sup>  
PLOT COST: £120,000 | BUILD COST: £301,000 (£1,881/M<sup>2</sup>)  
VALUE: £480,000

## *The Hybrid House*

The three bedroom house is primarily an oak frame construction, but structural insulated panels (SIPs) have been used for the roof and between the glazed areas in the walls. SIPs give the roof an added depth, which required skilful detailing on the leadwork and fascias



*"I think it is an exceptional house, and just what I wanted"*

**Sitting Room**

The oak frame is exposed in all its beauty in the informal sitting room which opens up onto the garden through doors from Rationel. The occasional vibrantly painted wall (as above the brick fireplace) lends a real feeling of warmth to this cosy room



**Open Plan Dining and Kitchen Space**

A charming sail blind has been incorporated to reduce the problem of overheating in the main open plan living space. The oak frame package was provided by Carpenter Oak



**Lighting Complications**

Exposed oak frames sometime struggle with modern 'hidden' lighting schemes. Probably the best example in the house centres on the purlins that strengthen the roof structure in Sue's sitting room. The object was to illuminate the frame - to highlight the beauty of the structure - so Matthew and Ian had to drill through the huge timbers in order to fix the spotlights.

The wires leading to the spots were concealed in a precut channel on top of the purlins which is not visible from floor level

**Front Elevation**

Sue's new home has been built at the end of a cul-de-sac in the garden of an adjoining house.



**Open Panel = Open Plan**  
Leaving some of the oak frame panels unfilled now allows Sue to enjoy a degree of separation between different spaces but with all the benefits of natural light. The Neptune solid oak kitchen (shown HERE and MIDDLE LEFT) was specified from Okells



**First Floor**  
A gallery landing enjoys plenty of light thanks to the bank of Velux rooflights. The main bathroom features sanitaryware from Victoria Plumb



After being married to a carpenter for 36 years, it was hardly surprising that widow Sue Crowe decided on a self-build design that featured a lot of timber. After her husband Andrew died in 2005, she gradually realised the cottage they had lived in for 13 years was too much work for her and that she would eventually have to downsize. Failing to find a suitable period property in the area, she decided to self-build.

A visit to the Homebuilding and Renovating Show at the NEC in Birmingham, a few influential magazine articles, and a visit to the Devon base of Roderick James Architects and associate company Carpenter Oak Ltd. convinced her that a green oak frame was the route to follow for her new home.

The result is a beautifully designed three bedroom, contemporary oak frame house, positioned at the end of a cul-de-sac overlooking open fields in a Suffolk village near Felixstowe — the area where Sue has lived all her life.

It is perfectly finished, compact, and yet with three good-sized bedrooms, is quite adequate to provide sleepover space for two of her grandchildren, who live just round the corner. It was Sue's son, Matthew, who was key to the build. Like his father (and his father before him) Matthew is a carpenter. He aided his mother by taking on the role of main contractor. However Sue, who sold her cottage fast and lived in a rental property for 18 months until moving in during June 2011, worked every day fetching and carrying, skivvyng, cleaning up and acting as teamaker-in-chief.



*“I found it hugely stressful and couldn't have done it without the assistance of my son”*

“Both Matthew and I have good roots and contacts round here,” Sue says. “Without this knowledge, undertaking the build would have been extremely hard because there are very few new builds in this style in this area.”

The project had a fairly traumatic start because there was a lot of local hostility. “The plot was part of the garden of the adjoining house, and the local people did not want anything built here,” Sue explains. “Gaining planning permission presented little problems, but convincing the village people that I intended to live here and play a full part in village life was very hard.”

Now all is finished, peace reigns. “Local people appreciate the quality of the house and all the thought that went into it,” reflects Sue.

Attention to detail is evident throughout. “With an oak frame like this containing a very high proportion of glazing, it really is important to get things right down to the last detail. Fortunately, Matthew had a really excellent team to support him, including my brother-in-law Terry George — a former builder.” This is evident as soon as you view the outside — especially in the oak detailing round the glazed areas and the leadwork on the roof. “We worked on a lot of these vital details as we went along,” Matthew adds. “I would chat with our architect Mike Hope in Devon — or when he came over every month to supervise — then he would draw up the details and send it to me so the subbies could work from it.”

The use of structural insulated panels (SIPs) between the glazed areas in the walls and in the roof proved a success because of their speed of erection, remarkable

### The Lowdown

#### SUE'S COSTS

Fees:	£26,500
Oak frame:	£64,000
SIPs:	£35,000
Contract, building materials/carpentry:	£93,000
Sprinkler system:	£5,000
Services:	£8,500
Sanitaryware:	£4,000
Plumbing incl underfloor heating:	£12,000
Electrics:	£10,500
Kitchen:	£11,500
Doors and Windows:	£10,000
Roof, incl tiles and leadwork:	£12,000
Glazing:	£7,000
Hire charges:	£2,000
<b>Total:</b>	<b>£301,000</b>

#### SUPPLIERS

<b>Design</b> Roderick James Architects ..... 01803 868000	<b>Brick plinth, chimney and wall</b> Mark Rudland..... 07773 411527
<b>Oak frame</b> Carpenter Oak Ltd..... 01803 732900	<b>Rational windows and doors</b> MA Simmonds ..... 01296 428280
<b>Main contractor and carpentry</b> Matthew Crowe of Ipswich Woodwork ..... 07885 282801	<b>Underfloor heating</b> Uponor..... 01455 550355
<b>SIPs</b> Sips Industries..... 01383 823995	<b>Sanitaryware</b> Victoria Plumb..... victoriaplumb.com
<b>Plumbing and underfloor heating</b> Mick Banyard..... 01473 311664	<b>Kitchen</b> Neptune/Okells: 01829 741512
<b>Electrics</b> Ian Finch..... 01394 282307	<b>Interior tiles</b> The Tile Studio ..... 01394 610528
<b>Roof glazing</b> Velux..... 01592 772211	<b>Conservatory glazing, glazed panels and internal glass</b> Kevin Turpin..... 01473 461311
<b>Roofing and leadwork</b> Vince Sawyer .. 07730 739738	<b>Additional oak</b> Whitmores..... 01455 209121
<b>Roofing slates</b> Primera.. 01487 825222	<b>Other materials</b> Travis Perkins, Felixstowe..... 01394 278999
<b>Staircase</b> Simon Warrington..... 07739 390802	
<b>Crane hire</b> Quintos..... 01473 712041	

U value, and reasonable cost. However, this construction also gave the slate-clad roof a depth that had to be seamlessly blended into the glazed roof of the garden room beneath. This involved skilful leadwork by roofer Vince Sawyer. It would have been very easy to get it wrong; likewise with the finishing details where the roof glazing meets the fascia.

"We were hampered by three weeks of snow during the winter of 2010/11 too," Sue says. "We also had slight delays with the Velux rooflights and the SIPs, but we still managed to move in during June 2011 to coincide with the expiry of my house rental agreement."

The finances, however, did not run as smoothly — the final build cost of £301,000 was £40,000 above Sue's original budget. She attributes roughly half of this to increasing the specification on many of the materials and fittings. But, the demand from the building inspector for a full internal sprinkler system added £5,500 to the overall cost, and bringing electrical power to the site cost a massive £7,500.

"Matthew had urged me throughout not to skimp on things, and I didn't," Sue says. "Fortunately I was able to find the additional money. I think it is an exceptional house, and just what I wanted. But, even after having undertaken a self-build before, I found it hugely stressful and I could not have done it without the assistance of my son. I am sure my late husband Andrew would have loved the end result just as much as I do." ■

## What I've Learned

### What surprised you most about undertaking this project?

The cost of installing the services was huge.

### What was your best buy?

The kitchen — we gained a massive discount through the architects.

### What is your favourite part of the house?

The kitchen and garden room.

### Did you find anything surprisingly easy or perhaps hard throughout the project?

The hardest part was all of the forward thinking and the need to make important decisions early on. Finishing the kitchen was the easiest — it was all planned so carefully that when it was installed, it worked perfectly.

### What's the one piece of advice you'd pass onto others now you've completed your home?

Pre-planning really is key. Try to think ahead as much as you possibly can too.

### If you could undertake the project again, is there anything you'd change?

Nothing — the house is exactly as I wanted.



## OAK: DESIGN DETAIL ISSUES

**A**s the main structure of the building (the oak frame) is constantly 'on show', this carries with it the ever-present danger of looking terrible if all the details are not just right. At the top of the list of pitfalls is the challenge of concealing all the electrics and plumbing.

Matthew admits he found it hugely challenging when he and electrician Ian Finch worked to conceal the wires leading to electrical fittings attached to large timber posts and beams.

"You can't just go drilling through an oak frame on a wing and prayer," says Matthew. "You really have to get it right."

"Because of the style of construction and the visibility of the oak frame, there was only one place in which we could position the extractor fan in the bathroom," Matthew explains. "And this entailed seven metres of ducting that had to travel through a specially concealed space constructed

in the garage roof to vent to the outside air. Fortunately, Ian and I had worked many times together. Things would have been a lot more problematical working with a less experienced electrician whom I did not know as well."

The other problem that Matthew encountered was the presence of large oak corner braces where some posts and beams meet. "The drawings do not always show the position of the braces," explains Matthew.

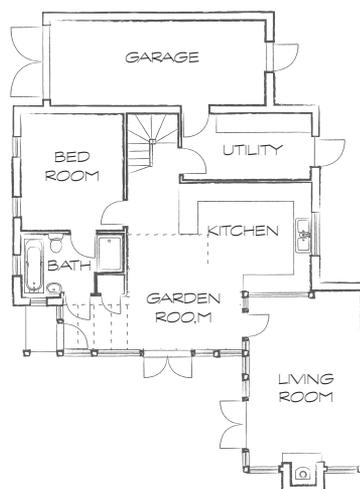
This in fact caused a problem in the downstairs bathroom, where they had to move the position of the WC because every time anyone got up from the pedestal the result was a bruised head! In order to do this, they had to remove a section of the beam-and-block floor and move the waste pipe.

"You really can only position things in certain places with an oak frame, and this involves a great deal of forethought and pre-planning," Matthew says.

## Floorplans

The ground floor features an open plan kitchen and garden room, together with a living room. There's also an en suite bedroom on this level and utility and garage. Two further bedrooms and a bathroom are situated on the first floor and are enjoyed by visiting grandchildren.

GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

