

# Single-storey sensation

Designed with a soaring zinc roof and standing within the confines of the Dartmoor National Park, Nigel and Shirley Davis's contemporary retirement bungalow makes a bold statement.

STORY: DEBBIE JEFFERY PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD DOWNER/JAYNE MORRIS PHOTOGRAPHY/NIGEL DAVIS



**W**hen Nigel and Shirley Davis wanted to downsize for their retirement they weren't prepared to settle for a standard, nondescript bungalow. The couple had lived in an ancient granite and thatched house on Dartmoor for 20 years, but once their children grew and left home they found the property too large for their needs.

"We were always paying out for repairs and knew it would only become more difficult to stay there as we grew older," explains Nigel, a retired petrophysicist. "We wanted a low-maintenance, energy-efficient home within walking distance of shops, and in 2016 we began looking to move to somewhere smaller."

The couple's son and his family live in the ancient stannary town of Ashburton, which stands on the southern slopes of Dartmoor, and Shirley and Nigel viewed several properties in the area, eventually finding a 30-year-old Swedish prefab chalet on a quarter-acre plot.

At first the small, triple-glazed bungalow seemed to offer exactly what they needed, but it soon became apparent that the property had been poorly positioned, with its main entrance facing sideways onto a neighbour's fence. The kitchen was also cramped, and the couple invited Ashburton-based architectural practice, van Ellen + Sheryn, for advice before purchasing the property.

"The location was perfect, with level walking into town and plenty of parking, but the entrance was confusing which meant that people came in through french doors in the bedroom," explains Nigel. "We also needed a larger kitchen and were thinking about changing the layout and remodelling."

Van Ellen + Sheryn specialises in progressive, contemporary designs within the sensitive landscapes of National Parks and AONBs, and practice founder Eilir Sheryn proposed demolishing the existing prefab chalet and replacing it with a bespoke home, which would also be VAT exempt.

#### EXTERIOR

The three-bedroom bungalow was designed with a swooping variable-pitch roof clad in zinc, walls of granite and larch, and glass doors opening onto the walled courtyard garden.



#### IN BRIEF

**PROJECT** New build  
**LOCATION** Ashburton, Devon  
**COST** £295,000 in 2015  
**SPENT** £500,000  
**WORTH** £800,000



“We’d never built a house before and loved the idea of being able to design something to meet all our needs, but we decided to live there first for a year before making the final decision to go for it,” says Nigel.

“Ian Phillips is a talented architect at the practice who listened to our requirements, which were quite specific: things like being able to bring the grandchildren into the house from the car without getting wet and a brightly lit space for Shirley to sew.”

Ian worked with the couple to explore six completely different designs – from a flat-roofed bungalow to a house with dormers – using walk-through 3D models. The final T-shaped, single-storey building provides a great example of what can be achieved in the Dartmoor National Park. The highly contemporary, clean-lined dwelling makes the most of its site creating a private, hidden home and garden in an urban setting.

“Shirley was keen on building a stone wall around the site and it was my suggestion to lift one corner of the roof – which ended up creating all sorts of issues,” Nigel continues. “It makes such a difference to the inside though, so I’m glad we did it.”

Roofed in zinc, the twisting surface provides height and drama in the main living room above the glazed

**ROOFING**

One corner of the roof is raised to add a sense of drama to the internal space.

## IN DETAIL

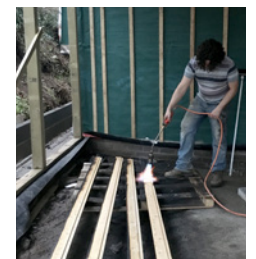
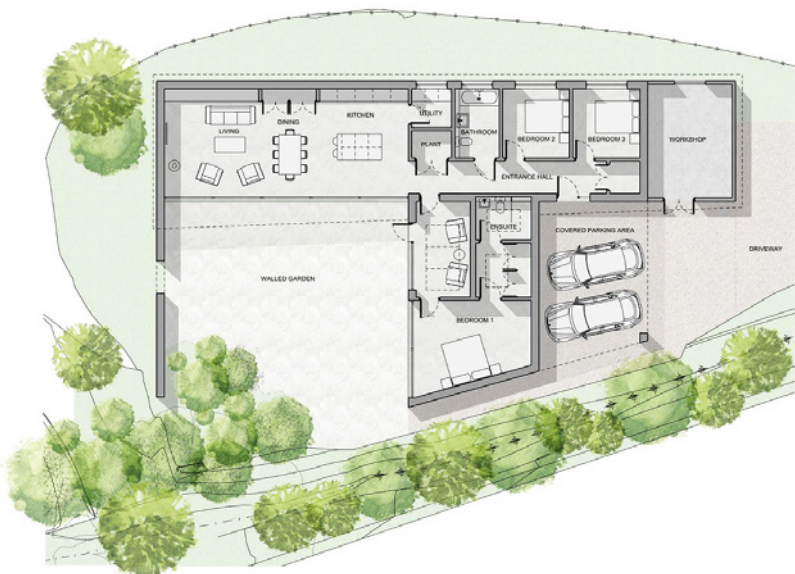
<p><b>PROJECT</b>  <b>Architect</b> van Ellen + Sheryn:                  vanellensheryn.com  <b>Builder</b> Goulden &amp; Sons:                  gouldenandsons.co.uk  <b>Structural engineer</b>                  StructureHaus:                  structurehaus.com</p> <p><b>STRUCTURE</b>  <b>Roofing</b> Joce Roofing Ltd:                  jocerroofing.co.uk  <b>Carpentry</b> Eclipse Carpenters:                  eclipsecarpenters.com  <b>Electrics</b> Wannells                  Electrotechnical Systems Ltd:                  wannellsLtd.com  <b>Plumbing</b> Ourheat:                  ourheat.co.uk  <b>Dry lining</b> Mudge Dry Lining                  Ltd: mudgetrylining.com  <b>Decoration</b> SF Decorators:                  sfdecorators.co.uk  <b>Groundworks</b>                  Kesterbrooke Construction:                  kesterbrookeconstruction.co.uk  <b>Sapa windows and doors</b>                  PS Counter Windows Ltd:                  pscounterwindows.co.uk</p>	<p><b>Granite</b> Lantoom Quarry:                  lantoom.co.uk  <b>Zinc roof</b> VM Zinc:                  vmzinc.co.uk  <b>Stonemason</b> Matt Lofthouse:                  07895 005255  <b>Steel</b> Westcountry Fabrication:                  westcountryfabrication.co.uk  <b>Insulation</b> Rockwool:                  rockwool.co.uk</p> <p><b>FIXTURES AND FITTINGS</b>  <b>Kitchen and bathrooms</b>                  Mayflower Kitchens:                  mayflowerkitchens.co.uk  <b>Tiling</b> Teign Tile and Stone:                  teigntileandstone.co.uk  <b>Lighting</b> Lightmaster Direct:                  lightmaster-direct.co.uk  <b>Underfloor heating, MVHR</b>                  Ourheat: ourheat.co.uk  <b>Porcelain floor tiles</b>                  Tileflair: tileflair.co.uk  <b>Electric blinds</b> Acacia Blinds:                  acaciablinds.co.uk  <b>Induction hob with ventilation</b>                  Bosch PXX875D34E:                  bosch-home.co.uk</p>
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wall, and the varied pitch of the roof creates a bespoke triangular window to one end of the open-plan kitchen/dining/living space, providing glimpses of trees beyond.

Two guest bedrooms, a bathroom and plant room are accessed from the entrance hallway, and the utility room is positioned beside the kitchen. The main bedroom suite and a separate sunroom/sewing room are located in the smaller wing, while outside there are a covered parking area and a workshop/store.

“Our garden is within the Dartmoor National Park boundary, so the planning application

“There were limits on how much bigger the new house could be, but at 180 sqm it’s more than large enough for our needs.”



**MATERIALS**  
 Detail of the stonework and the Japanese-inspired Shou-Sugi-Ban larch, which was scorched with a blowtorch.



### KITCHEN

The sleek, practical kitchen features a combination of light and dark grey units and Lapitec work surfaces. Walnut doors open into built-in storage space.

involved their consent,” says Nigel. “At one point we amended the plans to include a basement level, but the cost was just too prohibitive. There were limits on how much bigger the new house could be, compared to the previous chalet, but at 180-sqm it’s more than large enough for our needs.”

Nigel was keen to build a prefabricated house, which would be constructed largely off-site – resulting in a fast build time. “We couldn’t find anyone to build our design, though, mainly because of my idea to raise the roof, which wasn’t standard,” says Nigel. “The tendering process was depressing because nobody was getting back to us, and in the end we went with the only builder who gave a price.”

Demolition of the existing prefab began in March 2017, but as time passed little progress was being made. Nigel and Shirley had moved into rented accommodation and became increasingly anxious about the delays.

“Our builder refused to sign a contract and kept disappearing after the demolition stage, so not only did we have no house we also had no builder,” says Nigel. “Fortunately, another local company, Goulden & Sons, agreed to take over as the main contractor in June 2017 and from then on it was a very smooth experience.”

The Totnes-based construction company organised a raft foundation, once the original idea of underpinning the existing slab proved unfeasible. Structural steelwork was needed to support the large expanses of glazing, and the highly insulated timber-framed walls were stick-built on site.

A combination of stone and larch was chosen to clad the exterior of the new house, with granite proving a surprisingly affordable option at around £90 per tonne. “The stonemason was incredible and did an amazing job of the two end walls and our garden wall,” says Nigel.

“We’d never built a house before and loved the idea of being able to design something to meet all our needs.”





A palette of black, white and grey materials runs through the house from outside to in, and zinc roofing was matched to the same anthracite colour as the aluminium-framed doors and windows.

The exterior is clad in weathered Siberian larch and Japanese-inspired Shou-Sugi-Ban charred larch, which creates contrast between the main volume and the master bedroom wing.

“Buying pre-charred larch was just too expensive so we did it ourselves,” says Nigel, who worked with a blowtorch to achieve the desired effect. “It took an hour to char four lengths, but we only needed a small amount for the carport and one wall facing onto the courtyard.”

The unassuming timber and granite walls of the street entrance protect a hidden gem beyond. As you enter the house and move through the central spine corridor the main living and kitchen space opens up.

This large open-plan room has a vaulted, twisting ceiling and is flanked by a huge 11m run of glass doors, facing onto a central courtyard garden and supported on a bespoke steel girder to avoid the need for additional columns. The walled garden was an important requirement from the outset and is naturally protected from the urban surroundings by trees and hedgerows.

White marbled porcelain tiles bounce light around the interior and continue out into the courtyard – allowing the main spaces to flow seamlessly into the garden and helping to create an outdoor ‘room’.



“There were a few nice surprises, like the way the glass casts subtle reflections,” says Nigel, who was on site every day during the 12-month project.

Van Ellen + Sheryn was involved at every stage, advising the couple on interior detailing and finishes as part of its full interior and exterior design service. Every decision was governed by the need for a low-maintenance home, and the couple replaced their furniture with contemporary pieces more suited to the new house.

“We looked at laying limestone flooring, but it needs resealing, so we chose porcelain tiles instead,” says Nigel. “There’s a wet underfloor heating system and mechanical ventilation and heat recovery, which we’d thoroughly recommend as it reduces dust, and our heating bills are really low.

“Now we have far more time to spend with the grandchildren and to enjoy our hobbies, rather than constantly maintaining the house. It’s exactly what we’d hoped for.”

### **BEDROOMS/ BATHROOMS**

One of the two guest bedrooms is used as a playroom for visiting grandchildren. The main bedroom is located in the smaller wing and has an en suite and dressing room.

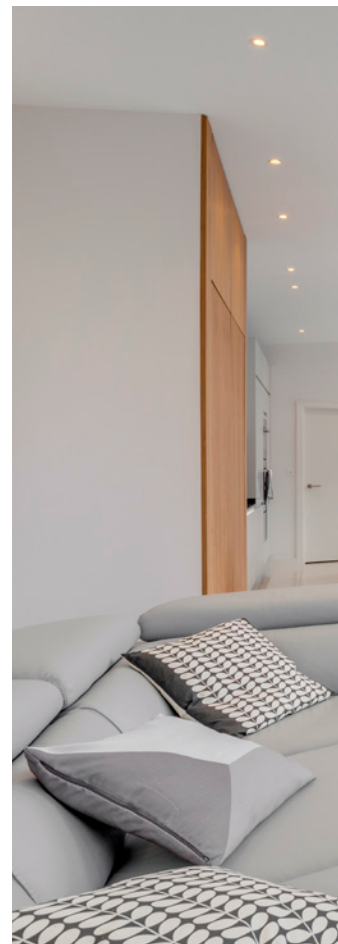


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### **DINING/ LIVING**

Porcelain floor tiles have been laid over underfloor heating in the open-plan kitchen/dining/living space, with the wall of glass doors opening onto a courtyard finished in matching slip-resistant tiles.





## FINAL WORD

### What was the high point?

Big milestones, such as the roof going on, were exciting and watching the stonemason working with such skill was fascinating.

### ...and the low point?

Initial cost estimates, which were far higher than we could afford. We very nearly gave up altogether.

### Your best buy?

Using offcuts of worktop for the bathroom sills was a great idea, and we have a hob in the kitchen with quiet, built-in extraction so our view isn't obscured by an extractor.

### Your biggest extravagance?

The zinc roof. The original tender was for Tata steel, but our builder, Richard Goulden, found some savings with windows and we decided to blow it on real zinc. It was a good decision and I love the hand-crafted look.

### Any top tips?

Make sure your builder signs a contract before they start work. We were lucky to find a reliable company prepared to pick up where our original builder left off.

