

New build  
**CASE STUDY**

# DOWN *in the* DUNIES

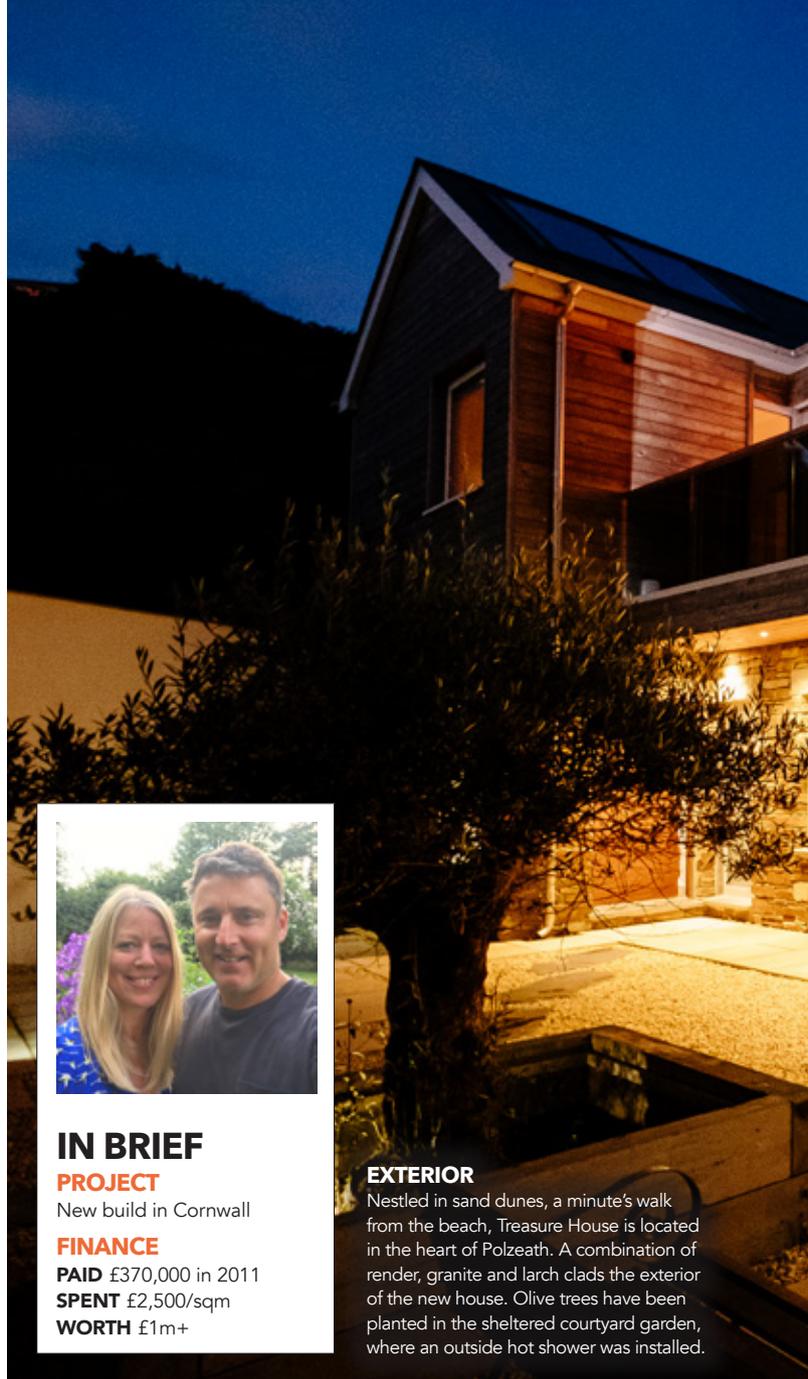
First-time selfbuilders Iain and Anna Wilson have built an impressive reverse-level beach house nestled in sand dunes on the North Cornwall coast.

STORY: **DEBBIE JEFFERY** PHOTOGRAPHY: **PERFECT STAYS**

“We planned to relocate from Wiltshire to Cornwall, and had been keeping an eye out for a building plot for several years,” says Iain Wilson. “When a derelict beach house in Polzeath came up for sale in 2011 we bought it at public auction – paying well over the £250,000 guide price because of the fantastic sand dune setting.”

Treasure House was one of the oldest properties in the village, but was sadly beyond economic repair, and

*“We paid well over the £250,000 guide price because of the fantastic sand dune setting.”*



## IN BRIEF

### PROJECT

New build in Cornwall

### FINANCE

**PAID** £370,000 in 2011

**SPENT** £2,500/sqm

**WORTH** £1m+

### EXTERIOR

Nestled in sand dunes, a minute's walk from the beach, Treasure House is located in the heart of Polzeath. A combination of render, granite and larch clads the exterior of the new house. Olive trees have been planted in the sheltered courtyard garden, where an outside hot shower was installed.





*“We set about drawing up plans for a new Treasure House, built using natural materials.”*

although no planning consent had been granted for a replacement house Iain convinced his wife, Anna, of the potential that such a coastal plot could offer.

“We set about drawing up plans for a new Treasure House, built using natural materials such as timber and Cornish slate, so that it would sit comfortably in its surroundings,” he says. “We focused on bringing the coastline indoors, with bleached timber, pebbles and natural stone, as well as creating as much light as possible.”

The house has been orientated in the same direction as the original building, nestled down in sand dunes which provide protection from the elements. Reversing the layout means bedrooms are on the ground floor, with living space above.

Arranging the layout around a courtyard ensures privacy, shelter from the wind and some shade throughout the day, and an annexe building with a sedum roof creates a buffer from the coastal path and provides pleasant views from the west-facing first-floor balcony.

Working within the constraints of the triangular plot proved challenging, and the concept designs and 3D models were produced in conjunction with Tim Hitchens, founder of Design By Timber, who also later crafted bespoke furniture for the house.

“Initially I’d thought I could do everything myself, because I had so many ideas in my head,” says Iain, who works in finance, “but it became obvious that getting help from the experts really added to the design process.”

Iain arranged for the existing house to be demolished and the site cleared in the winter of 2012, reclaiming materials wherever possible, including roof trusses, stone, floorboards and the original Delabole slate house sign, which were all re-used.

Once planning permission had been granted in 2013 for the replacement house an architect was engaged to produce



## CONTACTS

### PROJECT

**Concept design** Tim Hitchens: [designbytimber.co.uk](http://designbytimber.co.uk)

**Main contractor** Simon Lawrence: [simonlawrencebuilders.co.uk](http://simonlawrencebuilders.co.uk)

**Construction design and contract administration**  
Danny Wallis: [dw-architecture.co.uk](http://dw-architecture.co.uk)  
3D design Terraform Design: [terraformdesignuk@gmail.com](mailto:terraformdesignuk@gmail.com)

### STRUCTURE

**Piling and ring beam** Carnon Contracting: [carnon-contracting.co.uk](http://carnon-contracting.co.uk)

**Balcony glass and balustrade**  
Ace Engineering: [acegeneral-engineering.co.uk](http://acegeneral-engineering.co.uk)

**Granite walling slate**  
Lantoom Quarry: [lantoom.co.uk](http://lantoom.co.uk)

**Rainwater goods** Lindab: [lindab.com](http://lindab.com)

**Aluminium-clad windows**  
Hon Joinery: [honwindows.co.uk](http://honwindows.co.uk)

**Siberian larch cladding**  
Vastern Timber: [vastern.co.uk](http://vastern.co.uk)

### FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

**Underfloor heating**  
Nu-Heat: [nu-heat.co.uk](http://nu-heat.co.uk)

**Heating and plumbing systems** Gavin McNerlin: [gmservicescornwallltd.co.uk](http://gmservicescornwallltd.co.uk)

**Bespoke furniture** Tim Hitchens: [designbytimber.co.uk](http://designbytimber.co.uk)

**Biodisc, rainwater harvesting**  
Kingspan Klargestar: [kingspanenviro.com](http://kingspanenviro.com)

**Music system** Sonos: [sonos.com](http://sonos.com)

**Sanitaryware supply** The Bathroom Studio Ltd: [bathroomstudio.net](http://bathroomstudio.net)

**Sanitaryware** Duravit: [duravit.co.uk](http://duravit.co.uk)

**Worktops** Silestone: [silestone.co.uk](http://silestone.co.uk)

**Oils/stains** Osmo: [osmouk.com](http://osmouk.com)

**Kitchen** Aram: [aram.co.uk](http://aram.co.uk)

**Air source heat pump**  
Hitachi: [hitachiaircon.com](http://hitachiaircon.com)

**Underfloor heating, solar thermal collectors** Nu-Heat: [nu-heat.co.uk](http://nu-heat.co.uk)

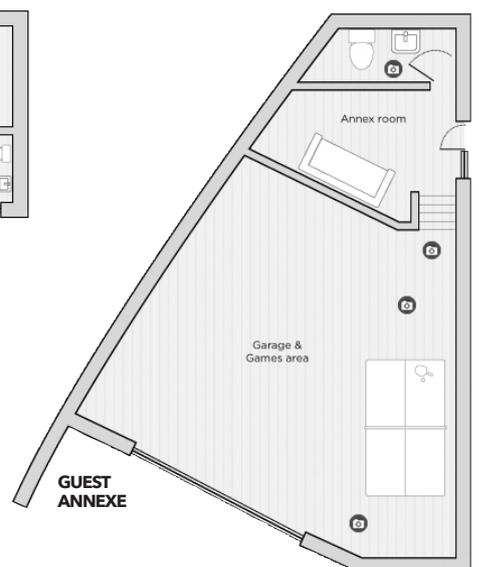
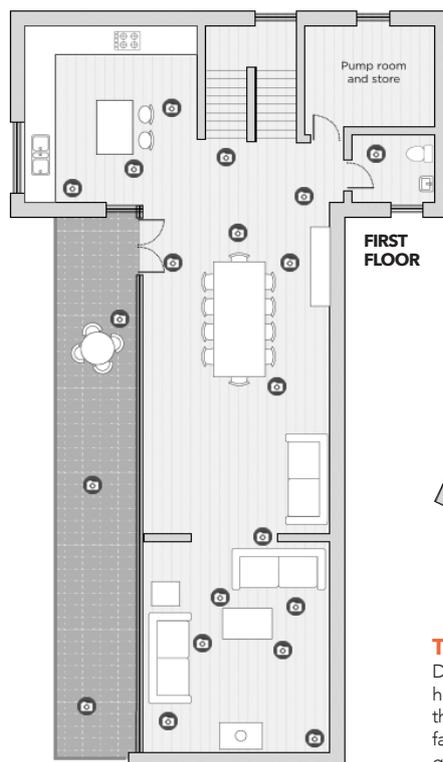
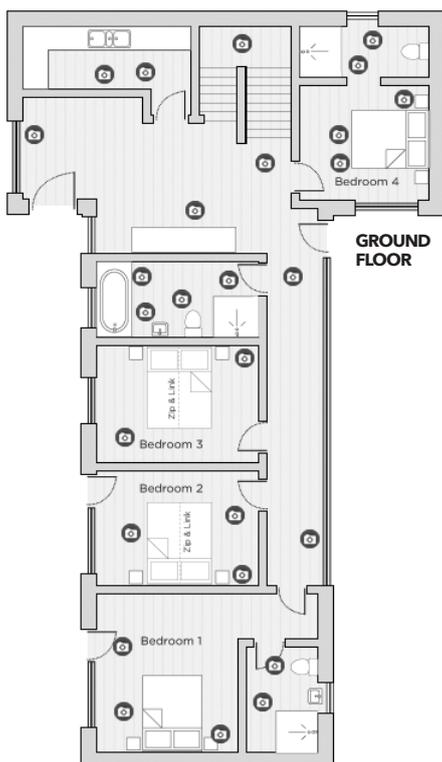
**Cove 2 wood-burner**  
Charnwood: [Charnwood.fr](http://Charnwood.fr)

**Engineered oak floor**  
Woodfloors4u: [woodfloors4u.co.uk](http://woodfloors4u.co.uk)

**Engineered oak floor**

Woodfloors4u: [woodfloors4u.co.uk](http://woodfloors4u.co.uk)

Treasure House is available for holiday rentals with Perfect Stays: [perfectstays.co.uk](http://perfectstays.co.uk)



## THE FLOORPLAN

Designed around a courtyard, the reverse-level house has open-plan living/dining/kitchen space on the first floor, with four bedrooms, two en suites, a family bathroom and a utility room below. A separate games room/guest annexe was also built on site.

**LIVING SPACE**

The expansive first-floor living/dining/kitchen features a wood-clad gable wall, a wood-burning stove and a screen of picture windows sliding open onto the balcony overlooking the courtyard below. Wooden panels may be slid across to separate the living area from the rest of the floor.



*“We chose triple-glazed windows with aluminium-clad wooden frames, which are beautiful and low maintenance. The best thing was that we could specify a bleached white finish, which fitted in with distressed wood throughout the house.”*

detailed construction diagrams from the concept designs – from which local company Simon Lawrence Builders could work.

Extensive piling into the sand dunes started in August 2013. “The piles are between three and 10 metres deep, in order to reach the rock below, so the house is effectively built on stilts,” says Iain. “Neighbouring houses don’t have piled foundations, and I’d guessed we might need a concrete raft, so the results of the £2,000 soil survey were

a bit of a shock. We’re in a dip, with sand below, and an underground stream nearby which can cause movement.”

Site access along the coastal path was tight for larger vehicles, and the weather conditions were dire, which also slowed progress. “It all helped to push us over our original budget,” says Iain. A structural steel frame was necessary to support the extensive glazing, with a blockwork ground floor clad in a combination of render and granite slate from Lantoom Quarry,





fixed with gaps to create a dry-stone wall effect. Siberian larch has been used as cladding for the timber-framed upper level, and will weather to a silver grey to complement the roofing slate.

“We chose triple-glazed windows with aluminium-clad wooden frames, which are beautiful and low maintenance,” says Iain. “The best thing was that we could specify a bleached white finish, which fitted in with distressed wood throughout the house.”

The detached annexe with its planted roof was built on an overgrown part of the plot, facing the main house, and forms the other side of the courtyard. This games room has been kitted out with table tennis, table football and a classic arcade machine, and can also provide additional accommodation for guests with a sofa bed and an en suite WC and sink.

Rainwater harvesting, solar thermal panels for hot water, and an air source heat pump connected to the underfloor heating ensure that the highly insulated new house boasts exceptionally low running costs. Cat-5 cabling has been laid throughout the house, together with a wireless multi-room music system, and a three-phase electricity cable was laid underground.

Iain, Anna and their sons – Zach, 9, and Ethan, 6 – continued to live in their Wiltshire home throughout the two-year build, with Iain regularly travelling to Cornwall and staying in a local hotel in order to oversee the project.

“I don’t think the builders would have appreciated me being on site all the time – they needed to get on with the job without being interrupted every day – but as work progressed I became a lot more involved with the interior finishes and landscaping,” he says. “We didn’t want a budget finish, and chose products which would be hard-wearing.”

Iain designed the courtyard, which features two old and extremely heavy olive trees that needed to be carefully dragged into place, with reclaimed sleepers from Perranporth beach used to form their planters.





Anna, who teaches Zumba, also worked hard on the interiors – collecting slates and rocks with the children and using their soft greys, purples, greens and blues as a colour palette for the rooms, together with warmer yellow tones to represent the stunning local beaches. Even the aluminium guttering and Silestone kitchen worktops were chosen to tie in with the muted seaside scheme.

Pebbles and tiny LED uplights have been set into the stone hallway floor, and reclaimed floorboards from a dance floor in a Newquay nightclub have been used to clad a feature wall in the living area, with glowing LEDs set into the shadow gap surround.

“We used liming wax on the feature wall, and also on our engineered oak floorboards to give them that bleached, beach-house look,” says Iain. “It was possible to carry the same distressed finish into other rooms, including the wall cladding in bathrooms and our oak staircase.”





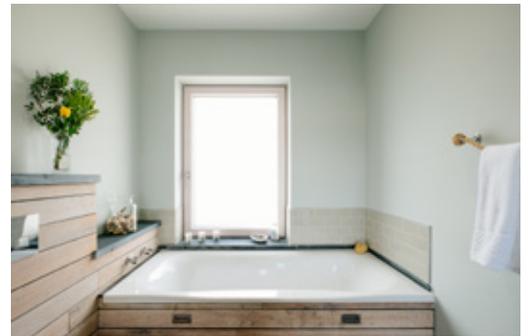
#### **KITCHEN**

A central kitchen island with bar stools has been positioned at the opposite end of the room, and the bespoke bleached oak dining table was made low enough for children to use comfortably.

#### **ANNEXE**

The newly-built annexe serves as a games room and additional guest suite.





#### BEDROOMS

Four bedrooms are located on the ground floor, accessed via a gallery hallway, and have engineered oak flooring laid over underfloor heating.

#### BATHROOMS

The main bathroom has a deep bath tub, while the two en suites both have walk-in rainfall showers.



The wood-burning stove in the sitting area needed to be craned into position, and a glass panel has been attached between the wall and the stove to create a virtually invisible protective screen which meets fire regulations.

The first floor balcony features an iroko handrail, with stones laid over LED strips which can be turned on at night, and pebbles were also used to create non-slip floors in showers. Reclaimed timber from the old house has been used to clad steel roof trusses on the first floor, and the interiors have a relaxed beach-house feel.

“Simon Lawrence Builders were great to work with, due to their supreme attention to detail,” says Iain, “It took a long time to get the final finish just right, but we find people notice the little touches, many of which were suggested by the builders.”

The house was completed in July 2015, and is currently available for holiday rentals as the family’s relocation from Wiltshire has been delayed. “We will definitely be moving to Cornwall in the future, and can’t wait to live in Treasure House,” says Iain. “It’s such a relaxing place to be, close to the beach yet tucked away in the dunes.”

## The final word

### WHAT WAS THE HIGH POINT?

Creating the original concept design was fun, and getting heavily involved in the later stages of the landscaping and interior design.

### ...AND THE LOW POINT?

Co-ordinating a team of people was sometimes hard work, because no matter how organised and diligent you are you’re relying on the subcontractors.

### THE BEST BUY?

The large light balls from Ikea are probably the cheapest things in the house, and cast interesting shadows.

### ...AND THE BIGGEST EXTRAVAGANCE?

Attention to detail – once you go down that route you have to



carry it through into every room. We have pebbles and tiny LED uplighters set into the stone hallway floor, and LEDs light up the shadow gaps around the feature wall cladding. These details all take time and cost money.