

# The white stuff

A charming cottage on the Winton Estate is the latest property to undergo a stylish overhaul courtesy of **Low Carbon Studio** and **Alba Green Oak Frames** writes Lynn Stewart.

The rather charming **White Cottage** sits on the edge of the Winton Estate and looks out over Red Mains Farm. Sitting within the Pencaitland Conservation Area, it's a peaceful family home. Built during the early-mid 20th century, it would probably have originally provided accommodation for farm workers.

The present owners had an idea that they would like to extend their house, adding a new family room and making an existing bedroom into a large en-suite bedroom. They also wanted to have a deck space that gave good views over the adjacent farm land and faced south, and called upon the services of Low Carbon Studio to design the extension.

The house had been altered and extended before, however the thinking was that the new extension would give the house a better balance, with the form and roof pitch of the new extension corresponding with the proportions and symmetry of the existing house, but with contemporary detailing.

The owners like the feel and look of timber, and settled on a green oak frame for the extension. They also wanted the walls, floor and roof to be well-insulated to give improved thermal resistance.

The green oak frame was designed and supplied by Alba Green Oak Frames and they also manufactured the timber external frame and roof structure. The owner had a lot of experience working on small building projects including work to the existing house and outbuildings, so he was

able to build the foundations, with help from his family and do a lot of the finishing joinery work, roof tiles and work to the windows himself.

The oak frame provides the main structure for the new rooms and allows the first floor attic space to be visually uncluttered by soft wood bracing. Curved oak bracing at the post and beam junctions help to stiffen the structure and are pleasing on the eye.

*"When designing the upper floor space I had to work within the existing ridge height, so the upper bedroom had to be carefully designed to ensure the space and light were sufficient,"* explains Colin Campbell of Low Carbon Studio. *"A dormer window and Velux roof lights were used and the glazed doors also let in light while giving good views out."*

The new extension uses a mixture of traditional and contemporary materials and detailing to reflect the existing house. The larch external cladding fits beautifully with the leafy garden and the woods to the south of the property. The roof has clay pan tiles so that it ties smoothly into the older building, and an insulated render system was used.

The internal finishes internally are simple and classic, allowing the exposed oak frame to shine. Oak skirtings and architraves help to finish off the internal spaces. The ground floor bedroom has large windows facing south which let in a lot of light and when needed there are low-energy LED lights.







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## ASK THE EXPERT



*Colin Campbell*

- Q. *What was your favourite element of working on this project?*
- A. I enjoyed working with the owners who are also friends and I new early on in the project that they would be doing a lot of work themselves. It was good to see the progress on site and particularly the oak frame which goes up very quickly.
- Q. *How did you ensure that the period charm of the space wasn't lost?*
- A. Careful choice of materials plus making sure the size and scale of the new extension was important, to make sure it didn't overpower the existing house. Using the correct amount of oak is key; although it's nice too much can be quite heavy and also careful positioning of the curved bracing.



*Luke Mallett*

- Q. *What challenges does a project like this present?*
- A. This particular project had very restricted access for us to raise the frame, fortunately we managed to shoe-horn the crane into position without too much damage to the surroundings but it was incredibly tight. As most of our work is in oak we normally require a crane to raise the frames so access really is a key issue.
- Q. *Are there any ways around the problem of poor access?*
- A. In some instances yes. We also use Douglas Fir to build the frames which is much lighter than oak and can, especially on single story structures be raised by hand. Obviously back in the day, when mechanical lifting gear was not available frames were raised with gin poles, ropes and many strong hands which is still possible and occasionally done today.

The frame was pre-fabricated in the workshop and the trusses were put together on site before being lifted into place using a crane. Oak is a relatively heavy timber so this is often the best way to erect a green oak frame. Access for the crane was limited which made the frame slightly more awkward to erect.

*"When most people talk about a self-build project it usually means that they employed their own designer and builder to build them a new house," says Colin. "In this case it was literally a self-build project with the owners doing a lot of the work themselves which helped to keep the costs down and also gives a sense of achievement... plus a few blisters and fair bit of head scratching at times!"*