



Bringing outside in

This beautiful and unique home extension in the Scottish Borders is testament to hard work and vision on the part of the owners, architects and builders

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This time last year, we dropped in on Jo and Crawford McNeil to see how their self-build project was going. At the time, their project, an extension to their home, Gardeners Cottage in Gattonside, was very much a work in progress. It's nearly finished so we re-visited this industrious couple to find out how things have progressed.

Their bold and stylish new extension makes a very interesting addition to their existing cottage. They have added a lot of their own touches to the building, particularly to the interior, filling it with a mix of new and second-hand, furniture which has been repaired and restored to breathe new life into it.



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A fan of upcycling, Jo designed her own feature lights which are made from cheese graters. They've been adapted to light their new stove and the extract fan pull chord even features a mini cheese grater too!

A mixture of interesting and well positioned furniture and artwork also give the space a warm, cosy and chic feel. Jo spent a lot of time looking for authentic pieces of furniture and fittings which would fit in to the house. It's been time well spent, and it complements the new extension perfectly.

Designed by East Lothian architects Low Carbon Studio, the extension uses an Alba Green Oak

Frame, which is a feature in itself. "I would always encourage people extending or building a new house to spend as much time as possible researching ideas for furniture and fittings," says architect Colin Campbell. "It's these finishing touches which really make a house a home, and picking the right pieces can really set off the architecture."

One particularly striking feature is a new stair formed from an existing tree which needed to be felled. It was milled so that it could be used as a new staircase linking the existing ground floor level with a new gallery space. Finished in reclaimed pitch pine, it complements the oak frame beautifully, and adds to the warm, tactile feel of the place.



ASK THE EXPERT – Low Carbon

Colin Campbell

Q. *How can I make my self-build feel more connected to the outside?*

A. A folding glazed screen that gives a large opening works well and if you use the same floor finish inside and out, like timber boards or stone it links the spaces. Also when positioning windows, make sure they are located to maximise views to your garden or to the landscape beyond.

Q. *How do I ensure that I furnish my self-build in a way that shows it off to its best advantage?*

A. This one is difficult, each person is different and some like simple or minimalist fixtures while others like traditional or retro style. You should understand how you intend to use the space, its feel, and what function it will serve. For oak framed projects the frame itself is like a piece of furniture so it needs to be expressed with furniture complementing it.

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Glass balustrades with stainless steel patch fittings to the stair and balconies give a contemporary feel which contrasts nicely with the traditional oak frame. Large areas of glazing give good natural lighting, but the space still feels cosy and intimate. The lower balcony has a folding door so that the glazed wall can be opened up completely; an absolute delight in the warmer months. From the living room, kitchen and dining space Jo and Crawford have striking views out over to the landscape beyond. Divine.

The oak sling brace frame features lots of nooks, ledges and pegs for placing or hanging small items, adding interest as well as being functional. "This is one of the benefits of an oak frame," says Colin. "A lot of owners of our oak-framed projects use the frame in this way. It needs to be adjusted as it dries out and timber wedges need to be tapped in on occasion to keep the frame tight."

Heating is provided by a log-burning stove which also acts as a focal point. It has a 15 KW output which is higher than most, and is the main heat source in the new extension. Along with the super-insulated walls, roof and floor this keeps the space ultra-warm.

External finishes are designed to fit in with the existing stone house. The slate roof links to the

existing roof, while the external larch weather boarding will turn grey in time to match the existing whinstone.

The new kitchen and dining space straddles old and new, linking the extension nicely to the existing house internally. The upper gallery is used as the main sleeping space for the owners; they're lucky enough to wake up to views across the river valley and beyond.

A bathroom space which used the old log store was also added to the extension and it too has been designed to add character to the house. As with many spaces in the property, it looks to connect outside and inside as seamlessly as possible. From the bath, for example, you can see outside and feel completely at one with nature.

"It's a beautiful and unusual project and the result of both the owners' and the builders' hard work is clear to see," says Colin. "It's a fantastic place to live and I would always encourage people to think about how they can improve the space they live in. Spending some time and effort can result in a home which has a really positive impact on your wellbeing, creating a space which feels cosy, calming and restorative, and which connects inside and outside almost seamlessly." TC

ASK THE EXPERT – Alba Green Oak Frames

Luke Mallet

Q. *How do I choose furniture and accessories which complement an oak frame?*

A. Individual, hand-made bespoke pieces complement any oak frame, try cabinet makers & crafts people like namongaston.com <<http://namongaston.com>> . there is a particularly nice oak framed inspired dining table on his website. Up-cycling old items into unique pieces really gives a personal, eclectic touch and can be achieved for not a lot of money.

Q. *How can I use my oak frame for storage or to display items?*

A. The addition of a mezzanine floor into your build will provide loads of storage space and is well suited to oak frames. The oak frame provides opportunities to position lighting that can be used to illuminate pieces of furniture and spaces as well as showing of the frame itself.

ALBA Green Oak Frames

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