

Witchcraft

A spectacular new 'grand design' on the outskirts of Peebles fuses cutting-edge design with traditional construction techniques for a home that's as unique as it is beautiful writes Lynn Stewart.



Sometimes, when it comes to looking for your perfect home, you realise that you have to build your own dream if you want to get it just right. This was the case for Marcus and Sally, the owners of an exciting new property in Peebles, who were in the market for a new home when they found there was nothing suitable for sale.

When they spotted an acre of land for sale on the edge of Peebles, they decided to build their own dream home, enlisting the help of architecture firm **Low Carbon Studio** to make that dream a reality.

Low Carbon Studio architects and designers are owned by Colin Campbell. Based in East Lothian and Edinburgh, they offer sustainable design solutions, support and advice to individual home owners and large organisations.

Their work is approached with sustainability in mind and they have experience in extending and altering existing houses and designing new build houses including oak frame structures. For this project, the owner asked Low Carbon Studios for a home which

would blend into the woodland plot, one which would use interesting materials in innovative ways and offer a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

The garden, they said, was to be an extension of the house, so that there would be a *seamless feel between indoors and outdoors* and so that it would blend into the beautiful surrounding landscape without the unnecessary removal of mature trees. The resulting design is extraordinary; a truly contemporary and bespoke home with great design and craftsmanship at its heart.

The project was very much a team effort. Built by **T Graham & Sons**, timber was supplied by **Russwood** while **McKay & Partners** were the engineers. **McGowan Miller Partnership** were the chartered surveyors. Based in Dumfries, MMP specialise in quantity surveying, building surveying, CDM coordination and project management. They work all over the south and central belt of Scotland as well as northern England.





At **Witch Wood**, in basic terms, MMP were responsible for all financial and contractual issues relative to the project. They ensured that the owners received sound advice at the feasibility stage on likely costs, provided unambiguous tender documents, valued the works and agreed final costs with the contractor.

The exposed green oak structural frame expresses traditional construction techniques and demonstrates how well they work in harmony with contemporary design and detailing. It was created by **Alba Green Oak Frames**, which is run by **Luke Mallet** and **Jack MacGregor**.

The duo build frames for all manner of projects, from glazed extensions, sun rooms and conservatories to oak-framed bridges, treehouses, garages and classrooms. They even built a medieval long-house for the **Clan Ranald Trust**. While they work mostly with green oak from sustainably managed sources in the UK, they also use locally-sourced Douglas Fir and Larch. Their focus is on sustainability and maintaining the use of traditional building techniques.

The ground floor of the main house contains the living room, dining area and kitchen and is open plan with an exposed oak frame, oak stair and log burning stove. The double height space over the dining room with suspended lighting adds to the feeling of open space.

There are lots of windows on the south side of the house to give views of the trees and landscape beyond and French doors in the dining area lead out onto a south facing timber deck/balcony. There is also an external fire for summer

evening entertaining. On the first floor there is a space over the entrance with a bridge linking the bedrooms, bathroom and the open plan living/family area.

A particularly interesting element of the build is the **'tree house'** which is the private part of the house and contains the owners' bedroom and study. It is raised on oak stilts, increasing the feeling of living in the woodland. The tree house also has a private balcony, stair and shower.

The house is designed and detailed to be a low energy home as per the owners' wishes. It is positioned so that the main roof pitch faces south to allow the future installation of solar panels and the tree house sits on stilts to reduce the building footprint. The heating and hot water system is powered by an air source heat pump linked to an under floor heating system while the highly insulated walls, roof and floors reduce heat loss.

Passive solar design with large windows facing south and high levels of natural light and natural ventilation help to maximise free energy and the north elevation has small windows to reduce heat loss. All the materials used are natural, recyclable and sourced locally wherever possible. The tree house and dormer roofs have cedar shingles and the house façade is mostly larch boarding. Vertical larch boarding on the tree house and horizontal boarding on the main house help to differentiate the forms and uses.

All in all, it is a truly spectacular and individual piece of contemporary architecture. It respects the beauty of the surrounding landscape while introducing a beauty all of its own via great design and true craftsmanship.