

Long time *coming*

Former army officer Brian Sherrington and his wife Amanda have realised their lifelong dream and built a German-inspired timber-framed home close to the Lake District.

STORY: **LOUISE PARKIN** PHOTOGRAPHY: **PAT NILSON**



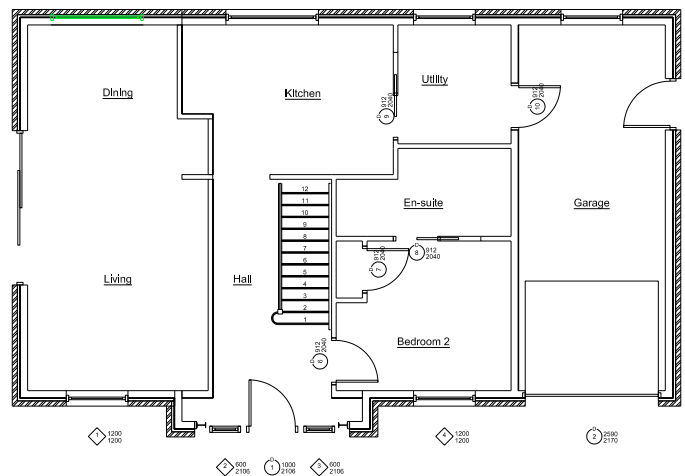
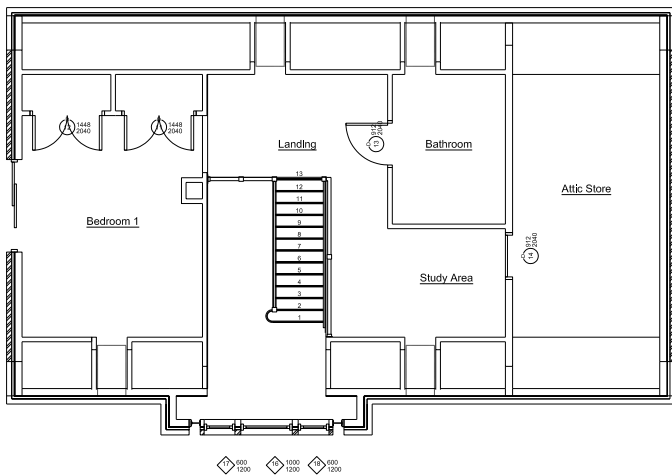
In brief
Project Timber-frame new build
Location Milnthorpe, Cumbria
Plot cost £130,000
Spent £198,588
Worth unknown

Having lived in what they describe as 'atrocious' military accommodation for many years, Brian and Amanda Sherrington had very firm ideas about what they wanted and needed from a house. They wanted something they could love and ultimately to build a home of their own. So when Brian retired from the regular army in 2013, it gave them the ideal opportunity to pursue their dream.

A listing on Rightmove caught their eye, a rural site overlooking the river in the village of Milnthorpe in Cumbria, with views of a deer park on the opposite bank.

The couple were both excited and nervous at the prospect of undertaking their first self build. They began planning their project by buying self-build magazines and reading them from cover to cover. Timber-frame construction appealed to them, particularly German- and Scandinavian-style homes, having been stationed in Germany for several years.





In detail

PROJECT

Timber frame Fleming Homes: fleminghomes.co.uk

Main contractor Paul Wood: 07815 182 256

Electrician J Lawson Electrical Ltd: 07786 222 566

Plumbing and heating T Cowgill & Sons Ltd: 01524 61294

Joiner Kurt Feller Joinery: 07414 905112

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Windows Velfac: 01223 897100, velfac.co.uk

Garador garage door Central Garage Doors: 015395 64364, central-garage-doors.co.uk

Floor tiles Rees Tiles: 015395

63422, reestiles.com

Internal doors Travis Perkins: 015395 63251, travisperkins.co.uk

Kitchen and bathrooms Purely Simply Lovely: 01524 846454, purelysimplylovely.com

Staircase & balustrades The Joinery Shop: 01539 731857, thejoineryshop.co.uk

Silestone worktop Westmorland Stone: 01539 734491, westmorlandstone.co.uk

Juliet balcony CBG Balconies: 01204 696439, glass-balcony.com

Splashback Jo Vincent Glass Designer: 01539 723949, jovincent.com

THE FLOORPLAN

The ground floor includes a double-height hallway featuring an oak staircase, an open-plan L-shaped kitchen/living/diner, with a secondary bedroom, bathroom and utility room. There's also an integral garage. Upstairs is a generous master bedroom, bathroom, a study and large store area.

Cost breakdown

Preliminaries	£ 9,394
Foundations	£18,729
Timber Frame Package	£31,816
External walls (incl K-Rend)	£33,176
Roof structure and covering	£15,302
Floor, wall and ceiling finishes	£21,580
Joinery and fittings	£9,924
Plumbing, heating, bathroom and kitchen)	£35,868
Electrics	£9,518
Decorating	£904
Fees	£4,572
External Works	£3,330
TOTAL	£203,160



“I felt stupid at times, trying hard to sound like I knew what I was talking about, but Paul (the builder) was always patient and understanding.”

The Sherringtons were invited to the Fleming factory in Duns by operations director Hayden Martin where they could see the 140mm rigid insulation being installed in the wall panels. The timber frame was erected by the Fleming team in around two weeks including the structural roof, creating energy-efficient external walls with a U-value of 0.11 W/m²K.

Paul's team carried out the bricklaying and plastering, with Brian engaging a groundworker, electrician and plumber. “The trades all agreed to work for us directly and Paul ensured that everything dovetailed,” says Brian. “Our contractors were amazing, truly, and we could not be happier with the quality and standard of their work.

“We were very fortunate to engage a local roofer. Despite us having to delay a couple of times, he made sure he was here to start on the day we needed him and he cracked on until the roof was finished and our triple-glazed Velux windows installed.”

Other professionals were not quite as reliable. There were issues with a bespoke staircase and when the joiner subsequently disappeared, Amanda and Brian were left to find someone else to finish the job, and £600 out of pocket. The second joiner proved a far better choice.



PICTURES

A double-height hallway features a striking oak staircase and a feature lighting cluster with boldly coloured pendant shades. The lounge (left) has a sliding door out to the garden, and a white log burner. Wooden steps connect the room with the L-shaped kitchen.

They visited a self-build exhibition to find out more and met Jason Hartley from Fleming Homes, a timber-frame house builder based in Duns in the Scottish Borders. “We both had a good feeling about what Jason was saying, so he came to meet with us at our home the following week,” Amanda recalls. “He explained everything in detail to a couple of rookies who had no idea or experience of self building!”

Jason told them that the basic cost for a build started at £1,000 per square metre, so they then worked out the size of the house they could afford, and came up with a floorplan for a two-storey, two-bedroom home. Fleming's designers produced basic plans, which evolved and developed over the space of several weeks as tweaks were made to the scheme before, ultimately, the design was finalised.

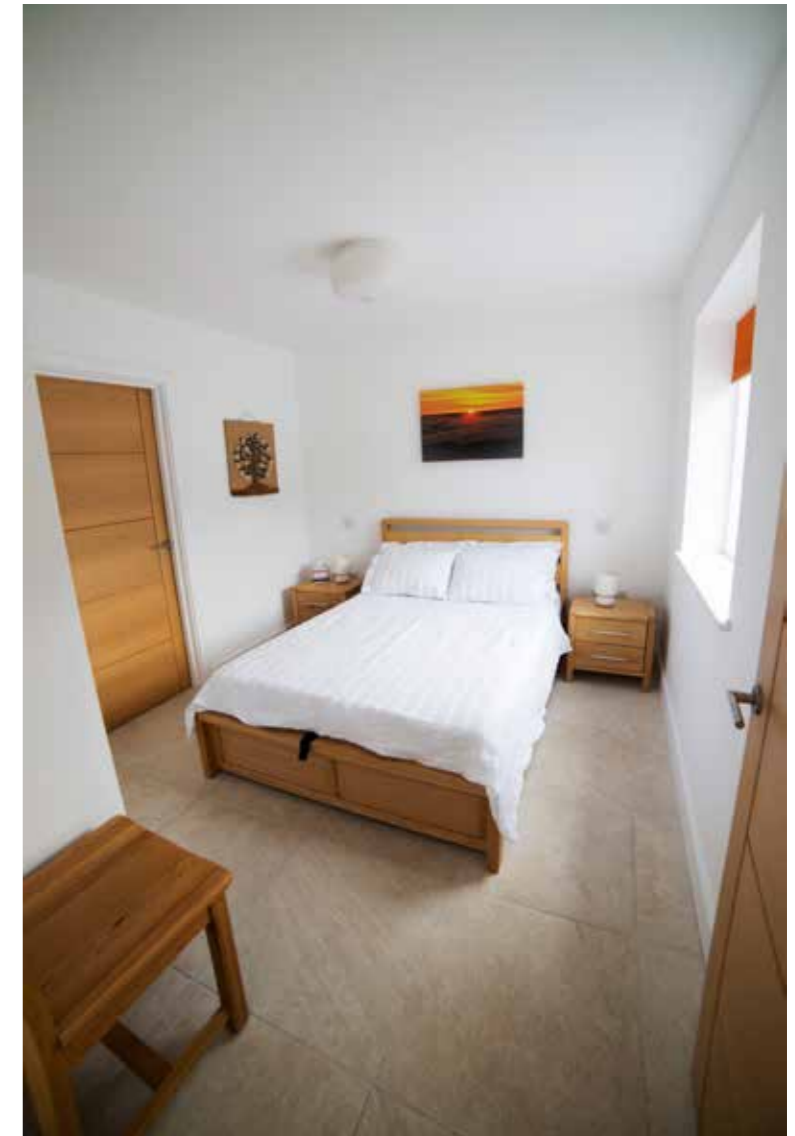
Planning permission proved relatively straightforward, and with this milestone out of the way the couple turned their attention to finding a builder. A magazine article described a stylish award-winning house in a nearby village so Amanda contacted the builder, Paul Wood.

“Paul was immediately engaging and we knew we had found a gem,” says Brian. “We went to his home for a meeting and sat in his kitchen going over the plans. Having not done anything like this before I felt stupid at times, trying hard to sound like I knew what I was talking about, but Paul was always patient and understanding.”

To keep within their relatively modest budget, Paul suggested the couple manage the project themselves, promising to advise them at each stage to ensure it ran smoothly. Paul's team prepared the groundworks for the timber frame, and put the couple in contact with subcontractors he used so that they could hire them direct and negotiate their own prices.

Brian and Amanda continued to live in a rented home in Garstang, travelling 24 miles to the site almost every day – sometimes twice a day. “We didn't think about it at the time, but on reflection I am not sure how we did it!” says Brian.





“It was a great experience – even with the sleepless nights.”

out. Three of the windows at the back of the house could not be installed, so the render needed to be removed around the reveals and redone. “Niko was visibly upset, and I understand why because the finish he had achieved was outstanding,” says Brian.

Hayden and his Fleming team were on hand when the juliet balcony was due to be installed. Usually attached to the brick outer skin, this was not possible because render board had been used on this section of the house. Hayden’s solution was to attach the balcony supports direct to the timber frame. New instructions were passed on to the builder so that work was carried out according to structural calculations.

The double-fronted house has anthracite grey aluminium and wood windows including a large glazed gable to the front, with a slate roof and a Hormann front door. The door to the integral garage is electric, Amanda and Brian’s only major luxury. There are two bedrooms, including the master, which forms a room in the roof with a balcony overlooking the deer park on the hill opposite. There is also a bathroom, study and store room. Downstairs the second bedroom has an en suite shower room in a bold orange colour, designed for the future in case stairs eventually become a problem for Brian and Amanda.

A modest kitchen features pale grey cabinets from Bauformat, with a grey laminate worktop and glass splashbacks. A run of base units lines one wall, with a bank of full-height cupboards and an oven on the wall opposite. The kitchen iconnects to the lounge/diner to form an L-shape, which is stepped down 600mm. Ceramic floor tiles throughout the ground floor unify the spaces, and are warmed with underfloor heating. Despite the

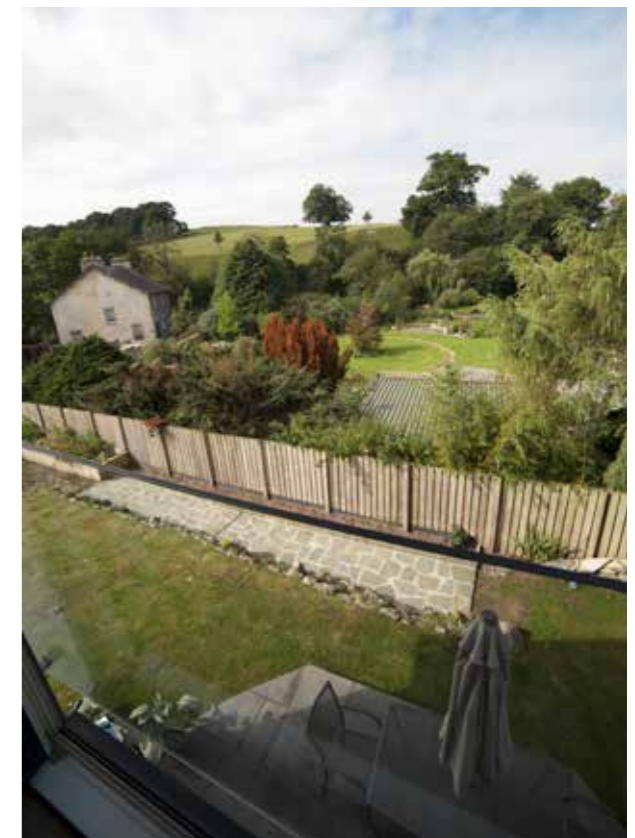
tight budget, high-end kitchens and bathrooms were chosen including Neff appliances, with Geberit, Duravit and Kalderwai sanitaryware in the bathrooms. A Jøtul log burner has been installed in the wall of the lounge, while a sliding door opens onto the patio and garden beyond.

The modest garden suits the Sherringtons who didn’t wish to be spending all summer weeding and cutting grass, but wanted it big enough to enjoy. A two-metre fence on the western and northern boundary provides a private garden planted with flowers, shrubs and fruit trees, with raised vegetable beds and a bespoke wooden hut built from leftover timber.

Brian and Amanda have gone from rookies to experienced selfbuilders in the space of 12 months, and have finally achieved the home they waited decades to build. And their first build has proved so successful they have no plans to move on.

GARDEN

Views of the low maintenance garden give way to a deer park on the hill opposite.



Further hold-ups occurred when the external renderer abandoned the project five days before they were due on site in favour of a bigger job elsewhere. A replacement was quickly found but then adverse weather caused another four-week delay. Ultimately the builder advised them to go ahead despite the wet conditions.

Brian recalls a very stressful night: “The night after the base coat render was applied, Amanda and I were lying in bed listening to the torrential downpour and gale force winds, worried sick that we’d get to site the next day and see all the base coat washed off the blockwork. The next morning Niko, our renderer, was already there and when I told him how scared we were, he laughed – apparently the base coat is waterproof after an hour, but of course we didn’t know that.”

With the render work complete, Velfac arrived on site to install the windows but discovered a problem. The walls were too thick because the depth of the render had not been accounted for during setting

KITCHEN

Bauformat units and Neff appliances have been chosen in the kitchen.

BEDROOMS

The two bedrooms both have a calming feel, thanks to neutral tones with accents of wood. This is in sharp contrast to the bold orange used in the downstairs bathroom.

Final word

What was the high point?

The completion certificate and a huge sigh of relief.

And the low point?

The sleepless night before the plasterers came in, and I worked all night to get the battening done. I felt sick with worry!

Your greatest extravagance?

There weren’t any really. Everything is essential and good value, but our electric garage door is brilliant.

And your best buy?

The Jøtul log burner.

What do you like most about your house?

The fact that it is ours and that everybody absolutely loves it.



Anything you would do differently?

No. It was a great experience, even with the sleepless nights.

What was the most enjoyable part of the project?

Finishing it and moving in knowing that, despite our huge inexperience, we’d done it and it was something all our friends and family love too.