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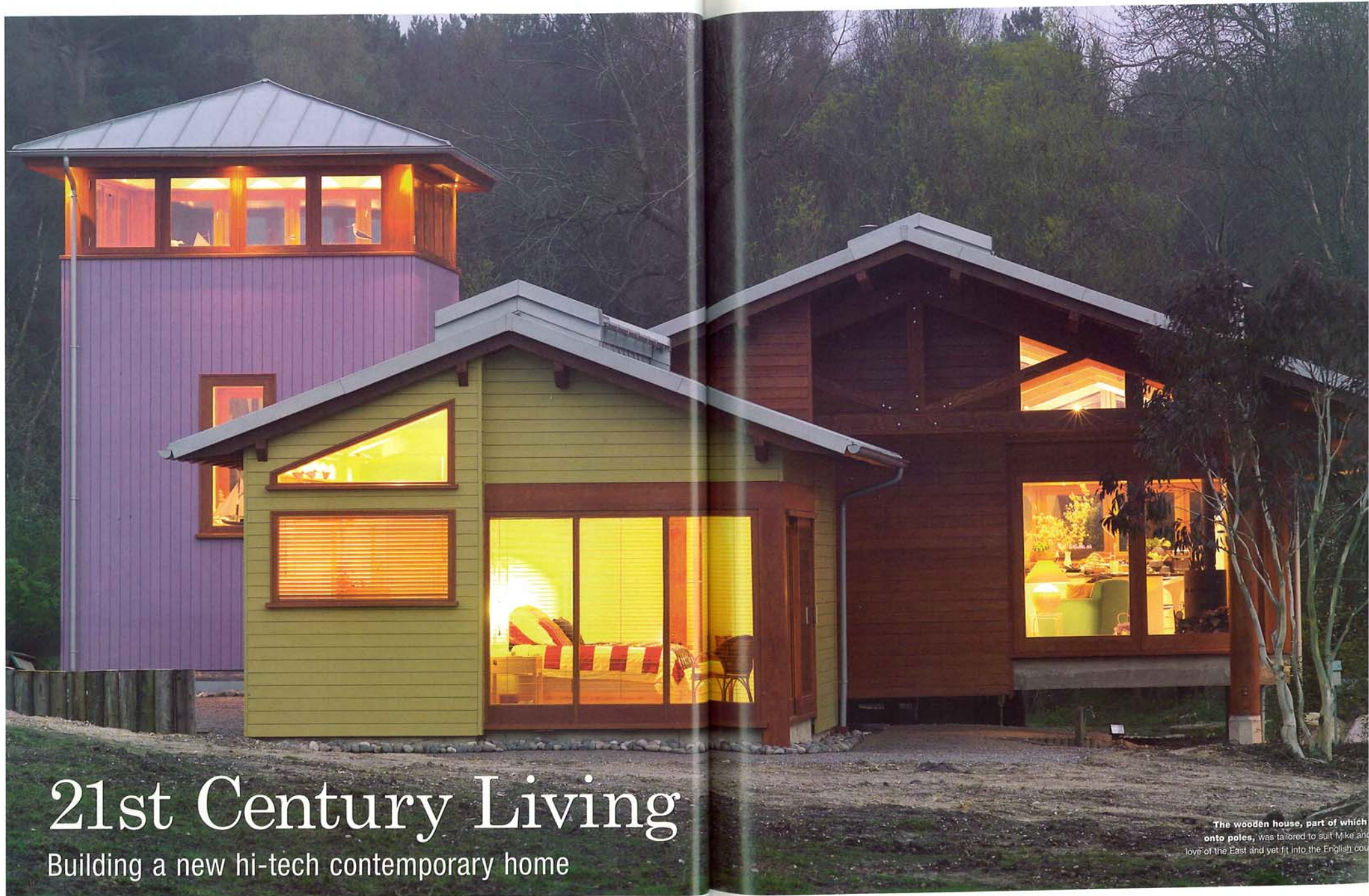
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21st Century Living

Building a new hi-tech contemporary home

The wooden house, part of which
onto poles, was tailored to suit Mike and
love of the East and yet fit into the English cou

Mike Thrasher and Lizzie Vann have built a cutting-edge home packed with the latest hi-tech features.

Lizzie and I discussed the idea of building our own house soon after we first met," explains Mike Thrasher. "We both love imaginative, unconventional properties and gathered ideas from our travels, but were unable to find a suitable plot of land. Eventually, we viewed Hillside Farm, situated a short distance from where we were living, and made a sealed bid for what was essentially a converted chicken shed!"

Set in 55 acres of organic farmland in the heart of the New Forest, the property is extremely remote with no near neighbours and views across open countryside. Lizzie and Mike discovered that they needed to gain retrospective planning permission for the chicken shed conversion, which they spruced up and painted to resemble a New England house. They lived in the property, which had virtually no insulation, and planned to replace it with an altogether more adventurous structure.

Gaining planning permission for this replacement took approximately three years because the planners insisted that no dwelling should ever have been built on the site in the first place. "It wasn't our design they opposed but the whole concept of building a new house," Mike explains. "Originally, we had started out with a five year plan, but ended up living in the chicken shed for a total of seven years."

The couple had found a US company marketing an updated version of traditional wooden Haiku houses, which were originally built in 14th century Japan. Raised on wooden poles to promote air circulation within the building, the houses seemed to blend into the landscape – a factor which led Lizzie and Mike to investigate importing a kit.

"We discovered that building regulations are so different in the UK that the structure would need to be completely adapted, so we decided to build something similar from scratch," says Mike, a graphic designer, who was keen to combine the Haiku form with more contemporary architecture which would offer bold interiors with large expanses of glazing.

With help from their concept architect, David Underhill, permission was eventually granted for the radical design, which resembles a group of zinc-roofed farm buildings rather than a single structure; with three timber clad buildings joined by glazed



Words: Debbie Jeffery
Photography: Nigel Rigden

Additional gadgetry has been included in the open plan kitchen, which was designed by Mike and Lizzie. A periscope-like Gaggenau extractor rises from the kitchen unit and extracts air from the hob, while a wine fridge has preset temperature zones and the waste management system emits clean water from the house waste.

corridors. A dark brown single storey living wing stands on poles beside the separate green bedroom block – made up of the master bedroom, dressing room and en suite bathroom – and a purple three storey tower contains a basement laundry with a guest bedroom above and a top floor office. In the corridor that divides the living and bedroom wings is a home library, with racks of books, DVDs and CDs, a work station and a specially built AV cupboard, which houses equipment such as the CD changer and power amplifier.

“I do feel annoyed that we had to compromise...”

The planners were keen that the house should be predominantly low level, and so rooms have been left full-height right up into the roof space to increase the impression of space. Restrictions on the overall footprint have meant that the master bedroom needed to be relatively compact in order to achieve a comparatively spacious living area. At 6' 4" Mike requires a large bed, which further shrinks this room. “I do feel annoyed that we had to compromise,” he admits. “No neighbours overlook our house, it is completely hidden, and a few extra feet would have made all the difference but we were strictly limited to build a property no more than 30% larger than the chicken shed.”

Mike and Lizzie decided to employ a project manager to co-ordinate the 38 specialist subcontractors required for their build. The new house was built right next door to the chicken shed and, as the couple planned to continue living there until it was eventually demolished, part of this needed to be taken down to make way for the concrete pillars and plinth foundations.

Ten poles of locally grown Douglas fir were turned on lathes off site and support the huge roof trusses – forming an important element of the interior design. These poles were bolted into position, protected from the damp earth by the concrete plinth, and the trusses winched on to create the load-bearing structure. ▶

Hi-tech Homebuilding

Homes at the forefront of design need also these days to incorporate the very latest in home technology – recognised by industry insiders as the biggest development in housing for decades. Features such as controlled lighting, multi-room audio, home cinemas and automated heating and security should all be considered. See p.91 for more information, or visit www.smarthomeshow.co.uk.



Hidden technology The centrepiece of the living room is a 50" plasma screen with speaker system. The screen is hidden behind an oil painting and the flat panel speakers merge into the neutral wall.

Mike had meticulously researched the internal fixtures and fittings, as well as the latest home automation options, and felt that building a house from scratch offered the perfect opportunity to install some hi-tech gadgets. He wanted the home entertainment system, lighting and heating to be custom-made, and approached Bournemouth based custom installer Dawsons. "I was aware of different companies who could do this," he explains, "but it was important to have someone local who would be flexible. We were so single-minded in our plans and we needed a company that could find ways to help us achieve them."

The Dawsons team went through the plans for the house in the early stages of building and worked to incorporate the technology within the structure. With no loft voids the cables have been laid in special floor ducting, alongside the underfloor heating, to act as the veins that power the lighting and audio-visual systems from a central computer.

Once the house was completed the couple invited around 40 guests, and amazed everyone by touching a button on their remote control which raised the picture upwards on motorised rails – bringing the huge recessed plasma screen into view. Lighting also plays an important role both inside and outside the house, with a Lutron Homeworks system that can be operated by remote control or from a six bank switch system in each room – which can set the mood for activities such as watching films or reading. LED lighting was added to the floor of the glass walkway which leads to the bedroom wing of the house, and provides a soft light to guide the way without the need to switch on overhead lights.

"Keeping everything free of clutter is a major occupation," says Mike. "We have no loft space, and so storage is at a premium. The house doesn't really need any further embellishment, because we have used strong, natural materials, and the setting and views are the main focus. We never get bored of looking out across the farmland and countryside. It has taken a long time to finally build this house, but it has proved to be worth all the waiting." ■

FLOORPLAN: The house is divided into three distinct zones linked by glazed corridors: an open plan living/kitchen wing, a master bedroom suite and the three storey control tower with a laundry, guest room and top floor home office.



Fact File

NAMES: Mike Thrasher and Lizzie Vann
PROFESSIONS: Graphic designer and MD of organic food business
AREA: Dorset
HOUSE TYPE: Two bedroom house
HOUSE SIZE: 165m²
BUILD ROUTE: Self-managed subcontractors
CONSTRUCTION: Douglas fir posts,

timber frame, zinc roof
WARRANTY: Architect's Certificate
FINANCE: Private and Portman Building Society self-build mortgage
BUILD TIME: June '03 - Feb '04
LAND COST: £250,000
BUILD COST: £350,000
TOTAL COST: £600,000
HOUSE VALUE: £850,000
COST/m²: £2,121

**29%
COST
SAVING**

USEFUL CONTACTS: **Concept architect** – DUA Architecture LLP: 01425 278252; **Working architect** – QED: 01962 842042; **Structural engineers** – Andrew Waring Associates Ltd: 01794 524447; **Project manager** – Graham Davies: 01590 675900; **Waste treatment plant** – Clearwater Polcon Ltd: 01278 433443; **Piling and substructure** – Able Piling & Construction Ltd: 01489 797600; **Roofing** – Pace Roofing Ltd: 01794 515155; **Window and door frames** – TK Joinery (Blandford) Ltd: 01258 455521; **Window furniture** – Spiller Architectural Ironmongery: 01935 432929; **Steel** – Allfab Southern: 01794 518911; **Sliding door gear** – Hillaldam Coburn Ltd: 020 8336 1515; **Plumbing and water systems** – Clinton Foakes: 07712 645568; **Skylight** – Polar Plastics: 02380 899611; **Bathroom fittings** – Aston Matthews Ltd: 020 7226 7220; **Underfloor heating** – Warmafloor: 01489 581787; **Column turning** – Spindlewood Woodturning: 01278 453665; **Flooring** – Kahrs UK Ltd: 01243 778747; **Tiles** – Fired Earth Interiors: 01295 812088; **Deck** – All Decked Out Ltd: 07789 206240; **Plasma TV** – Dawsons: 01202 764965; **Kitchen units** – Rational Built-In Kitchens (UK) Ltd: 01543 459459; **Lighting control** – Lutron EA Ltd: 020 7702 0657; **Lighting supply** – Contract Lighting and Design: 01202 520266; **Paint and stain finishes** – Sikkens Ltd: 01480 496868