

An eco echo

Liz and Bill Heath had the perfect location – they just needed the perfect home to put on it. Heather Dixon discovers how they built their green dream

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE BURTON

Y-shaped oak stairs and a two-storey glazed atrium create a striking entrance hall



Above: The striking timber-frame house in Claxton, near York, was designed to include eco-principles
Right: Liz and Bill can see across the village green and down the main street from their first floor sitting room

Struggling to squeeze their growing family round the table at meal times, Liz and Bill Heath decided it was time to create a bigger dining room. Better still, a bigger house.

But after developing their Sixties bungalow in Claxton, near York, as far as they could without making it look like a hotchpotch of extensions, they realised their only choice was to move.

Excited by the prospect of new beginnings, they started searching for a large, modern home within a 10-mile radius. They soon discovered, however, that they were really better off staying where they were, knocking down the bungalow and starting all over again.

'We couldn't find anything we liked in our price range,' said Liz. 'We love living in the village and we have great friends and neighbours so we thought, why not stay put and build something to our own design for half the price?'

Both Bill and Liz had retired from York Survey Supply Centre, which they founded, and wanted to create a house which suited their lifestyle with fewer bedrooms and more living rooms.


They were also determined to bring as much glass as possible into the structure, particularly to the front of the house where they could enjoy uninterrupted views across the village green and surrounding countryside.

For two years they researched and planned, visited exhibitions and poured over the internet, sourcing materials and piecing together their ideas



until they had enough information to hand their plans to an architect.

'We decided on a timber frame with a brick outer skin and built-in ecological attributes,' said Bill. 'It was the fastest method of building so there would be less disruption for the neighbours.'

The new house echoed the footprint of the original bungalow while Bill and Liz moved into an apartment nearby. They sold anything that wasn't useful or of sentimental value, keeping a sofa, chair and television and a few 'treasures' which were put into storage. 



Liz and Bill chose the striking Cambia Rational kitchen, designed and fitted by Lynden Design Studio, York, which is finished in tourmaline red with a black quartz worktop



Left: Light and space are key features of the bedrooms, which are simply furnished to allow the high ceilings and large windows to speak for themselves

Above: Bill wanted the house to be high tech with a drop-down screen for TV and computer use. An HD In-Focus projector beams the TV onto a 2.3m cinema screen which drops down from the ceiling



'Some of these things are still packed away in boxes, but we couldn't bear to throw them out,' said Liz. 'We had a very clear idea of the way the new house would look and our Eighties style furnishings just wouldn't have worked in the new red and black scheme.'

They even sold the fixtures and fittings, including doors, windows, carpets, radiators and the alarm system, before finally demolishing the bare shell of the bungalow.

'It wasn't at all strange to see the old house come down,' said Liz. 'It was like rubbing it out and starting again. We were so excited about the new house that we didn't have time for regrets.'

The timber frame went up in just four weeks.

'It was really exciting to watch the sections going up so quickly,' said Liz. 'When we went away on holiday a friend took photographs of the progress and emailed them to us so we could see the room



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layout and the first bricks laid.'

Bill and Liz wanted to get everything right first time so they made sure their home would be as eco-friendly as possible.

'This is where we plan to live for the rest of our lives so everything in the house is state-of-the-art with modern windows, the best insulation, eco heating and ventilation together with the latest computerised electrical equipment and lighting. We have not compromised at all; it's certainly built for the future.'

The insulation is a combination of 50mm Kingspan and Termex cellulose fibre, a breathable material which forms a compact, draught-free layer attached seamlessly to the structure. It allows water vapour in the air to filter through the breathing structures, ensuring a healthy building.

A weather compensating, water-based underfloor heating system works alongside a heat recovery and

ventilation system to redistribute heat throughout the house and keep running costs to a minimum. The ventilation system filters and changes the air in the house every hour, recirculates the heat evenly to all rooms, minimises dust levels as airborne particles are drawn through a filter system and eliminates condensation on the large glass areas.

Technology has played a huge part in the build of the house, which is fitted with computerised lighting (any lights left on by accident at night can be switched off from the bedside).

'Generally speaking, Bill dealt with the build and technical issues and I oversaw the interior,' said Liz. 'Once we agreed a red and black theme for the kitchen we decided to carry that through the rest of the house. The most difficult part was visualising the size of the furniture before the walls were in place, because we wanted everything ready to go in as soon as the build was finished.'

Travertine tiles create an easy maintenance bathroom



Contacts

Architect: Hayes & Lazenby
01723 360733

Main contractor: Moordale Construction, York
07979 386198

Electrician: RDN Electrics, Malton 01653 696347

Electrical supplies: The Light House, York 01904 476223

Tiling: GP Tiling
01942 207917

Heat pump: Danfoss (Eco Heat Pumps Ltd)
0114 270 3900

Underfloor heating: Eco Hometec 0800 8620278

Windows: Dendura
01538 361888

Timber frame: Heritage Designs 01239 614462

Insulation: Termex, Easingwold 01347 821020

Heat recovery/ventilation: ADM, Skipton 01756 701051

Kitchen: Lynden Design, York 01904 795694

Alarm: Electrotec, Hull 01430 424202

Garden: Sally Tierney Garden Designs 01423 358709

Soft furnishings: Bespoke Soft Furnishings, York 01759 371309

Tiles: Al-Murad 0113 253 7766

Oak floor: Warmawood, Holmfirth 01484 685222

Office furniture, fireplaces and media wall: Christies Fitted Home Offices 0113 240 5858

Eco technology: Sustainable Technology Solutions 01509 410365

Entertainment system: Zen Custom Solutions 01430 803473

But even Liz and Bill's meticulous forward-planning couldn't have prevented hitches from happening. Just a week before their luxury spa bath was due to be delivered, they discovered the retail outlet had gone into administration.

'We had already paid for the bath so we rang the London branch who arranged for a bath to be shipped direct from the supplier,' said Liz. 'We were very relieved – we could have been bathless.'

With the house finally complete, Bill and Liz didn't want to keep their dream home to themselves. Over the last two years they have held village and private social events in their spacious house, and have become accustomed to passers-by stopping on the roadside to admire the striking glass-fronted property.

'You can't really miss it when you drive down the road,' said Liz. 'One day we were sitting in the upstairs lounge when we spotted a young couple hiding behind the bushes having a good look at the house. The glass prevents people seeing in, so they didn't realise that Bill and I were sitting there looking out at them. We don't mind when people stop to look. No one really gave the bungalow a second glance but now everyone is curious to see it. It's definitely a house for sharing.'



Liz and Bill Heath



The garden has been redesigned by Sally Tierney of Garden Creations