

Homebuilding & Renovating

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FUTURE

REAL PROJECT
BARN CONVERSION

Living by numbers

David and Karen's painstaking conversion of this 18th-century barn included removing and reinstating the original beams piece by piece





HOMEOWNERS

David and Karen Geoffreys

LOCATION Salcott

SIZE 247m²

BUILD TIME 10 months

PROPERTY COST £265,000

BUILD COST £450,000

VALUE £1.3 million (in 2022)

WORDS Hugh Metcalf

PHOTOGRAPHY Richard Gadsby

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ision is a recurring theme in the story of David and Karen Geoffreys' conversion of this 18th-century barn in the village of Salcott, Essex. And it's something that was most certainly required to imagine this agricultural building, which used to belong to a turf farm, becoming their new home. "You can't imagine what it was like," says David. "The limestone floor was coming up, there was an owl at one end, pigeons at the other, and it was just full of old tractors."

But David could see the potential. He is, after all, an architectural joiner who specialises in old and listed buildings. Yet, the barn still represented a challenge — he hadn't taken on a restoration completely from scratch before. It wasn't that David and Karen were daunted by a big project — you only need to look out from their garden to see the self-build they undertook in the same village in order to fund this venture, but the barn came with its own set of obstacles.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

The first hurdle the couple encountered was a set of architectural plans already attached to the barn that didn't quite fit with their 'vision' of what their dream barn conversion would look like. "The barn had planning permission when we bought it," David explains, "but we didn't like the style of the design." With its corrugated metal roof, the building would have felt more industrial, and less cosy, while the couple dreamt more of a 'country-style barn'. Unfortunately, the architect who drew up the original plans wasn't interested in helping to redesign the barn with their ideas in mind.

"The barn had planning permission when we bought it, but we didn't like the style of the design"





The oak interior was kept to retain the character of the 18th-century barn's original beams. However many of the beams were removed and taken away to be cleaned and sandblasted, after first being numbered to ensure they were replaced in the correct order.



Industrial-style fittings including pendant lighting, bar stools and cabinetry cup handles, create the ideal mix of old and new in the kitchen.

Rather than find another architect to revisit the plans, David, decided to go it alone and redesign the barn conversion himself to fit not only what he and Karen wanted, but to get planning permission for the renovation, too. "I completely revamped the planning, with a new roof and a few interior changes. I was the project manager, designer and buyer on the build," David jokes, "and occasional forklift driver."

ASSEMBLING A TEAM

For David, an important part of his role as project manager was to put together a good team. "While working on past projects I've picked up some good people over the years," says David, who admits that while he called on many old contacts, some of his 'dream team' this time around fell into his lap through a touch of good fortune. "A friend of mine met our bricklayer down the pub,

and he'd just moved in at the end of the road. He was keen to come and work with us and he's been a godsend to us and the project," says David. It was also affirmation of the couple's commitment to try and keep their trades local.

RETAINING ORIGINAL FEATURES

The care and attention that the couple put into their team reflects the end result and the space has been restored and converted meticulously. "A lot of the beams haven't been moved at all," Karen explains. "Many of them were numbered, taken out, cleaned and sandblasted, and then put back." On the original brickwork, David's keen to point out fingerprints from the person who made the bricks back in the 1700s, too, while he's also proud that the team used traditional nails and copper plumbing throughout the build.

The original features have clearly been treated with reverence, but not to the point where it affects how the barn now functions as a home. For example, a new brick inglenook fireplace, complete with woodburner, has been installed in the living area, creating a stunning focal point. And in the bedrooms on the new mezzanine level, rooflights have been inserted to ensure these spaces are light and airy, while cleverly reframed by some of the original timber.

The interiors share the same sense of balance, too. The kitchen (sourced from Davonport Kitchens — another local choice that was important for David and Karen) is a traditional Shaker style featuring tongue-and-groove panelling, but it has been given some contemporary finishing touches to help locate this home in the here and now. "We decided on a more industrial style, with that mix of old and new," says Karen.

A SUSTAINABLE VISION

Adding contemporary elements didn't end at the interior design, either. Solar panels were installed on the south-facing roof, along with a solar battery, air source heat pump, low-flow aluminium radiators and underfloor heating, housed in a small plant room next to a downstairs WC. "Though it's so well insulated, the underfloor heating hardly comes on," says David. In summer, it's cool inside, in spite of the huge south-facing glazed gable, thanks to David and Karen's choice of solar glass.

The couple's dedication to honouring the bones of the building are what they're most proud of. "The same family who owned the barn before still live in the village," says David. "One of them walked in here and said, 'It still looks the same as when I was a boy,' and that's humbling." To be honest, it turned out so much better even than the vision we had in our minds. **H**

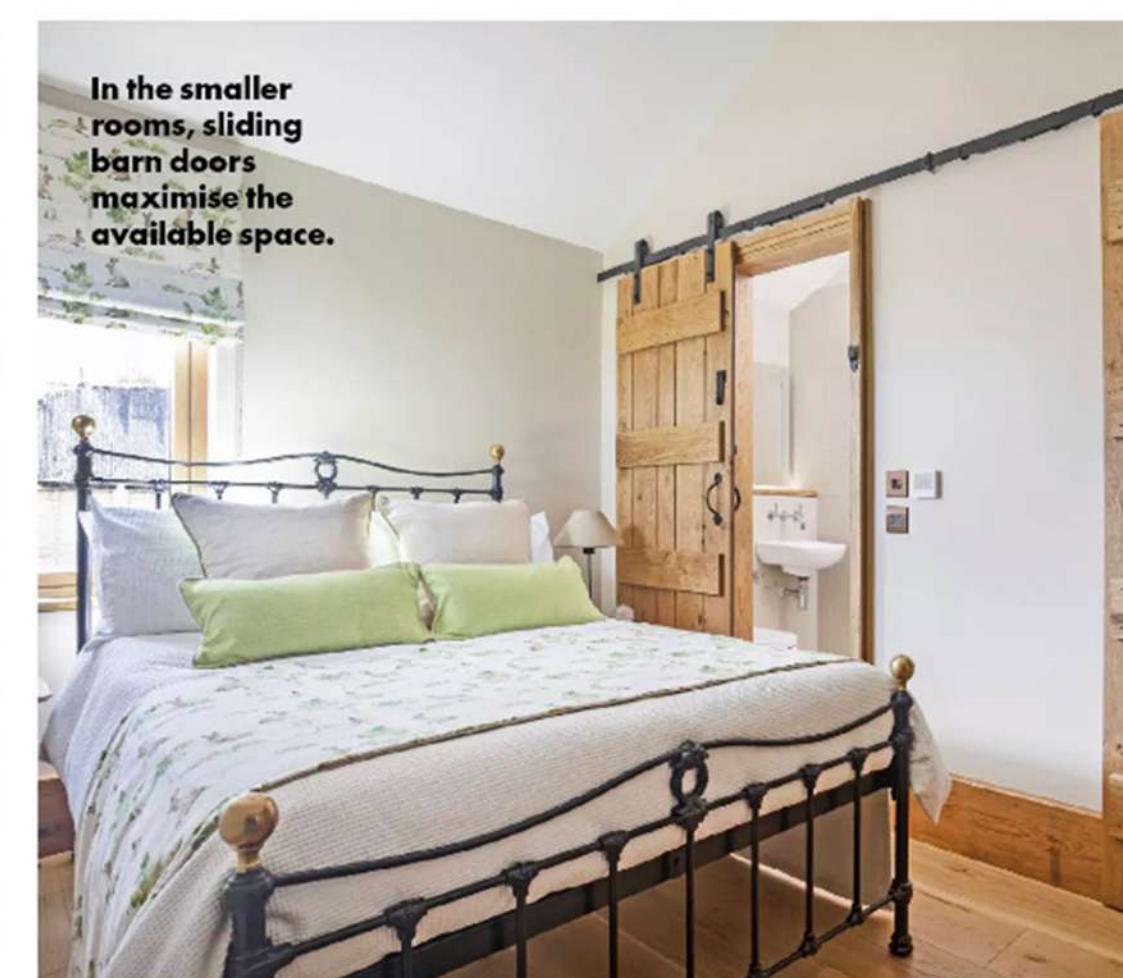
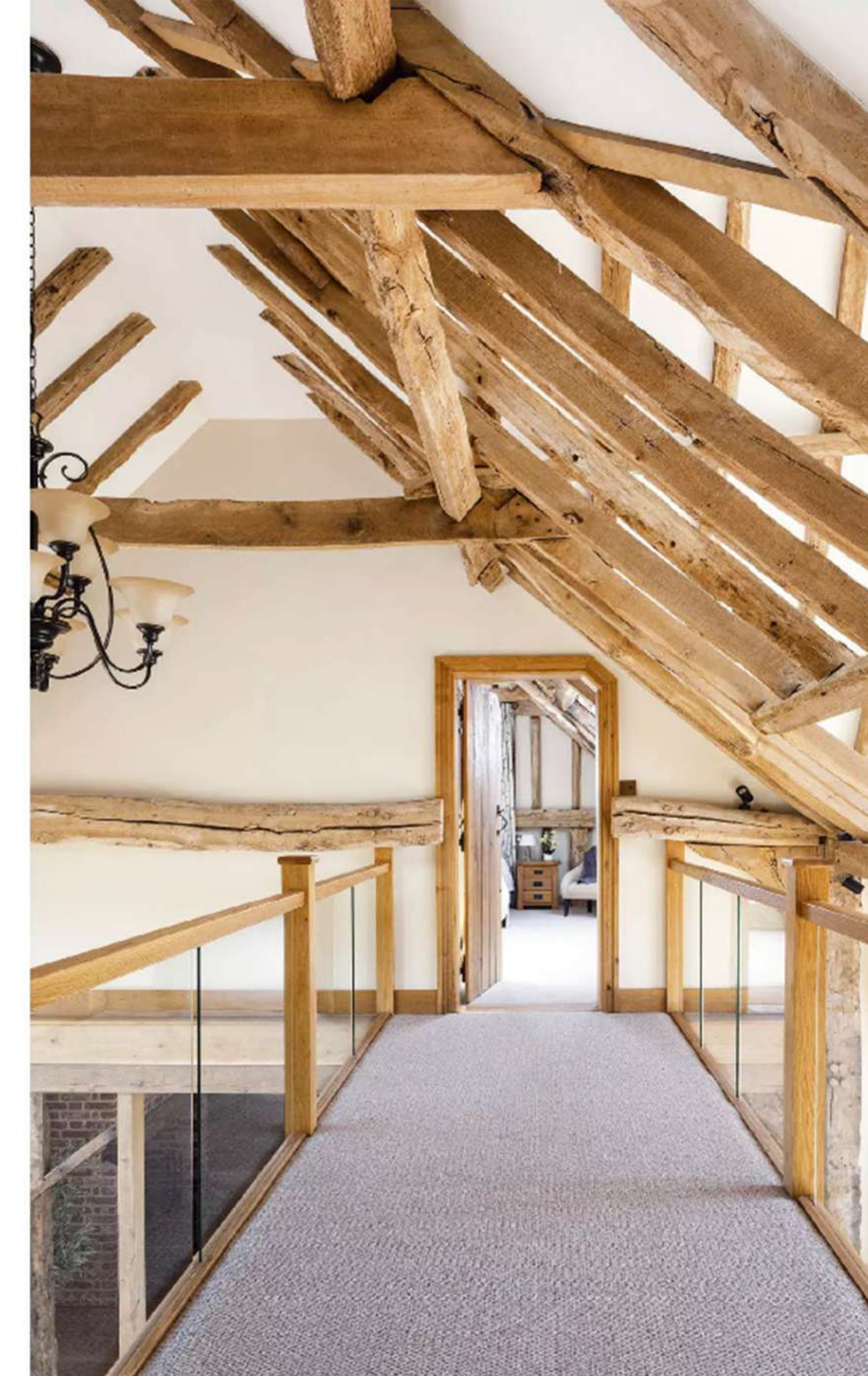
Where the beams may have caused difficulties for the home's lighting scheme, David and Karen opted for wireless switches to help circumvent any wiring restrictions.



SPOTLIGHT ON: ERECTING ROOF SCAFFOLDING

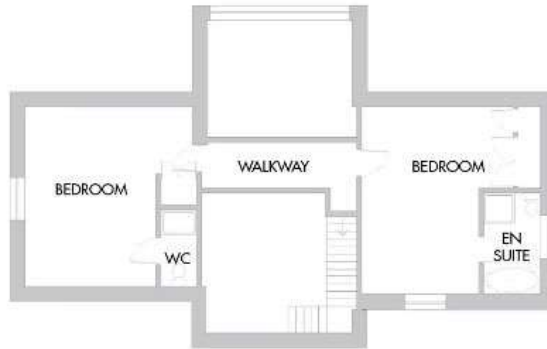
David and Karen's build is one of those rare conversion projects that came in both on time and within budget. So what's the secret? As well as the experience of David and his team paying dividends, one of the best uses of the budget was to erect a scaffolding roof early on in the project to provide cover for the build. "We ummed and ahed about it, because it was a big expense," David recalls, "but it was well worth it."

"It saved us weeks and weeks when it was pouring with rain," he adds. "At times, it was a mudbath outside, but in the barn it was dry as anything." With the scaffolding in place, David says they didn't lose a day's work at all due to the weather. The overall cost to the project was between £7,000 and £8,000, but David estimates it saved the project budget far, far more. "I'd absolutely recommend it to anyone doing this sort of thing," he says.



THE PLANS

FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



SUPPLIERS

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER Roberts Hay Partnership: www.rhpdesign.net

EXTERIOR CLADDING Brooks Bros: www.brookstimber.com

HEAT PUMP Terra Therma: www.terratherma.co.uk

SOLAR PANELS Stag Solar Solutions: www.stagsolar.com

SOLAR BATTERY Stag Solar Solutions: www.stagsolar.com

EXTERNAL OAK DOORS/GABLE GLAZING AJ Pummell joinery: aj-pummelljoinery

ALUMINIUM/TIMBER WINDOWS Timbertherm Windows: www.timberthermwindows.com

KITCHEN Davonport Kitchens: www.davonport.com

BATHROOM Victorian Plumbing: www.victorianplumbing.co.uk

FLOORING Flooring Supplies: www.flooringsupplies.co.uk



THE DETAILS

The plant room neatly contains the solar battery/inverter, underfloor heating controls, water tank and electrical consumer unit.

SELECTED COSTS

PROFESSIONAL FEES
£18,000

ASBESTOS REMOVAL & DEMOLITION £11,000

UTILITIES £4,500

FOUNDATIONS AND UNDERPINNING £18,000

BRICKWORK £18,000

STRUCTURAL GROUND FLOOR £8,500

SCAFFOLDING £15,000

CLADDING & INSULATION
£23,000

OAK FRAME REPAIR & ROOF FIRST FIX £45,000

ROOF £25,000

MEZZANINE £9,500

WINDOWS & DOORS
£26,000

OAK SCREENS £12,000

ELECTRICS £18,000

PLUMBING £18,000.

HEATING & HOT WATER
£20,000

TIMBER TREATMENT £5,000

INTERNAL JOINERY SECOND FIX £35,000

KITCHEN £50,000

FLOORING £12,000

DECORATION £11,000

GARAGE AND LANDSCAPING £65,000