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The accidental self-build

Holly Louise Eells talks to Adam Walker, managing director of Walkers and Period Homes, and his family, about how they brought their dream home to life

Your Instagram account about your home @our_build_journal now has more than 11K followers. How did the project start?
We first renovated an Edwardian semi in Ingatestone, but as a growing family, we knew we would outgrow it fairly quickly. Fast forward to just six months after that renovation, and my wife Dominique and I found ourselves walking around a different overgrown, ramshackle house on our favourite road in Ingatestone.

It was a great opportunity to extend and renovate another red brick house, but this time detached and with a family-sized garden. As a property developer, I see how quickly people outgrow their homes, so although it felt too early to move, we knew in our hearts it was a good next step for us.

The house had been donated to a charity by its former owner's estate and we then purchased it. Contrary to expectations, it was the slowest process imaginable. We then started to obtain quotes for an extension and full renovation. The house had been empty for a few years,



Photo: Darren Chung for Davonport

TOP:
The kitchen was designed for entertaining and family life

but untouched inside and out for nearer ten years, so it was in a state of serious disrepair.

Each builder suggested it would be easier and more cost-effective to 'start again' with a new-build house, which was definitely not something we had considered. However, to achieve our plans, it was likely we'd be left with only two or three walls, and even they were unlikely to be stood on sufficient foundations, so we were convinced to take the new-build route. We loved the style of our previous Edwardian home, so we chose to incorporate some of its design cues in the new house.

Would you say your dream vision is now complete?
Aside from landscaping and minor finishing items, the house is 99% complete. We wanted to hold off moving in until this point, otherwise it is all too easy to start to live with unfinished items. And as great as all our tradespeople were to have around, it's different when it's your home rather than a building site, so there is a danger of leaving jobs for another day.

Any highs or lows?
We had a smooth journey overall, not least because our main contractor, Arron of Ardan Developments, was simply amazing and is now very much a friend. The funding process was probably the hardest element, given that it was a much larger project than we first planned. Thankfully, we have some good contacts through the business who were able to help with some creative financing solutions, but even still, it was a fast lesson in managing cash flow and making a pitch for funding!



Photo: @our_build_journal

A workout with a view

Can you share any valuable lessons?
The most valuable lesson would be not to delay any decisions for later on. Often you have very little time to make a decision, and things such as bathroom and bedroom layouts need to be decided early on to get the services correctly in place.

What is your favourite room?
The gym looking into the garage has to be my favourite room; if anything is going to motivate me to work out, it's looking at my pride and joys! For Dominique, the open-plan kitchen and living space works perfectly for entertaining and being with the children throughout the day.

We worked with Davonport, having been so happy with the kitchen they installed in our previous house. They have a reputation for quality and are a joy to work with from start to finish. The kitchen really is faultless, and much attention is given to the layout and functionality as well as the aesthetics.

Can you share any advice on building your dream home?
We have been approached by many people looking to build their own home one day and would, on the whole, fully encourage it. The financial element shouldn't be overlooked. Once the contractor starts, you have to keep meeting the payments to keep the job running on schedule and as planned.

One of the best construction decisions we made was to install a concrete first floor. There isn't a single creak, and you simply cannot hear movement upstairs.

Would you do this again?
We plan to stay here for many years to come, despite some very tempting offers to part with it already! For us, the location in the centre of our favourite village is just perfect and we can't foresee what would change that. We have worked with some superb trades and suppliers and we feel extremely lucky to have enjoyed the process of creating our dream home and bringing our vision to life. ◆

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Photo: @our_build_journal

The couple took cues from the Edwardian style