

A second chance

Building a new home on part of their garden has been transformative for one family

WORDS **REBECCA FOSTER** PHOTOGRAPHY **ANDY MATTHEWS AND JIM STEPHENSON**



Bonded resin was chosen for the driveway because it is porous, which helps with drainage, and wheelchair-friendly

Despite being fans of the TV series, retirees Jo and David Wright had never contemplated taking on their own *Grand Designs*-style project. The couple raised their three grown-up children, Lizzie, Sally and Tim, in a six-bedroom, four-storey Edwardian house in the Hampshire countryside. Then in 2011 Jo became a wheelchair user following an infection in her spine.

The family home was no longer suitable for Jo's needs, and the couple's search for a single-storey property that they liked proved unsuccessful. They then investigated the possibility of extending their

home to create a wheelchair-friendly ground floor. 'Building an extension would have left me cut off from everyone,' Jo explains. 'I wanted to be able to go into every room and be entirely independent.'

Jo, 60, and David, 62, turned their attention to finding land on which to build a new house. They didn't have to look far. 'Our home is on a two-acre site, so we came up with the idea of dividing the plot in two,' says Jo. Not knowing whether building another house would be possible from a planning perspective, they sought the help of an architect. 'I'd been doing some research online, looking for local practices,' says Jo. 'I went away from »



David, Jo and architect
Dominic Gaunt enjoy
the garden with family
dogs Brex and Remy

IN BRIEF

LOCATION Near Hook,
Hampshire

TYPE OF PROPERTY

Detached self-build

BEDROOMS 5

PROJECT STARTED March 2018

PROJECT FINISHED October 2020

SIZE 750sqm

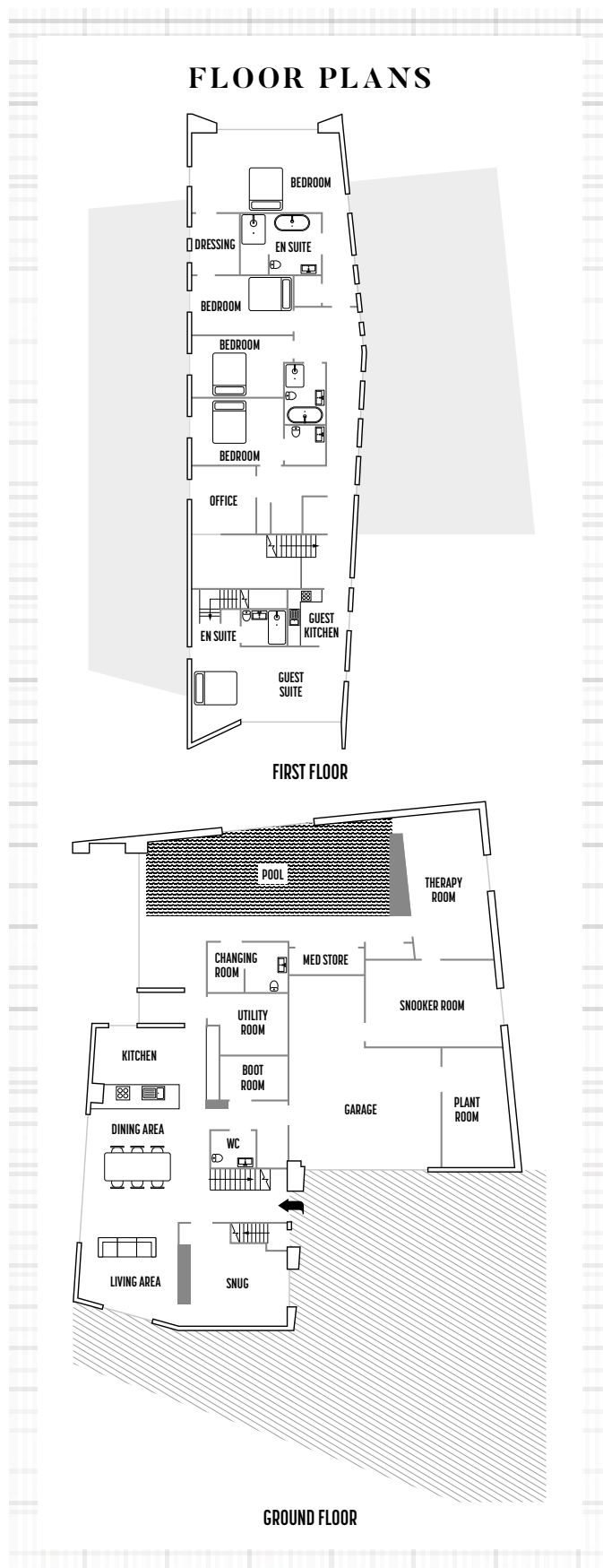




ABOVE Long, white Danish bricks clad the ground floor, with vertical black timber boards above to help the house blend into its wooded setting



ABOVE The arrangement of furniture in the ground-floor living space provides ample room for Jo to manoeuvre her wheelchair



‘We wanted a home that worked for the whole family – with me just happening to be a wheelchair user’



The open-plan layout with wide corridors lends itself well to accessible design. The large-format Minoli porcelain tiles are non-slip





LEFT Hardwearing composite Dekton worksurfaces are teamed with sleek, handleless cabinets for a streamlined space

ABOVE The inset sink has been set back within a recess and positioned at a height Jo can reach with ease

the computer and came back to find that an advert for the architecture firm Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt had popped up. We gave them a call, and the rest is history.'

The practice had a successful track record when it came to working with the local planning office, and was open to the couple's ideas. Though Lizzie, Sally and Tim had left to study at their respective universities, the new house needed to be a base to which they could all return. 'Dominic Gaunt and the team listened to us,' says Jo. 'We wanted a home that worked for the whole family – with me just happening to be a wheelchair user.'

The design also evolved from the couple's desire for a complete contrast to their old house. 'It is red brick, with turrets and multiple levels in a Gothic style, whereas the new-build is contemporary,' says Dominic, who is a director at Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt. Inside, the open-plan layout includes level thresholds, along with enough space for a wheelchair to turn.

After bouncing around ideas with Jo and David, the practice presented them with three design concepts. 'We homed in on one option pretty quickly,' says Jo. Once this had been nailed down, the couple obtained outline planning permission to build on an area of their garden fondly known as the football pitch. 'When the kids were younger it was filled with goal posts and the trampoline – it wasn't cultivated garden,' explains Jo.

Going for outline permission before submitting a detailed application afforded an opportunity to test »





LEFT To bring colour into the scheme Jo and David had a rug specially made for the living area

BELOW The bespoke staircase is a steel structure clad in oak. The lift is out of sight behind the stairs

the waters with the planners. The approach worked well, and the scheme received no objections.

Although the design and planning stages went without a hitch, the same could not be said for the construction. Significant excavation was needed to level the sloping site. 'It had to be flat, plus we were digging down to put in an indoor swimming pool,' says Jo. 'The team had to dig around 3m deep across a 75sqm area. Truckloads of wet clay were taken away – it seemed to take forever.'

Progress took another hit when the couple's contractor went bust in July 2019. Rather than spending months scrambling to track down another firm to take on the half-finished job, Jo took the lead in co-ordinating the rest of the build. 'We kept the same site manager and commercial manager, who effectively became our quantity surveyor,' says Jo. 'Dominic and the team were also extremely helpful. We all pulled together to keep things moving.'

Even the weather seemed to be against them. 'When we needed it to be sunny and dry for the groundworks we got torrential rain and snow. And when we were trying >>



Jo and David's bedroom features triple-aspect glazing, which provides stunning views of the trees around the house



LEFT The first-floor landing has a natural palette of materials, including oak flooring and timber panelling. Felt has been fitted behind the timber slats to improve the acoustic performance and reduce echoes

BELOW In the dressing area that opens off the pool, the crisp, white wall-hung sanitaryware and grab rails are from Hewi



to get the garden laid in early 2020 we had one of the hottest springs on record,' says Jo.

Despite the challenges, there were no regrets. 'We were living comfortably in our original home – all the chaos was on the other side of the hedge,' says Jo. From a vantage point on an area of hardstanding overlooking the site, she could see the house being built from above. 'It was where I saw some of the more magical moments, such as when the top floor corridor took shape,' she says.

It's still one of Jo's favourite places. Floor-to-ceiling windows run along one side, framing some of the best views. 'It's quite deliberate that we've not hung any art there,' says Jo. 'Shafts of sunlight do the job for us.'

Horizontal timber battening forms a black box at the centre of the house. It borders the kitchen-diner and the stairs, continuing down into the swimming pool area. 'It was Dominic's idea, to help relate the house to the plot and the timber cladding on the outside,' she says. 'It's this detailing that makes the house special.'

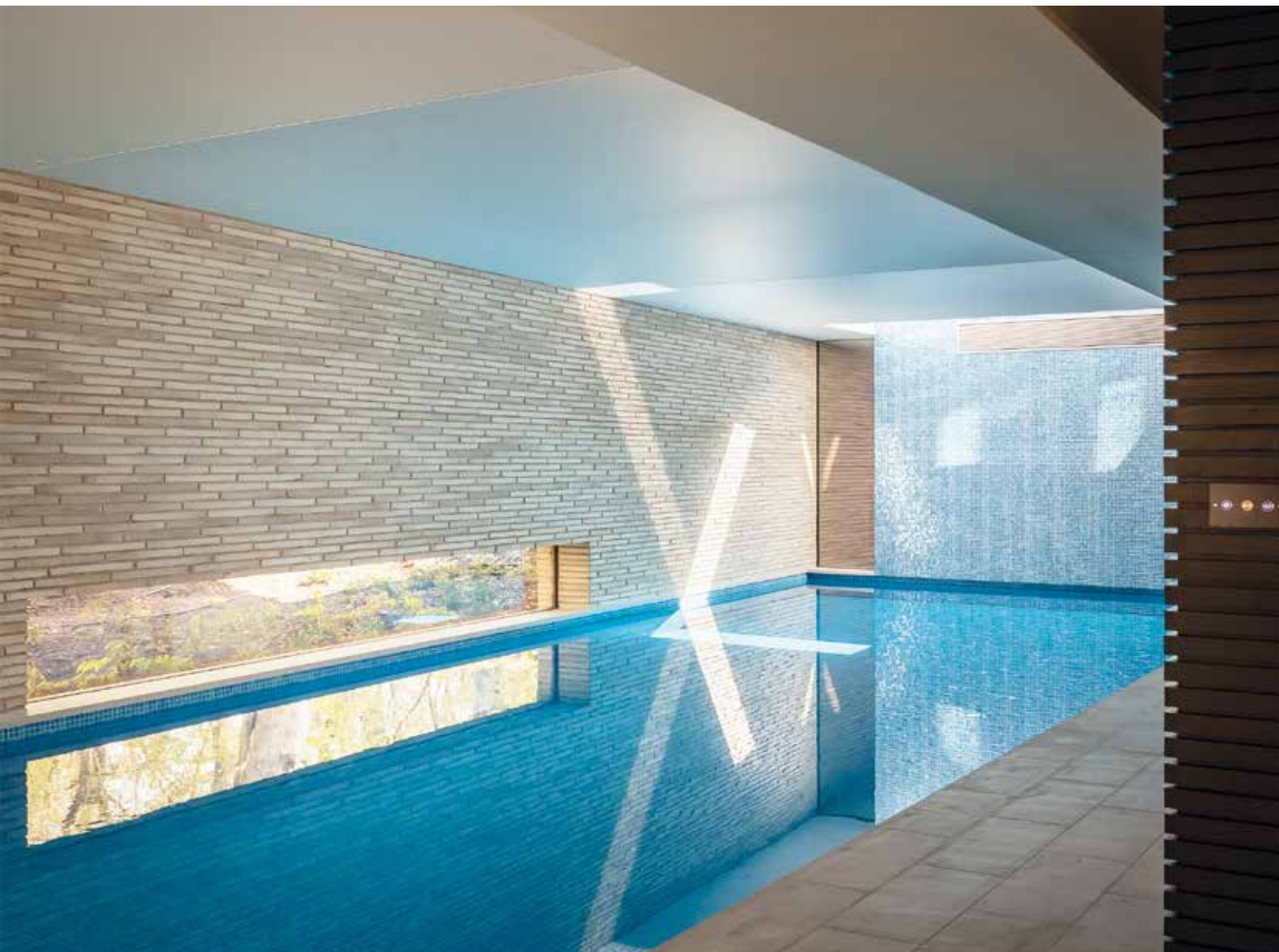
Living in a house tailored to her needs has been transformative for Jo. Level thresholds, a lift and bespoke

'We were living in our original home – all the chaos was on the other side of the hedge'

joinery make an enormous difference to the way that she's able to interact with the space. 'It's a simple thing, but having a dining table with inset legs that don't get in Jo's way makes a big difference,' says Dominic. 'The two kitchen sinks are at the right height and the washing machine and tumble dryer are elevated so Jo can use them easily.' There's a separate guest suite, which could be used by a live-in carer in the future.

It's not just Jo who has benefitted from the thoughtful design. 'David used to worry about leaving me on my own for too long, but everything is so much easier in this house,' says Jo. 'When I became disabled, my family's existence was turned upside down. Getting back to normal is the biggest prize I could have asked for.' GD

BELOW A low-level strip window and rooflights at the far end create patterns on the surface of the pool





A masonry plinth forms the ground floor, with a box-like structure cantilevered above made from a steel frame with timber infill panels

SUPPLIERS

PROJECT TEAM

Architect Ayre Chamberlain Gaunt
(acgarchitects.co.uk)
Structural engineer Eckersley O'Callaghan
(eocengineers.com)
Sustainability and MEP Mesh
(mesh-energy.com)

STRUCTURE

Steel works Clarke Construction Essex
(ccl.co.uk)
Groundworks MTD Formwork
(mtdformwork.co.uk)
Brickwork Randers Tegh (randerstegh.com),

Taylor Maxwell (taylormaxwell.co.uk),
Queens Park Brickwork (01202 303322)
Swimming pool Pools by Design
(poolsbydesign.co.uk)
Ground-source heat pump WDS Green Energy
(wdsgreenenergy.co.uk)
Solar PV panels Spirit Energy
(spiritenergy.co.uk)
Plastering, tiling and painting
Georgian Complete Finishings
(gcfinishings.co.uk)
Plumbing Tugwell Heating
(tugwellheating.co.uk)

Electrics TMS Electrical Contractors
(tmslectrical.com)

Windows IQ Glass (iqglassuk.com)

Garden design and build Catherine
MacDonald and Landform Consultants
(landformconsultants.co.uk)

Driveway LA Kattenhorn & Partners
(kattenhornsurfacing.co.uk)

Garage doors Deuren (deuren.co.uk)

Door automation Dormakaba
(dormakabagroup.com)

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Kitchen The Myers Touch (themyerstouch.co.uk)

Accessible kitchen design

Adam Thomas Consultancy
(adamthomasconsultancy.com)

Bathrooms Motionspot (motionspot.co.uk)

Sanitaryware Hewi (hewi.com)

Lift Aritco (aritco.com)

Lift installation Platinum Lifts
(platinumlifts.co.uk)

Stoves Focus Stoves (focusstoves.co.uk)

Tiles Minoli (minoli.co.uk)

FURNITURE AND ACCESSORIES

Living room rug Helen Yardley
(helenyardley.com)