

PROJECT: Cottage extension
COST: £800,000 + house



Back to the Future

Sue and Roderic O'Sullivan have extended their traditional thatched cottage with a breathtakingly modern extension, which more than doubles their living space



“Building a pastiche of the old cottage would have been a poor solution”



Words: Debbie Jeffery
Photography: Nigel Rigden

Take a look at Roderic and Sue's Salcombe home in our From the Archive feature on page 218

When Sue and Roderic O'Sullivan decided to update and extend their quaint thatched cottage to create a home for their retirement, they knew exactly who to contact. Some years before, they had appointed Devon architect Stan Bolt to design their remarkable holiday home — which literally clings to the sea wall in Salcombe. This avant-garde waterside retreat is uncompromisingly modern and stretched both architect and engineer to the limits.

This time, instead of contending with the tides and elements, the O'Sullivans had a whole new set of

challenges to overcome. “We bought our cottage back in 1987, and it holds some very fond family memories for us,” says Roderic. “The property isn't listed, but we still feel like custodians, and didn't want to rip the heart and history out of the old building, because we were so emotionally attached to the place.”

Stan Bolt usually limits his projects to within a two-hour radius of the practice's Devon office, but in this case he was prepared to make an exception. “Roderic and Sue were outstanding clients the first time around, and I knew that this would be just as challenging and exciting,” he explains. “They wanted to retain all the

ABOVE AND RIGHT: A new extension has been dug down into the landscape to form a lower living/dining space, with sliding glass doors opening into a sheltered sunken courtyard garden
PREVIOUS PAGE: The existing cottage has been conserved, with a newly thatched roof, using traditional materials such as salvaged bricks, lime render and oak joinery



very exciting to see both the old and new elements of the house beginning to work together as a whole.”

The project demanded a diverse range of both materials and techniques, with salvaged bricks used to rebuild the hybrid brickwork detailing of the original cottage. Traditional methods and materials such as lime render and oak joinery were used in the old building, whilst the new build element included exposed in-situ concrete, expressed steelwork, oak-veneered panels and glass wall finishes.

“We had a very close working relationship with a local structural engineer,” explains Stan Bolt. “The first floor of the extension is a reinforced concrete slab, which is totally unconnected to the cottage. There’s a study alcove in the living room and a concrete service core which act as the main supporting columns, and it was quite dramatic to see the upper floor apparently pivoting on just the central service pod and some delicate-looking steel props.”

This clever solution allowed the external walls to be detached from the more enclosed timber framed first

floor, enabling the reformed brick wall of the cottage to be fully exposed. The pinkish red of the bricks is echoed by pale terracotta-coloured walls both inside and outside the new extension, which serve to draw the eye out to the enveloping landscaped gardens. Glazing in the living room opens directly into a sheltered sunken courtyard, which has proved to be an inviting suntrap space for eating and relaxing well into the evening.

“There’s no doubt we’ve taken huge inspiration from our Salcombe home,” states Roderic. “Open plan living suits us, and having a study pod for the computer in the main living area is extremely useful — in fact, it’s quite hard to get our four grown-up children to move from this spot when they come to visit! We were also accustomed to looking out at the view through walls of glass, so many of the ideas were imported from Stan’s original design and work equally well in the countryside as they do on the Devon coast.”

Despite the fact that the original cottage has undergone a major overhaul, it still retains its original

“The two parts of the building may be totally different but they work in complete harmony with one other”



ABOVE: A large column radiator from Hudevad (BACK OF SHOT) acts as a divider between the old and new parts of the house and doubles as a balustrade for the striking steel, oak and glass staircase, which appears to rise unsupported to the cantilevered first floor landing
RIGHT: A wall in the sitting room incorporates a wood-burning fireplace and concealed music system, with oak-veneered panels to cover the TV screen when not in use

For more on radical extensions, see page 64

charm of the quirky thatched cottage and to introduce a totally new element which – although contemporary – would successfully connect with the cottage to give them the space and light they needed.”

Situated in a gloriously lush natural landscape within a Conservation Area, the existing brick keeper’s cottage had been constructed in around 1790. A thatched extension was added 100 years later to form a long farmhouse, with a 1975 rear lean-to ultimately resulting in a dark, chaotic and labyrinthine interior with small rooms and an irrational circulation pattern.

Stan Bolt proposed replacing the 1970s lean-to with a larger two storey extension, incorporating a fully glazed sunken living/dining space, a glazed double-height atrium and a timber framed first floor, clad in timber with a zinc monopitch roof.

This upper level is a more introverted space, containing three additional bedrooms and two bathrooms. Its high-level vertical glazing provides south light, ventilation and a visual link back to the re-thatched roof of the old cottage — which has been renovated and reconfigured to contain the ground floor kitchen and a study, with two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs.

“Although the extension is physically larger than the cottage, it was designed to be subservient and respectful to it, and crouches down slightly so that it’s virtually invisible from the front approach,” explains Roderic, a retired solicitor. “Planning permission was granted extremely easily, and the old 1970s extension was demolished. The rear of the cottage was then effectively removed and goalpost-shaped supporting steelwork introduced before the new part could be built. It was



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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: A glazed balcony overlooks the double-height hallway; Sliding glass doors open out onto the sunken courtyard; The study area and cast concrete walls for the utility/WC act as structural columns to support the concrete first floor in the extension; The kitchen has remained simple and traditional, with white units, open shelving and granite worktops

charm, and there is a marked and intentional division between the new and old parts of the house, which is further emphasised by the choice of furniture. Antique pieces were selected for the older part of the building, and the traditional kitchen combines simple white units, granite worktops and open shelving.

The extension is physically stepped down from the kitchen and hallway – partly to ensure that the new roofline remains invisible from the front of the house – and has a robust oak floor with contemporary sofas, chairs and tables. The terracotta fireplace wall is one of the only solid areas in this glazed space, and

contains a woodburning fire and a music cabinet, with an inset television which may be concealed behind a sliding oak-veneered screen.

“There are some hi-tech gadgets, but we have tried to be as environmentally aware as possible,” Roderic explains. “The thatched roof has been fully insulated and there’s a new insulated floor slab in the kitchen. The concrete for the utility room and WC service pod was poured into shuttering and then later waxed, and these solid walls form a central heat store which retains warmth from the sun. Despite all the glass, this is actually an extremely warm building.”





Conventional steel radiators have been fitted in the old cottage, with underfloor heating on both floors in the extension, and a condensing oil-fired boiler. Additionally, a large column radiator doubles as a balustrade for the stunning oak, glass and steel staircase and effectively separates the old and new parts of the house.

There's a rainwater harvesting system connected to the building's downpipes and all of the glazing within the new structure is high performance with an integral solar film and electronic mechanical blinds.

"The glass has opened up a whole series of views over nearby Savernake Forest, which we never had before," says Roderic. "People are quite surprised when they walk into the cottage and realise that it stretches back into a glazed space which brings light into the whole house. The two parts of the building may be totally different but they work in complete harmony with one other. Building a pastiche of the old cottage would have been a poor solution. Stan's design is far more honest and practical, and we really couldn't be more pleased because he has so successfully blended together the old and the new." ■

USEFUL CONTACTS: Architect Stan Bolt Architect: 01803 852588 Structural engineer Mark Lovell Design Engineers: 01380 724213 Service engineer Purnell Associates: 01934 741824 Landscape designer Catherine Thomas Landscape & Garden Design: 01722 339936 Historic building consultant Colin Johns Architect: 01225 868037 Main contractor and joinery Gaiger Bros Ltd: 01380 722412 Sliding oak doors and windows Scandinavian Timber Ltd: 020 8864 0131 Thatcher RJ Howell & Son: 01747 821943 Oak flooring Junckers: 01376 534700 Kitchen Dezives Kitchens: 01380 721772 Column radiator Hudevad: 01932 247835 Sanitaryware CP Hart: 0845 600 1950 Rooflight Vitral UK: 01223 499000 Underfloor heating Uponor: 01455 550355 Fireplace Rutland Fire Products: 01455 209808 Garden landscaping Gardenesque Ltd: 01672 811344

Fact File

NAMES: Roderic and Sue O'Sullivan

PROFESSIONS:
Retired solicitor and teacher

AREA: Wiltshire

HOUSE TYPE:
Five bedroom extended house

HOUSE SIZE: 230m²

BUILD ROUTE: Building contractor and specialist subcontractors

FINANCE: Private

CONSTRUCTION: Thatched brick cottage, blockwork and timber framed extension

BUILD TIME: Nov '04 – Feb '06

HOUSE COST: £315,000

BUILD COST: £800,000

TOTAL COST: £1,115,000

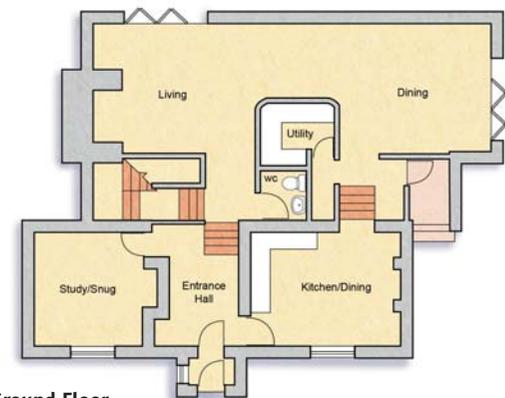
CURRENT VALUE: £1,500,000

COST/m²: £3,478

**26%
COST
SAVING**



First Floor



Ground Floor

FLOORPLAN: The existing cottage contains the kitchen, entrance hallway and study, with steps down into the new living/dining extension and its concrete service core of utility room, WC and store. Upstairs, there are two bedrooms and a bathroom in the cottage with three additional bedrooms and two bathrooms in the extension