

The sloping, pitched roof of the house was designed to mimic the lines of the surrounding pine trees

PARADISE in the pines

A forest is an enchanting spot to build a home but it also comes with a few challenges, as one family soon discovered

AT A GLANCE

Names Anna and Andy Gregorek
Ages 38 and 40
Location Nr Dartmoor, Devon
Property Eco self-build
Bedrooms 3
Bathrooms 2
Build started May 2014
Project finished April 2016
Size of house 136sqm

Embarking on a self-build project can never be taken lightly. Factor in wet weather, heavy soil and a densely forested plot of land in a remote part of Devon, and even the most committed budding project manager will be tested to the limit.

This was the case for Anna Gregorek, 38, and her husband Andy, 40, who constructed a holiday home in woodland just outside Dartmoor. The couple first discussed building the property back in 2010, before their two children, Aurelia, four, and Athena, one, had arrived. But it would be a long and challenging journey before their dream became a reality.

Living in Buckinghamshire, they spent a lot of time travelling back and forth to visit Anna's parents, who run

The pair enlisted a local architect and family friend to design an eco-friendly house that would blend into its surroundings

a fishing holiday park, Anglers Paradise, just down the road from the site. As a partnerships director at Warner Records, Anna was keen that she and Andy, who runs a busy marketing and events company, had a place to escape to. 'We both work full time in London, and there was plenty of travelling to-and-fro to see my parents,' says Anna. 'After a lot of discussion we decided to take the plunge and build a property nearby.'

Gifted with a piece of her parents' land, Anna and Andy made plans for their new home. The pair enlisted >



Cladding made from recycled material was chosen for the exterior of the house



The open-plan living space is minimal and unfussy with muted colours, timber flooring and an inset wood burner



Full-height windows provide a great view of the surrounding woodland

Anna and Andy relax with their daughters Aurelia and Athena in the spacious living area



local architect and family friend, Alf Trewin, to design an eco-friendly house that would blend into its surroundings.

'Eco elements were a key part of the brief,' says Anna. The couple both felt strongly that the house should be as energy-efficient as possible, particularly as securing planning permission to clear and build in the middle of the forest depended on it. As a result, the eco-friendly features include an air source heat pump, a borehole for fresh water, solar panels, photovoltaic panels, a sedum moss roof and wood-burning stove, which means that the underfloor heating rarely needs to be turned on.

Almost every aspect of the house was designed with a nod to nature – even the way it looks. 'The rather spiky edge appearance of the building's jagged, mono-pitched roof picks up the silhouette of the pine trees,' says Trewin. 'This project was about reflecting the forest around us, not taking away from it,' Anna elaborates.

On the ground floor, a bedroom, shower room and open-plan living space have just the right amount of luxe detailing to be comfortable and airy. Floor-to-ceiling windows and south-facing bi-fold doors lead out to a covered terrace,

creating an inside-outside feeling in the summer. The two bedrooms upstairs cantilever outward, with windows that provide a great view of the wildlife among the trees.

After planning permission was granted in late 2012, Andy and a friend spent the majority of the summer of 2013 readying the site for the build, which officially started in May 2014. 'The clearing is down a small, private road and it was necessary to create a separate track to access it,' explains Anna. Living 250 miles away during construction meant that Anna and Andy had to rely on the architect and family to check in on site. The couple travelled down as much as possible but with new babies arriving and jobs to hold down, it was less than they would have liked.

Construction was slow at first, with bad weather seriously hindering progress. The trickiest part came when trying to lay the concrete foundations. 'On digging into the ground we came up against dense yellow clay,' says Trewin. 'There is very little topsoil so drainage is poor, and we had to go down about 2.5m in places with reinforced concrete, which was quite a task for such a small site.' Another big job was laying cable to provide electricity, >



'I've always wanted a copper-plated, freestanding bath and we made the master bedroom bigger to accommodate one,' says Anna



Long horizontal windows in the bedrooms are reminiscent of a wildlife hide

which proved difficult because it was bird-nesting season, so Anna and Andy had no choice but to wait it out.

Once the foundations were in place, everything went smoothly – the timber frame was erected and the house was constructed quickly. Anna ordered the fixtures and fittings without having seen the house, as she was due to give birth imminently. The furnishings and palette are purposefully neutral to keep the focus on the surroundings, and engineered oak floors, a bespoke oak staircase and odd accents of colour make for a pared-back, welcoming bolt-hole.

In total Anna and Andy spent around 15 per cent more than they had originally budgeted for. 'My advice is to get the project thoroughly quantified and costed before you get under way,' says Trewin.

Be that as it may, the couple are overjoyed with their self-build venture. 'We hope to retire to our forest house someday,' she says. 'It's a wonderful retreat in the woods.' **GD**
• *Find out more about this property at Paradisepines.co.uk*

TURN TO THE NEXT PAGE FOR PROJECT DETAILS »

Project details

We take a more in-depth look at this woodland wonder



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SUPPLIERS

PROJECT TEAM

Architect Trewin Design Architects (01409 253 013; trewin-design.co.uk)
Contractor Cornish Homes & Property Services (01288 361 392)

STRUCTURE

Windows Velux (01592 778 225; velux.co.uk) **Decking** Ecodek (01978 667 840; ecodek.co.uk)
Roof cladding Alwitra Marley (01283 722 588; marleyeternit.co.uk)
Windows and doors Robeda (01237 472 651; robeda.co.uk)

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Induction range and sink Both Rangemaster (0800 804 6261; rangemaster.co.uk) **Wood burner** Barbas Bellfires (01562 515 715; barbasbellfires.com) **Bathroom tiles** Topps Tiles (0800 783 6262; toppstiles.co.uk) **Freestanding copper bath** Heritage Bathrooms (0330 026 8503; heritagebathrooms.com) **Kitchen** RGB (01409 253 535; rgbld.co.uk) **Pendant lights** The Lighting Superstore (01225 704 442; thelightingsuperstore.co.uk)

FURNITURE AND ACCESSORIES

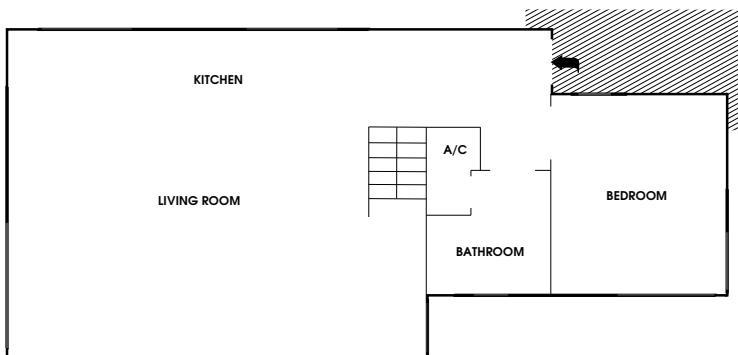
Sofa and dining chairs Made (0344 257 1888; made.com)
Dining table and bench Loaf (0845 468 0698; loaf.com) **Armchairs** Ikea (020 3645 0000; ikea.com)



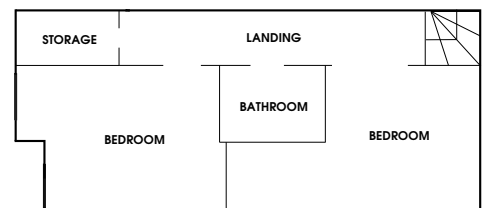
SPOTLIGHT ON OBSERVATION DECK

'The custom-made glass balustrade along the staircase and mezzanine creates a sense of openness in the house,' says Anna. 'The oak handrail and supporting base enclose thick glass panels, extending the sight line from below into the bedrooms upstairs. The door of the master suite slides open, and because of the way the space has been designed, light comes flooding in through the glazing. We really wanted to enhance the open-plan feeling.'

FLOORPLAN



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

Style finder

Tactile furniture makes this eco-friendly country house cosy



IN DETAIL UNDER THE STAIRS

The curve of the stairs has been used as clever zoning in the open-plan living area, and the space under the steps provides a niche for a flat screen television, which is mounted on the wall. The TV's white frame blends in seamlessly with the white painted walls. For a similar model, try Currys. (0344 561 0000; currys.co.uk)

GET THE LOOK

1 Beautifully curved

Yurt polished chrome modern ceiling pendant, £72, The Lighting Company (01643 707 505; lightingcompany.co.uk)

2 Outdoor comfort

Rocking chair in dark brown, £69.90, Casa Pro (0800 279 7234; amazon.co.uk)

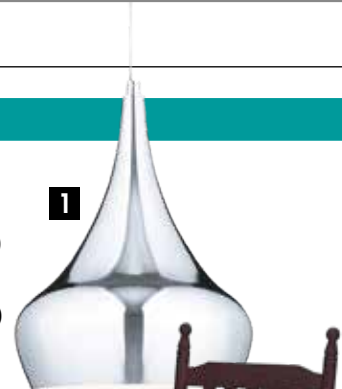
3 Stylish perching

Richmond occasional table/stool, £69, Rockett St George (01444 253 391; rockettstgeorge.co.uk)

4 Natural tones

Herdwick sheepskin rug throw, from £75, The Fabulous Fleece Company (07796 801 818; thefabulousfleececompany.co.uk)

5 Soft seating Tivoli right-hand corner sofa in indigo, £1,479, Swoon Editions (020 3319 6332; swooneditions.com)



1



2



3

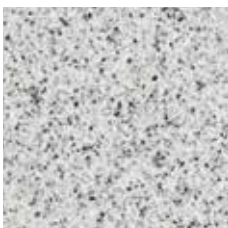


4



5

MATERIAL FOCUS



PALE WORKTOP
Bianco Crystal granite, £200 per sqm, The Marble Shop (020 8216 2051; themarblestore.co.uk)



ATMOSPHERIC BLUE
Water-based eggshell paint in moonlit night no. 43, £29 per litre, Designers Guild (020 7351 5775; designersguild.com)



RICH PATTERN
Palmeral velvet in green, £120 per linear metre, House of Hackney (020 7739 3273; houseofhackney.com)