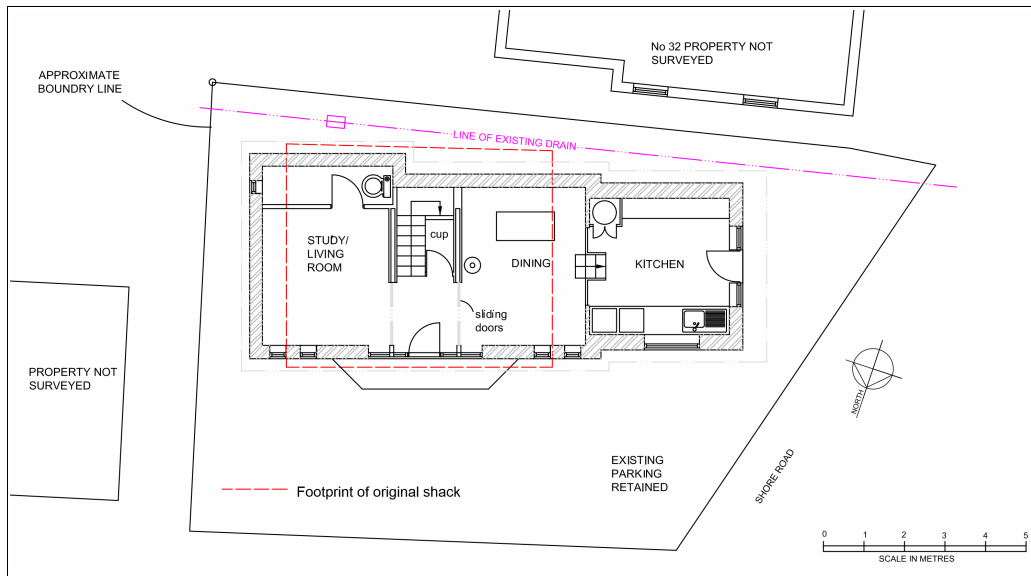


A Build Beside the Seaside, Part 2 – Turning plans into reality

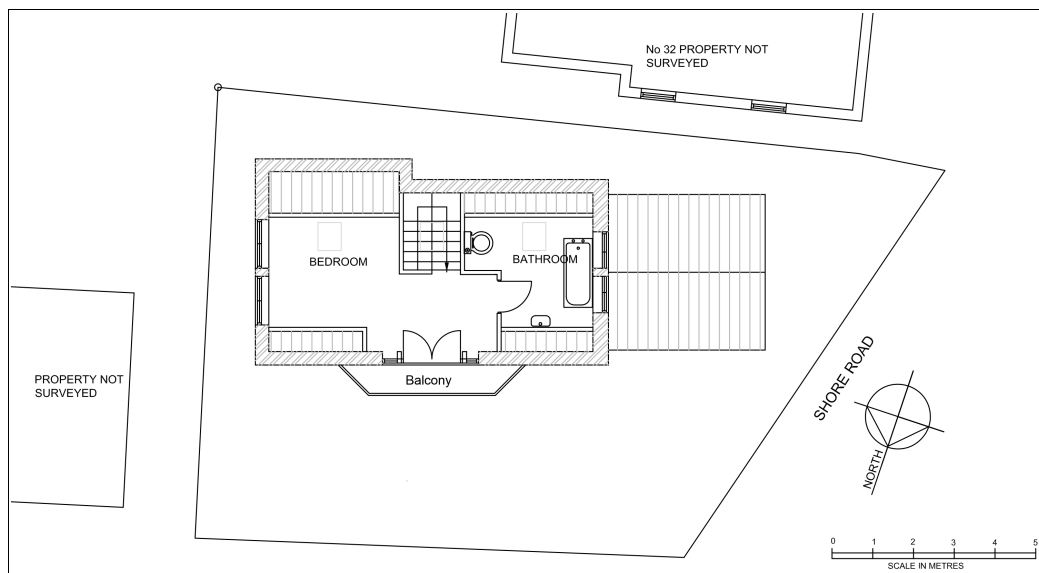
Last month we saw how John Hardiment and his wife, Nicole, became involved with selfbuild almost by accident. They realised that their seaside shack on the Isle of Wight was not worth repairing. So they undertook to build themselves a small, eco-friendly, chalet bungalow in its place. John had worked in mechanical services for the construction industry for forty years, but had no previous experience of new house building.

Their bijoux build is a small chalet with a floor area of only 50 m². We saw the architect's elevations last month. Here are the floor plans:



Ground floor and site

Note: the small size of the site – only 150 m².



Upper Floor

I continue my interview with John:

Me:

How did you finance the build?

John:

We did it from our own resources – we didn't have to get a mortgage.

Did you have a budget for the build?

Yes. I thought I'd do the building for £100,000, though at this stage I hadn't written the specification or fully developed the design.

[As we'll see in a later article, the final cost of the build was considerably more.]

That includes paying for the architect, and all the other services?

No. The original budget was £100,000 plus the professional fees.

Quite a lot of the original budgeting worked out, but some things were a long way out. I had estimated that the carpenter would be here for six months, and in fact he was here for two years.

My budget figure for the groundworks was £20,000, including the underground services – electricity, gas, water and drains. We were able to go out to tender for the groundworks with the drawings, a specification and a bill of quantities (produced by my Structural Engineer). We went out to seven companies, and we got one tender back – and that was for £39,000.

I then approached another seven contractors, from who we got four good bids. The lowest was £19,000. That was from Attrill's who were looking for a stopgap. They were a very, very good choice. We had some variations, and we ended up with a bill for £20,000. That worked out very well. We had asked for a breakdown of the costings as part of the tender. This was a great help for monitoring costs when I negotiated the final account with Attrill's.



Foundations

Note: the split floor levels following the slope of the ground.

The nearest blue pipe will be the rising main in the kitchen. The other blue pipes will be used for the rainwater harvesting system (and nowadays should be black/green).

Before we got to that stage, I had gone out to tender for the mechanical and electrical work and for supplying and erecting the timber frame. I thought I had got most of my costs tied down. Of the increased costs, just over half was the carpenter's daywork costs. I hadn't detailed the kitchen, bathroom cupboards, shelving, and built-in bookshelves. I grossly under-estimated the work content in lining all the internal walls and ceilings with timber.

The other half of the over-spend was made up by items I couldn't get priced beforehand, for example, the scaffold. And there were items that came up that we hadn't expected, for example taking core samples on site and getting a geo-technical report. It was very difficult to fully design everything at the outset and to obtain firm prices, particularly for some of the eco features. I had to budget as best I could. I can only recommend to anyone costing a one-off building to include large contingency items where firm quotations cannot be obtained.

The windows are a feature of the design – how much did they cost?

The windows were a hard one.

We got one price for over £20,000. I had budgeted for £9,500. Norrskén were originally around £10,000, but they slowly crept up to £13,000 as we negotiated the final spec. I said that was too much. They came back with a very good deal: if we cut out the fiddle-faddle, like different colours and some non-standard details, we could have the windows for £11,000. I closed the deal straightaway.

Their Viking windows are made in Estonia, and made with slow-growing Siberian timber. Which is what our proper exterior timber used to be in this country. The windows are double glazed, and very good indeed.

We have some windows with unusual shapes. We spent a long time fiddling about with the shape of them, and thinking about how much of the window frame on the outside was going to be visible on the inside.

Unusual window opening

Note the temporary plastic sheeting to keep out the weather.

The ridge beam is supported by the steel frame, visible on the right.



We went to Norrskén's showroom with the draft drawings, and we then chose from their standard shapes to make up the overall shapes we wanted – we wanted the mullions to all line up, for example.

The window agent came and measured up for the windows. *[Good service – especially useful as the windows are non-standard shapes.]*

There's steelwork around all of the triangular-topped windows [to support the ridge beams]. Avoiding cold bridging was quite a business. The timber frame supplier hadn't come across this at all before, somebody being fussy about cold bridging. I did a lot of detailed drawings myself.

Did you consider triple glazing?

The extra cost of triple glazing was going to be £1,000, and the pay-back time would have been more that double the life of the windows.

I did use payback to help me make some of these decisions. I think it gives a very good yardstick.

The windows were custom made for you. Did you pay anything in advance?

Yes. The deal was 50% on order, and the balance before delivery. I asked for a certificate of vesting. This transfers the title of the goods to the purchaser while the goods are still on the supplier's premises – instead of transferring title on delivery. This would provide a safeguard if Norrskén went out of business.

Actually, we eventually negotiated a deal whereby our contract was with Viking and we paid Viking direct. They are a very large company and unlikely to fail. We made the final payment by BACS the day before delivery.

You did the project management of the build?

Oh yes. And I took a keen interest in the details.

For example, my structural engineer was semi-retired and was very much a reinforced concrete man. But in his day, insulation to foundations was not considered as important as it is today, so I was redrawing a lot of his details. I wanted to make sure that I minimised the heat losses through the slab and through the blockwork upstand. *[Because of the sloping site, part of the back wall has been built of blockwork, where it is beneath ground level.]*

The log store and the food store are the structural engineer's idea. We put the insulation at the back of them, and it was Nicole's idea to ventilate the food store. The air from outside keeps the store cool for our vegetables and the like. It works very satisfactorily.



Log store under construction

The top of the store will form part of the raised kitchen floor – note the UFH pipework (white) for this floor.
Note also the two air inlets on the right from the outside. Connected to one will be ducting to supply air to the wood stove. Connected to the other will be ducting to a matching food store off to the left of the photo. (A ventilation grill in its wall will allow the air to circulate.)

Did you get a building warranty?

No. We weren't intending to sell on, and we didn't have to get a mortgage.

In fact, I do question the value of a warranty which is only valid for ten years.

Did you get any site insurance while you were building?

Yes. We had to take it out three times, as cover lasts only for a year.

Who did you use for building control?

Just the local authority.

How did you get on with the building inspector?

He was very pleasant and helpful.

I had a long list of things he wanted included in our submission. Many of the items I couldn't understand in the building regulations. He gave me a couple of hours in his office, and we went through everything. He told me what he would accept, and so on. On that basis, I made the application for building control myself.

Have you got a completion certificate?

No. I went to see the new building inspector recently, and I now have a list of certificates and things he wants. So I'm sending him that information. But I've still got the rainwater harvesting to install, and the downpipes.

Do building control know you have moved in?

Yes. But they are relaxed about it.

Next month: The shell and airtightness.

FURTHER INFO:

Nicole's blog

Follow John and Nicole's build (and their cycle tours of Cuba, Australia and Myanmar/Burma):

<http://wilhelminacrew.blogspot.co.uk>.

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