

New dawn

A touch of modernity for a timber cottage in Hertfordshire

06



Aim high

How to climb the ladder to the best locations in town

08

Sail away

An ancient windmill with coastal views in East Sussex

13



Home truth

Our undercover agent has to endure the office party

23

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Ab fab

The bright and beautiful home of designer Ab Rogers

02

FEATURE ARCHITECTURE



Wood works: the extension is mainly constructed from red cedar ribbed with iroko hardwood

Ancient and modern

The architect Jeremy King has breathed new life into his mother's 400-year-old home. By **Nick Lloyd Jones**

Jeremy King is an up-and-coming British architect who specialises in seamlessly blending the old with the new. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the award-winning extension he designed for his own mother's house – the Grade II listed timber-framed Pound Cottage in the village of Benington near Stevenage in Hertfordshire. This dates from 1578 and is two cottages knocked into one, with its own substantial back garden and occupying a lovely spot overlooking the green.

Jeremy knew the house well, having grown up in it. "My understanding of how the circulation of the house should work came through living there," he says.

There had been concerns about low ceilings, poor lighting and clogged layout since his parents moved there in 1987. "The original cottages were linear in plan," explains Jeremy. "They followed what the French call an *enfildade* layout, which means there are no hallways as such and the rooms open up sequentially, one after the other."

The problem had been slightly alleviated by some previous owners, who installed a glass passageway along the back of the house. This helped link the rooms, or "unlock the house" as Jeremy puts it, but still only partially succeeded in solving the blocked circulation prob-

lem. In particular, Jeremy thought, the kitchen was in the wrong place at the side of the house, gloomy and "out on a limb".

The solution Jeremy eventually hit on was an extension he describes as a "barn". "The challenge was to design a building that was contemporary without being in-your-face modern," he says. "I wanted something new that echoed the rural vernacular."

He achieved this largely through his choice of materials – timber and glass. "I use these materials together quite a lot as I find they straddle the divide between being familiar and contextual while exuding a contemporary edge." The building is principally constructed of western red cedar ribbed with iroko hardwood. Because the cedar is untreated, it is quite a bright russet, but this will fade into a silvery grey more in keeping with the main body of the house.

Plans had long been afoot to extend. Soon after the Kings bought the house they commissioned a firm of local architects to come up with some ideas. Plans were drawn up and permission obtained but the project languished for many years.

Jeremy, meanwhile, had qualified as an architect in his own right. He had also become increasingly interested in the modernist style while working for the Hudson Featherstone part-



nership – principally known for the futuristic Baggy Hall on the north coast of Devon. Jeremy stayed with them for several years before setting up his own west London-based practice in 2002.

The idea of designing an extension for Pound Cottage was subsequently revived. They dug up the old plans and Jeremy began poring over them. He approved some of the points, in particular the resolve to build the extension on the site of a former garage – derelict but lending symmetry to the house and serving to partially screen it from the village green.

However, he wasn't happy with much of the original design and felt not enough attention had been paid to maximising light. So, he tweaked and adapted and got back in touch with the planning authority. The upshot of this was to relegate the existing kitchen to the status of utility room and to replace it with a new one in-

corporated into a 60sqm wing parallel to the drive. The entry point to this was a new front door opening into a single-storey glass vestibule which connected to the glass passageway at the back of the house.

A new garage was installed to the rear of the wing as well as a sheltered veranda area overlooking the back garden. However, the star turn was the kitchen, linked to the body of the house by the glass vestibule.

"I had come to realise that the kitchen needed to be positioned next to the garden," says Jeremy. The garden had become an integral part of the house with its east-facing terrace directly accessed through the kitchen's french windows.

The windows, like the outer walls, were latticed with iroko strips. "It's a way

THE IDEA WAS CONTEMPORARY, BUT NOT IN-YOUR-FACE MODERN

of disguising the glass," says Jeremy. "Rather than having big shouting apertures, I wanted to incorporate larger areas of glass into the elevation but in a disguised way. I like the way the timber-cladding of the barn is echoed in the wooden strips across the windows."

Inside, too, the kitchen is bathed in light. Huge arc lights hang from its vault-

ed ceiling while a south-facing oriel window has been added above the vestibule to let in yet more sunlight.

To the opposite side of the kitchen from the French windows, meanwhile, slit observation windows and a ventilation shaft above the customised units enable Jeremy's mother to indulge her twin passions of smoking cigarettes and keeping a watchful eye on her neighbours at the same time.

The Kings are delighted with the extension. "It's breathed new life into the place," says Jeremy. "It has altered our relationship to the house and the way it is used. It has corrected the circulation and all the internal spaces now feel properly balanced. The new kitchen has become the living heart of the house."

Apart from scooping a prestigious RIBA award for the project, it seems to have marked out Jeremy's future career as a specialist in designing tasteful modernist extensions to historically sensitive buildings.

"What gives me the greatest architectural satisfaction is incorporating the best elements of modern design – especially use of space and light – within older buildings. It's always such a challenge but when you get it right it can be immensely rewarding."

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ASK ALICE

Do you have an interiors dilemma?

Consult our resident specialist



The hall of our home has become a disaster area. We are a family of five and are drowning beneath a mountain of coats and jackets. We had a row of hooks on the wall but they have fallen down under the weight. Can you suggest something stylish and strong to help us out, please?

Mandy Sutcliffe, by e-mail

Heal's (www.heals.co.uk) has a plain and simple solution for you. Their Shaker peg rail has six pegs, comes in oak or cherry and is good value at £30. For something more colourful, take a look at Globo from SCP (www.scp.co.uk). These single pegs are coated in plastic in a choice of six colours, £15.50 each. If you're into collectibles, you might be interested in the Eames Hang It All rack, £141, also from SCP. The steel frame tipped with maple balls in nine different colours makes a jolly-looking piece.

All of these options depend on the strength of the fixings to the wall, though, and if these are not up to scratch, you may prefer a free-standing alternative. Habitat (www.habitat.co.uk) has a simple, lacquered solid oak coat stand for £62 and, if recycling is your thing, consider adapting your Christmas tree (as I did last year). Remove all the branches to leave three-inch stubs, round them off with a wood file and some sandpaper and stand it in the hall. It's a great way to solve your problem and ease your conscience at the same time.

Our kitchen flooded while we were away at Christmas and although the lino floor is now fairly dry, one corner has bubbled up. Our insurance company has said that they will pay for repairs to this section of the floor but I am worried that this kind of flooring cannot be successfully repaired. What do you think?

Jerry Leyland, Hornsey

It is difficult to advise you without knowing the state of your sub-floor but I do know that this kind of problem can be rectified provided that the sub-floor is sound. If your lino has been laid on to a plywood base and this has been given time to dry out sufficiently, the bubble can be injected with adhesive and the lino rolled with a heavy roller. The results are generally very good.

However, if the sub-floor is scribed, this may have crumbled as a result of the flood and no repairs will be very successful.

The only area in my house where I can work is on a table in the living room. The computer spoils the look of the room and I am also distracted by the rest of the family. I would like to find a way to hide myself and my mess from the rest of the room and am thinking of screening off the area. Do you have any suggestions?

C Hooper, Whitechapel, east London

Screening off the area with a folding screen is a good idea, and there are plenty of modern or antique choices on the market. You could also try making your own from a wooden frame made from canvas stretchers covered with fabric. Visit www.interiordec.about.com for instructions.

A more permanent solution, suitable if your room has a modern feel, can be found at Master Plastics (www.master-plastics.co.uk). Their acrylic blocks can be used to build a semi-transparent panel.

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