



Ace of **Arts** (and Crafts)

The Whitehorns had to battle planners for over a year to build their Arts and Crafts style self-build in Surrey. A beautiful and highly adaptable home worth £750,000 shows the wait really was worth it

PHOTOS DAVID GADSBY
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Above left to right: The use of wood and the style of the build help to create an effect of a house looking older than it is. **Left:** The bricks and tiles from Michelmarsh were all hand made to a personalised design. **Opposite page:** The design was based on converted barns so that the house would blend in with the area.



the facts

Names Nick and Janet Whitehorn
Ages 57 and 52
Occupation Retired sales director and clerical assistant, Royal Surrey Hospital
Location Surrey
Type of build New build
Method of construction Timber-frame
House size 230m² (2475ft²)
House cost £390,000
Build cost £290,000
Total cost £640,000
Cost per m² £2,085 (£101 per ft²)
VAT reclaim £4,000
Work started April 2003
Construction time 11 months
Current value £750,000

Nick Whitehorn has the kind of fighting spirit that is essential when it seems nothing is going your way. So when the planners at Waverley Borough Council objected to his plans to build a new home in Ewhurst, Surrey, his gloves were quickly off in the battle to change their minds.

Nick and his wife Janet had fallen in love with the idea of building a house designed by Skantec Swedish Homes. The company, with a UK office in Tiverton, Devon, specialises in designing and building timber-frame buildings to their customers' individual specifications.

Planning problems

Just because Skantec is Swedish, its houses do not necessarily look like they should be perched on the slopes of a Nordic mountain. This was the last thing Nick and Janet had in mind. Their design was based on converted barns in the area, so the house would blend in with the countryside.

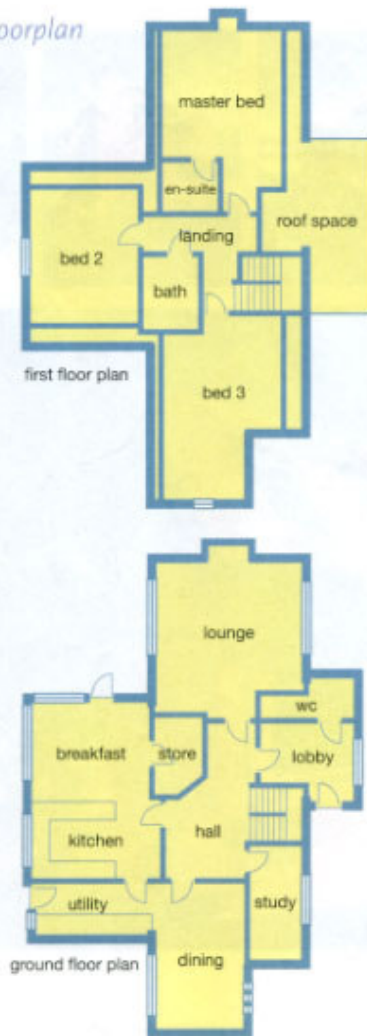
Nevertheless, the planners seemed to find plenty to object about. "They were incredibly restrictive," recalls Nick. "Rather than looking at the overall volume of the house, and its aesthetic appearance, they were totally bound by numbers and floor areas and they tried to deny me my democratic right of a decision from the committee."

The Whitehorns were completely taken aback by the attitude of the planners. They had already purchased the plot, which included a run-down 1965 bungalow, and were convinced their proposals would produce a far more attractive outcome.

The planners objected to the scale of the project, even though the existing dilapidated bungalow had 40 per cent development rights, meaning it could be significantly extended. They insisted the Whitehorn's plans did not conform to local planning policy and could therefore not be approved.

build diary and floorplan

Nick and Janet struggled to get their plans approved by Waverley Borough Council. The council took issue with the scale of the project – the size of floor areas being of special concern – rather than the aesthetic of its appearance. After eight months, though, the council relented.



April 2002 Discovered plot
June 2002 Completed purchase
July 2002 Filed first planning application
January 2003 Plans passed by planning subcommittee
March 2003 Registered build with NHBC Solo scheme
March 2003 Demolition of existing bungalow, provision of temporary electricity and water supply
April 2003 Footings

prepared and block and beam floor installed
May 2003 Ground floor of frame erected
May 2003 Roof tiles fixed
June 2003 First-fix electrical and plumbing and boarding out of first floor ceilings
July 2003 Installation of ventilation and heat recovery system
August 2003 Plastering starts and kitchen units fitted
September 2003 External

brickwork starts
October 2003 Nu-Heat underfloor heating installed and floors screeded
November 2003 Chimney erected and fire installed
December 2003 Interior decoration and installation of oak floors
January-March 2004 Brickwork continues with final fitting of interior
October 2004 front garden landscaped and completion certificate

While the couple bought the site in full knowledge that it did not have planning permission for a new house, they had a fallback plan to redevelop the bungalow and sell it on – if the worst came to the worst.

"I knew I could build something 40 per cent bigger, sell it on, and not lose out on the deal," says Nick.

The fight is on

The Whitehorns took little comfort in their contingency plans when the planners rejected their original application about a month after it was submitted. They remained determined to fight for the house of their dreams. A few months later, after receiving a modified proposal, the planners took delegated powers to enable them to throw out that one too. It looked like Nick and Janet's dream home was doomed.

Down, but by no means out, the couple decided to elicit the help of Will Goodall, the architect assigned by Skantec to the project. Together they compiled a detailed information pack about the proposal which was then delivered to every member of the planning committee. Skantec charges between £1,750 and £2,500, plus VAT, to assist clients in the planning process – an expense the Whitehorns feel is worth every penny.

Letters of support from the Whitehorn's would-be neighbours were also collected and passed on to the planners. But Nick's masterstroke was to win support for the project from a local councillor. Eventually, eight months after the Whitehorns had started working up their plans, in May 2002, the proposal was approved by the planning subcommittee in January 2003.

The Whitehorns breathed a huge sigh of relief. But they could not relax for long. While the battle to win planning consent had been harder and longer than they had anticipated, the really hard work still lay ahead of them.

Quick thinking

The couple had sold their family home, a five-bedroom farmhouse, to finance the project and were living in a house nearby. They had agreed to take it in part-payment for the farmhouse after the housing market had slowed following the New York terror attacks in September 2001.

"We had found a couple who wanted the farmhouse but couldn't find a buyer for their house," says Nick. "So we swapped houses and took some cash in exchange. You have to think on your feet."

While the Whitehorn's temporary home was perfectly comfortable, they were keen to press on with building their new house as quickly as possible. As soon as it was finished, they could move from the other house, sell it and bank the proceeds.

Nick, a retired sales director, decided he was going to project manage the build himself. This was a full-time job. "I was on site every day. I was a labourer when that was the best I could do, and I did skilled jobs when my skills were up to it," says Nick.

Services error

The old bungalow was demolished in March 2003 and the existing services were disconnected. This meant the Whitehorns had to arrange temporary electricity and water supplies. Bearing in mind it was only two months since they had won the planning battle, the couple could not believe the problems they encountered when dealing with one of the utility companies. ▶

There is no hint at all of its Swedish origins. The design has been inspired, in part, by the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century



Above: The large square sitting room is complemented by the centre piece Bodart and Conay fire

Below left: The kitchen by Sheraton features plenty of work surfaces

Below right: Generous windows give the dining room no shortage of light



Above and top left: Internal joinery was made in Sweden
Middle and bottom left: Bath and shower fittings are very de rigueur
Below: An old-fashioned rocking horse continues the Arts and Crafts theme the Whitehorns went for

top tips

- Ensure your plans are signed with local planning policy
- Register the build with NHBC Solo
- Get utilities quotations agreed as soon as possible – you will need water and electricity on site
- Get to know the building control officer
- Get references for tradesmen, as well as at least three quotations

"The electricity company needed six weeks' notice to assess the job and quote, and another six weeks to do the work," says Nick. In the end he was able to transfer the electricity supply from a garden shed to the site. Nick advises any budding self-builders to get utilities quotations agreed as soon as possible. "Because you will need water and electricity on site," he says.

As soon as construction started, Nick contacted the local building control officer, whose job it is to ensure new builds comply with Building Regulations. "Get to know the control officer," says Nick. "They can be very helpful."

Once the project got under way it ran fairly smoothly. The foundations were laid in March 2003 and by the end of May the frame was up and the roof tiles had been fixed. The frame was supplied by Skantec. "I selected them because of their 'fermacell' wall boards and high level of

insulation. The insulated fermacell gives the house great sound deadening qualities," says Nick.

Internal joinery was supplied by Skantec and made in Sweden by Dooria. The windows are Tanums Fenster, supplied and installed by Skantec. They are triple-glazed, new generation soft K glass with argon gas. The bricks and tiles are from Michelmarsh. Each brick was hand-made and blended to Nick's personal specification.

The overall effect is a brand new house that looks much older. There is no hint at all of its Swedish origins. The design has been inspired, in part, by the Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century. There is more brick than was originally intended – owing to the planners. Despite this, it looks more like a converted Surrey barn than a built from scratch designer home.

"The handmade clay bricks, Flemish bond, and roof tiles that look old from the moment they go on, give the house an appearance of age," says Nick. "I have had people say to me that it looks like it's been here for ages."

Interior indulgence

The indulgences that begin with the building materials continue with the finishes inside. The large square sitting room has a Bodart and Gony fire, which Nick installed himself. It is a sealed, multi-fuelled fire set into the chimney breast. "It's like a living painting on the wall," says Nick.

The kitchen, by Sheraton, was supplied and fitted by Surrey Interiors. Nick agreed a fixed price for fitting, which delivered extremely good value. "The fitter was a perfectionist and the finish was very good," he says.

Also downstairs there is study, a dining room and a shower room. The thinking behind this layout is that if the Whitehorns want to sell the house, they could convert the dining room into a fourth bedroom. Nick installed the underfloor heating himself, as well as oak flooring throughout the house, which was supplied by Boen Parket. The house also has a ventilation and heat recovery system, supplied by Skantec, but fitted by Nick.

So after all their hard work, would the Whitehorns embark on a self-build project again? "I suppose I would," Nick hesitates. "But my wife won't."

Given that even Nick jokes that the best bit was moving in, it is hard to imagine either of them tackling such a project again. That's not to say Nick has lost his fighting spirit. In October 2004, he went into battle with the planners again – this time to build a garage. The planners took umbrage at the proposal, even though Skantec provided a bespoke design to complement the house.

"Planning permission for the garage was another year's battle," says Nick. Thankfully, agreement was reached in September 2005. Despite his run-ins with the planners, Nick advises other self-builders to push the planning process as hard as they can. "It is best to have a pre-planning meeting," he says. "But if they prove intransigent, use the entire process to get what you want." ☉



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useful contacts

- Architect** Will Goodall, via Skantec Homes **W** www.skantec.co.uk
- Main building** suppliers Skantec **T** 08703 30175 **W** www.skantec.co.uk
- Bricks and tiles** Brick and Stone Specialists Ltd. **T** 01444 400406
- Windows** Tanums Fenster (supplied and installed by Skantec)
- Flooring** Supreme Concrete **W** www.supremecrete.co.uk
- Oak flooring** Boen Parket **W** www.boen.com
- Kitchen** Surrey Interiors **W** www.surreyinteriors.co.uk