



Far left: The house is built on a two way slope.

Left: Backlit glass panels in the front entrance are influenced by the Far East.

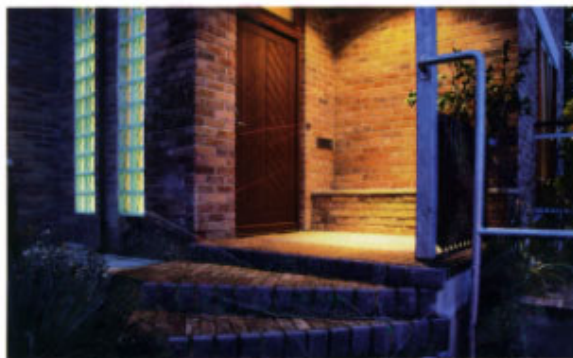
Opposite: The views from the balcony.

Right below: A pond forms part of the front steps.



Artist John Marston (above) had a bungalow in Hove demolished in order to build an open plan home where lighting is a feature.

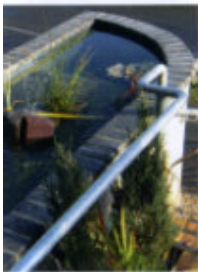
# Light minded



**A**rtist and musician John Marston has designed a house where lighting has been used so creatively that it is a major part of the furnishings and where a large modern open plan space is as comfortable and welcoming as open arms.

In 2002 John Marston and his partner Jill Tansley decided to move out of London and down to the south coast. "We needed a place with good transport links to London for work," says John, "so in the end we decided on Brighton."

At that point they were looking for somewhere to renovate. John's original training in interior design added to over the years by working as an architectural illustrator alongside builders and architects meant that he had the capability and the enthusiasm to take on a



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major project and he and Jill had a very good idea of what they wanted in a house.

"It was just luck finding this," says John, "I was driving around with a friend who's a builder and found this old bungalow for sale. It was the view that sold it to me. That and the fact that the railway station is just four minutes away."

The bungalow was in a road which sloped down towards the coast but also sloped steeply eastwards facing the South Downs. "It had been on the market for six months and at £228,000 it was too expensive for a builder to buy and do up to sell on," explains John, "but for us, it was ideal."

John's original ideas about renovating the bungalow fell by the wayside on closer inspection. "The bungalow had been built in the 1950s," he says, "but it had not been well maintained and it had a lot of damp so we

decided the best thing to do was pull it down and build a new house."

John's ability as an illustrator meant that he could go to the planning department with a drawing which gave an excellent idea of what he wanted to do. His drawing showed a house with three storeys on the road front and two at the back with a basement floor for a garage and workshop, an open plan kitchen/dining/living room on the ground floor and three bedrooms with two en-suite bathrooms and one family bathroom on the first floor.

"We didn't have too many problems with them," says John. "I am used to dealing with planners and I have come to the conclusion over the years that if you ask for more than you require you might get as much as you want."

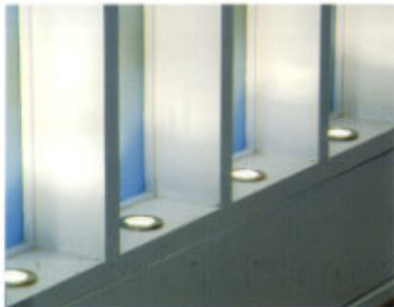
The only real problem was that John had wanted the house built in a pale coloured brick and the planners insisted on what they called a mellow rustic brick to fit in



Above: The fire was supplied by Emsworth Fireplaces (01243 57990).

Left and below: The ash staircase was made locally.

Below left: Lighting was supplied by TLC (01293 42000).



with the other properties in the road. "Mind you every property in the road is different," grumbles John. "There's even a white one at the far end of the road."

After some investigation John and Jill decided on a timber framed house and found Skantec. One reason John gives for choosing a timber framed system is that he was able to produce the layout he wanted and Skantec would do the rest of the work, saving the expense of an architect. John decided to project manage the job himself, something he says he would prefer not do in any future projects. "I did it because it was a cheaper option," he says. "We employed local labour to do everything and it got too personal. It would have been much easier with someone to act as buffer. I hadn't



expected how difficult it would be managing tradesmen." John organised all the groundwork himself up as far as the block and beam first floor. "I'm told that building into the hillside means that for every degree of angle you can add an extra percentage on to your costs," he says. "It cost £12,000 to excavate the garage and ground floor but putting the garage underneath the house was a very worthwhile project. I just hired a man with a digger."

Thus John blithely brushes away the incredibly detailed work required to ensure that the base structure was exactly the right size and in the right place for the timber frame to sit on top. After this, according to John, the building was really easy which says a lot for Skantec's efficiency.

"The timber framed route was the right one for us," says John. "It is a little more expensive but you get a better product in the end and the insulation is fantastic, as are the triple glazed doors and windows which came with the package."

Before the laminated oak flooring was laid John used a commercial sprayer to coat all the interior walls white.

"You get a good cover that way," he explains, "which is a good thing to do with a new build. We did all the walls one colour because we feel that you have to live with a place for a year or so before you know what colours it wants. We have just started putting colour on the bathroom walls."

The corner between the sitting room and dining room has been earmarked by John for his baby grand piano when he buys one.





The open plan Dining area leads into the kitchen. "Kitchen smells are a problem even with our fresh air system and a cooker hood," says John. "Jill tells me the latest idea is to have two kitchens, one to do the messy bits in and one to serve from – a good idea but a bit pricey."

This light wall colouring adds to the slightly Far Eastern feel that has been influenced by John's time living and working in Singapore. His years of working on interior design in clubs and restaurants have influenced his ideas on decorating with light.

"I do believe lighting is extremely important," he says. "It can be used to conceal what you don't want to show and to highlight the bits you do want to show. It sets the mood and helps to provide warmth."

John's blue lighting on the staircase is a case in point. "They are LED linked to a downlight and sunk in the wall," he explains. "Visually they seem to make the rest of the room warm and pink somehow."

Lighting is also used cleverly to 'hide' the main L-shaped room from the front door. John designed and built this panel with frosted glass insets, which are bottom lit, lightening what could have been a solid lump of wall so that it almost appears to float.

The oak frame of the building allows for such alterations as building alcoves into each bedroom, which can be easily fronted with glass sliding doors from Gorman Field Doors to make wardrobes.

"You just put track bottom and top and slip them in," explains John. "They work a treat but we did have a lot of breakages when they were delivered."



### John's insurance tip

John strongly recommends selfbuilders take out insurance. "I ordered all the white goods for the kitchen from a dealer in Exchange & Mart. They were delivered on Friday and the door was jemmied open and everything stolen on Sunday. Try not to have anything like this delivered unless you have very good security."

John fitted the Ikea kitchen units, which he says are excellent and well made.



Top: A balcony off the main bedroom enjoys lovely views and is the perfect venue for summer breakfasts.

Above: Triple glazed windows offer protection from coastal gales.

Right: Radiators from The Radiator Company are part of the interior design.



The slide and folding doors on the patio, however, caused problems. After Eloo Beldan supplied and fitted them John noticed that the glass had a lot of distortion. After a great deal of discussion John discovered that they had supplied toughened glass which is rolled and tends to have some distortion rather than laminated glass which costs slightly more but has no distortion.

"I wasn't told this at the beginning," grumbles John. "The doors cost £5,500 and the laminated glass would have cost another £400 – £500 at the beginning which I would have happily paid if I had been given the option. As it was we split the cost of replacing the glass.

### Cost of build

ORIGINAL BUNGALOW	£212,210
NEW HOUSE	
Timber frame	£73,053
Materials	£72,533
Labour	£66,625
Total	£212,211
	£424,421
Value today	£575,000

### John's tip on wall hung wc's



"Wall lavatories creak," says John. "There is no way of curing the problem and also they stick out too far and take up too much room. Wall hung sanitary ware is a fad. I blame myself for selecting them and for the design of the bathrooms. If I did this again I would get an expert to design them."



The couple decided not to skimp on the internal doors and door furniture. "This is a part of the house you handle and use all the time," says John, "and it would be a mistake to have something cheap that did not quite give satisfaction."

The Kungsäter doors were obtained through Skantec and come as a door suite where the frame is fitted and then the doors simply clip on. "Normal doors are cheaper to buy but more expensive to fit," explains John. "And it does mean that if you need to take a door off for any reason you just unclip it. No screwdriver's required."

John and Jill are extremely happy with their house. "This is a fantastic house that is designed for us," says John. "The layout works perfectly and the views are wonderful to wake up to each morning whatever the weather."

### John's tip on Cat5 cable

Cat5 cable was wired in for telephones and computers but in John's view it is already obsolete and was a waste of time and money. "Everything is now becoming wireless," he explains, "I shouldn't have done it."

### Contacts:

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 Emsworth Fireplaces: 01243 377990,  
[www.emsworth.co.uk](http://www.emsworth.co.uk)  
 The Radiator Company: 01342 302250  
 Just Add Water: [www.justaddwater.co.uk](http://www.justaddwater.co.uk)  
 Kungsäter Doors (Available through Skantec)