

15 REASONS WHY YOU NEED TO

# Build Your Own Home

Whether you'd like to flex your creative muscles, source the latest eco technologies or save thousands of pounds on construction costs, there are dozens of reasons why building your own home is one of the best decisions you could ever make – Nick Robbins picks out 15 that will get you inspired to start your project now!

## Form and Function

Designing an accessible home doesn't mean you have to compromise on the design quality, as this project from OB Architecture proves. Note the level access from external to internal space, while there's a lift inside to connect the floors.

## 1 BECAUSE IT MAKES ECONOMIC SENSE

It may seem cold to put the rational, money-focused argument at the head of this list – especially when the more romantic ones follow later – but there are strong economic reasons for building your own home. For instance, a self-build project qualifies for zero rating for

VAT purposes, which gives a saving of 20% on labour and most materials – something you won't get for the vast majority of renovation projects, or for extensions.

Not only this, but in taking on this project yourself you'll be cutting out the housebuilders' profit. Though the cost of your project will vary depending on the size of your house, build route you opt for, and the materials you choose (there's a handy build calculator on page 210), it is more than likely that the final cost would be less than buying a comparable house on the open market. These savings mean that your project can include features that really set it apart. Architect Allan Corfield of AC Architects says: "A self-builder is working to a much lower cost per m<sup>2</sup> than a traditional main contractor build – therefore you can use features and materials which aren't always achievable on a set budget. These can include glass handrails, clever recessed feature lights or shadow gaps instead of traditional skirting."

Plus, what you are looking for in your ideal house may not exist on the market – which brings us neatly to the next point...

## 2 BECAUSE THE HOME YOU'RE LOOKING FOR DOESN'T EXIST

Although buying a home is one of the most important decisions you will ever make, many people seem content trying to buy somewhere that they can then fit their life into, rather than one that fits their life. If you feel like you can't find the home that's right for



you or your family's situation, then it might be time to a consider building your own home.

Many people have a shopping list of features they are looking for in their new house but end up compromising as they can't find their 'perfect' house. But self-building gives you the opportunity to include such features. It might be as simple as wanting a house that has a glazed rear elevation to enjoy summer evenings, or you may be desperate for a room by the back door to shower off muddy dogs and boots – whatever your priorities, building your own home means you can avoid compromising.

### 3 BECAUSE YOU CAN CREATE A HOME OF ARCHITECTURAL MERIT

One big aspiration for many homebuilders is the opportunity to live in a house that has architectural merit. You only need to look at the case studies within this magazine to see the quality that can be achieved, and the variety.

"Every self-build project presents an opportunity to create a home of architectural merit," says architect Darren Bray of award-winning PAD Studio. "It's a unique collaborative experience between client and architect, which delivers a one-off house. Because that's what you get; there is no stamp or mould – it's all about the context of the site, location and orientation."

Building a home that stands out – whether it's bold and contemporary, more refined and traditional in style, or features fine, handcrafted materials – is an unquantifiable bonus that can be enjoyed for years to come.

### 4 BECAUSE YOU HOPE TO BUILD AN ACCESSIBLE HOME

Self-build can provide an opportunity to create an accessible home. One important reference here is The Lifetime Homes Standard, which sets out 16 criteria to creating accessible and adaptable homes that suit a range of situations, 'from raising small children to coping with illness or dealing with reduced mobility in later life'. The criteria include practical and unobtrusive design choices such as wider door frames, planning for the creation of bedroom space on the entrance level, and accessible showering facilities. These features are often inexpensive when factored in at the design stage, but expensive or impossible when retrofitting into an existing home.

These features needn't distract from the beauty of the home either, as Martin Bell of Transform Architects – who has successfully designed many an accessible home – explains:



"Self-building gives our clients the power to express how they wish to live, the environment in which they want to live in and the ability to change their way of life, as individuals and as a family, on a personal and social capacity. Clients have full control over colour and tone, integrated or independent equipment and cabling for the future. They can choose items such as slip-resistant surfaces inside and out, and a range of aesthetically pleasing design solutions for the common disability-related items such as external ramps and hoists."

### 5 BECAUSE YOU WANT TO LIVE IN AN 'ECO' HOME

There are financial and moral reasons to aspire to build an eco home. You may want to limit your carbon footprint and live in a home that reflects a sustainable lifestyle. Alternatively, low energy bills – and safeguarding yourself against future fuel price hikes – could be a big driver.

Regardless of motivation, it's easier to build a home with eco-friendly considerations from the outset than it is to retroactively apply these elements to an existing home. Whether you're looking to achieve Passivhaus standard, with its rigorous, objective measures of efficiency based on excellent thermal performance and high levels of airtightness, looking to generate your energy from renewable sources, or want to build your home using ►

#### A Literal Dream Home

It's possible that the house you are looking for doesn't exist, so it might be that you have to design and build it yourself – as in the case of Nick Fisher and Jo Jordan and their award-winning fantasy home in Suffolk.



build methods which promote a healthy environment, there are plenty of options available to you from the outset.

Allan Corfield believes that “the heart of any home design should be the ‘fabric first’ approach to low energy, [which] concentrates on getting the forever bit right — the external fabric, like walls, roofs and windows. If this approach is followed then any self-build can be a successful low-energy home, giving low running costs.”

## **6 BECAUSE IT'S YOUR CHANCE TO GET INVOLVED IN A BUILDING PROJECT**

One of the best ways of reducing the costs of your self-build is to pitch in during the process. This could take the form of project management, where you could be responsible for hiring trades, procuring materials and ensuring that they arrive when they're needed. Or it could be that you get physically involved and work as a labourer on site, or undertake some tasks on a DIY basis. Your involvement will depend on your level of comfort doing the work and how much time you're willing (or have) to devote to the project.

Of course, if you don't fancy this, but still want to self-build, you can always hire a project manager and visit the site in a troubleshooting capacity, or choose a package company to deliver your build. As HB&R's Editorial Director Jason Orme says, as long as you find your own plot, decide on the house design or choose the products that go in it, “you can proudly wear a badge that says ‘self-builder’ on it.”

## **7 BECAUSE YOU WANT YOUR HOME TO IMPROVE YOUR WELLBEING**

A home should be a place that enhances wellbeing and is a pleasure to live in, but this is not always the case. Many existing houses suffer from a lack of natural light, poor ventilation, inadequate heating and feature little or no connection to the outdoors. Building your own home provides opportunity to design a home which promotes welfare.

One interesting principle here is biophilic design: it's the idea of fusing design elements with natural elements to bestow wellbeing benefits upon inhabitants. It's backed by science too, with several studies proving that homes built with biophilic design principles in mind can have wide-ranging benefits, from improving sleep to reducing stress levels. While there are plenty of biophilic design choices that can be made after a build, the most comprehensive



are made at the start, including material choices, introducing natural light and the connection between indoor and outdoor spaces.

## **8 BECAUSE THE LAND IS AVAILABLE**

One of the most difficult parts of the self-build adventure is procuring a suitable plot. You face stiff competition when it comes to finding a suitable plot, not only from other self-builders, but from developers and land agents. However, some people may be starting from a position of strength without realising it. David Snell, HB&R's plotfinding expert, says: “For some, a plot is already within their ownership in the form of the garden that has become too large for their requirements. The greatest advantage of having your own plot on part of your garden is, obviously, the fact that you don't have to fork out to buy it.” So make sure you're not overlooking a golden development opportunity in your own back yard.

## **9 BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT IS ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO DO IT**

That the UK is in the midst of a housing crisis is not in doubt — the main parties all explicitly stated this in their election literature in the run-up to the recent general election. The government's White Paper *Fixing our Broken Housing Market*, published in February 2017, began to address how to solve the problems, singling out custom and self-build as a way of producing homes ‘more quickly and to a higher quality than other homes.’

The government is considering the self-build route as a serious option and seeking ➤

### **Rolling up your Sleeves**

Robin Cochrane built this house for just £690/m<sup>2</sup> by undertaking much of the work himself and haggling on all parts of the build. He didn't scrimp on features either — he's included a home cinema and built-in music system as well as an air source heat pump that runs the under-floor heating.

to remove barriers that can stop people from considering it. This has primarily been in the form of supporting the Right to Build proposal from the National Custom and Self Build Association, which sees local planning authorities keeping a register of interested self-builders in their area and trying to find land for those on the register within a three-year period. The list is being used to gauge the public's appetite for self-build and will affect the supply of land freed up by local councils. You can find more details at: [righttobuildportal.org](http://righttobuildportal.org).

## 10 **BECAUSE IT MAY BE EASIER THAN YOU THINK**

There are a lot of moving parts when you decide to self-build, from navigating planning to ordering materials and hiring the trades who'll work on site. Lots of people want to take on a certain level of responsibility – perhaps because they want to be involved in the process, or they want to save costs – but there are options for those who don't. Hiring a main contractor is one of the most common and sees you hand the plans to a contractor who then arranges their team and/or subcontractors to get it built. You're not completely divorced from the process and will be expected to appear on site semi-regularly to check on the quality of work.

You can also opt for a package home – often, though not always, a timber frame kit home. The big advantages here come from the speed at which the home can be built, the fixed price certainty and how hands off you can be during the process. (Many package companies offer different levels of service, allowing flexibility for you to choose how little or much you want to be involved.)

It's also possible to get your self-build project professionally managed, in which you cede responsibility to a project manager for the duration of the build. You will have one point of contact throughout and will be somewhat removed from the process, which is exactly what some people are after. (Remember though, that these routes are typically more expensive than other routes to building a home – check out the build cost calculator on page 210 to find out more.)

## 11 **BECAUSE YOU CAN DESIGN A HOME TO ADAPT WITH YOU**

It's becoming more common for self-builders to factor in a degree of 'future-proofing' in their design, allowing their new

home to adapt with them. Taking charge of the design of your home affords you a degree of flexibility that other methods cannot match.

There are many ways of futureproofing a home. This could see you create a space that works as an office initially, for instance, but has the flexibility to be used as a playroom as and when your family circumstances change.

It could also be that you want to stay within your budget during the build, but want to give yourself the opportunity to add an extension or garden room at a future date when finances allow, or as your needs change.

It's sensible to have a think about your plans at the earliest stage possible and consider all your options. For instance, one area you might want to consider is your loft space. You may want to use this space as storage initially, but might consider a conversion at a later date, to add space and value to your home. Opting to use attic trusses rather than – typically cheaper – fink trusses during the build, will make future conversion easier and cheaper at a later date. So will adding provision for plumbing and electricity in this space.

## 12 **BECAUSE YOU WILL FEEL GREAT AFTERWARDS**

Don't discount the emotional response that you'll have to building your own home. It'll start straight away – perhaps even when you find the plot and have the first vision of the house that will one day stand there. As

### **Green Credentials**

This carbon negative home in Scotland used materials sources from the farm on which it's sited, allowing it to blend into its environment and creating a truly low-impact eco home.







### New Found Land

The government is encouraging councils to free up brownfield plots for homebuilding. The results could lead to more like projects like this one in Bristol, which was shortlisted in our awards last year and was built on a former block of garages.

you see the building develop, the sense of satisfaction will likely only grow: whether that's the timber frame being erected or the first course of brickwork being completed. And all that excitement and anticipation (and yes, no doubt some stress and worry) is rewarded in the most handsome way when you can walk into your finished home.

"There is an undoubted pride in having built your own home," says David Snell, who has recently finished his fourteenth self-build. "You've done what so many dream of but don't have the courage to commit to. Perhaps what summed that feeling up best was when a self-builder friend told me some friends had visited and realised that the self-builders had jumped several rungs of the property ladder above them. 'Oh, you are lucky,' they said. 'Luck has nothing to do with it,' they replied. 'We saw the chance and we took it.'"

### 13 BECAUSE IT'S A CHANCE FOR YOU TO SHOW OFF YOUR CREATIVE FLAIR

If you've always wanted to live in a log cabin, pine for that New England-style or long to reside in a modern oak frame home, you're more likely to realise that dream by building it yourself than waiting for it to appear on the market. And beyond those 'big picture' design choices, you're in control of as much

IMAGE: SIMON MAXWELL

of the build as you want to be. From layouts, staircases and glazing, to door handles, plug sockets and bathroom tiles — your creative input will shape the direction of the build in partnership with your architect or designer. As Allan Corfield attests: "The relationship between architect (or designer) and client is key. This is a partnership that can last up to 18 months — and sometimes longer — so it needs to be strong. As a self-builder is more involved in the whole process, they are often the ones who come up with creative design ideas."

### 14 BECAUSE IT WILL BE PART OF YOUR LEGACY

According to the National Custom and Self-Build Association (NaCSBA), 53% of adults want to build their own home at some point in their lives. For those who decide to self-build, it will be the realisation of a long-held ambition, the opportunity to leave a physical legacy and perhaps even the chance to cross something off their bucket list.

Darren Bray of PAD Architects says: "Self-building is all about leaving something on the planet that enhances, respects and sits comfortably in its context. Our goal in life as architects must be to create something that brings joy to the owners and the built environment."

The finished home is testament to the homeowners' vision — the tangible outcome of ambition and determination to do something out of the ordinary.

### 15 BECAUSE IT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE FOR THE BETTER

You'll pick up skills, make connections and friendships and perhaps even develop a passion that will convert you into a serial self-builder. You'll find yourself with a bulging contacts book and likely stay in touch with many of the people involved in crafting your new home. As Darren Bray says, from his perspective, "a truly successful relationship with a client is when they are your friends and you get invited to their parties, many years after completing the house."

And you will throw parties, no doubt wanting to show off the fruits of your labour, at which the house will be the subject of much of the conversation. You may even convince a few of your friends or family to try self-building themselves — though you will likely be called upon for your expert advice having already completed your project. **H**