



## A Triumph in Accessible Design

With a brief to create an accessible home, Martin Bell of Transform Architects has achieved a staggering new build



**Martin Bell**  
Martin Bell is a RIBA chartered architect and director of Transform Architects (transformarchitects.com)

**HB&R: Did the clients come to you with a set brief?**

**Martin:** Mr and Mrs Cunliffe had a large plot and needed a family home for themselves, their two sons and their daughter Olivia who suffers from dyskinetic cerebral palsy. They came to us as we do a lot of work with accessible homes and they wanted to know what solutions we could design for their challenged site on a budget.

We came up with a concept of having a two-storey façade to the front, built into the natural slope of the site, with the rear being single-storey and exiting onto the rear garden. By including a lift, it meant that we could position Olivia's bedroom on the first floor, along with

the hydrotherapy swimming pool, accessible bathroom, therapy room, carer's accommodation and the family kitchen/dining/lounge area. The design intent was for Olivia to feel like she had her own private space upstairs from which she could open out directly onto the garden as well as being within easy access of the main family hub.

**How did the planners view the project?**

Barnsley Council embraced the project. They are particularly encouraging of contemporary architecture which helped. Of course, we had to explain why the house is so big as it needed to include all of the necessary accommodation for Olivia's specific needs. ➤

**Light-Filled Family Space**

The open plan kitchen/family/dining space has been located on the first floor of the home to be on the same level as Olivia's bedroom, carer's accommodation and the hydrotherapy pool. This allows Olivia the opportunity to engage in everyday family life. Large expanses of glazing open out to the rear garden.



**Building in Accessibility**

The house has been carefully designed to cater to Olivia's disability. Below, her bathroom provides a functional space yet designed with splashes of pink tiles to give the space a personal touch and not feel like a hospital environment. Left, a contemporary glass and timber staircase sits next to a lift, allowing both the family and Olivia the ability to move up to the next floor and meet in the same place.

**What materials have been used here?**

The clients wanted a contemporary design, but a house in keeping with the street scene, which is made up of a range of material finishes including brick, stone and render. With accessible homes it is important to promote good sustainable architecture, as so often these types of homes can look and function like hospitals or community buildings. We designed a home, for Olivia, her family and friends that integrates all the family in everyday roles and responsibilities and makes the trials they encounter in everyday life a little easier, while making the best use of all aspects of the site and its surroundings. ➤





### Hydrotherapy Pool

In order to provide Olivia with the best care within the comfort of her own home, the design includes a hydrotherapy pool on the first floor to the rear, which open out through full-height glass doors onto the rear garden. Situated at the opposite end of the landing to Olivia's bedroom, this allows the other children to also enjoy the pool when not in use, without disturbing her.



### Front Façade

During the planning process, Transform Architects had to explain to the planners that the house had to be large in order to accommodate all of the additional spaces required for an accessible home. The wide property has been clad in a mix of render, natural stone and western red cedar cladding.

The house is very wide, so we designed the glazed entrance feature to help to break up the building mass. From the front, the building has a natural stone base, with render above in two colours and sections of western red cedar timber cladding.

### What do you have to consider when designing an accessible home?

It's important to have a clear understanding of the client's requirements with regards to wants, needs and must haves from a medical and aesthetic perspective, as well as understanding

the site which you will be working on. No two clients are the same and it is not just enough just to install a lift and/or ramps for easy access — we also challenged the design from the outset through the 3D CAD design model to make sure there were no obstructions that could cause problems now or in the future as Olivia's needs may change. The corridors are over 2m wide — far wider than the average corridor — to allow for easy manoeuvring between rooms. Open plan layouts are also key in the family hub. When designing accessible houses it is important to remember that it's not a facility, it's a home. **H**