

The new GEORGIANS

This newly-built Little Gaddesden home created by a husband and wife build-and-design team is testament to the beauty and importance of details

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It's all about symmetry. The owners felt a Georgian style with classic dimensions would 'settle in the landscape and stand the test of time'

Given the opportunity, wouldn't you say the gods were on your side if you'd been looking

for a house and one turns up that is exactly the style you want and in your price bracket? And – here's the deciding factor to make you feel you can't let a chance like this slip by – it's been built by a high end builder and his interior designer wife as their own home. Well this could just be you, with this house on the books at Savills.

Sadly the phrase 'attention to detail' has become a cliché. It is trotted out so often it has lost its currency. But in the case of Anthony and Julie Hayes, the virtue of paying attention to everything is evident to an extraordinary degree in the five bedroom, four bathroom, four reception room 5,522 sq ft house they built for themselves in the village of Little Gaddesden in Dacorum.

Even the screws for the smallest jobs and the angle at which bathroom tiles were cut with mitred edges were cause for deliberation, before being entrusted to a craftsman, regardless of the extra time expended.

Walk into the kitchen-breakfast room and you are in a space 38ft by 29ft running front to back of the house. There's not a kitchen appliance, not even a wooden spoon, to be seen. All the utensils and gadgets are within an arm's reach but in a walnut-lined purpose built cupboard or drawer, out of sight so as not to spoil the sculptural beauty of the



ABOVE: Even the bay trees are symmetrical

BELOW: The staircase made by a local firm is, like all the design, simple but beautifully made

clutter-free worktops.

Julie, it is fair to say, is obsessed with detail. But she is also eminently practical and having enough storage space is a priority. Her input as the interior designer on the project goes far beyond selecting the colour for walls and choosing soft furnishings.

It was the difficulty in finding quality tradesmen for the renovations they took on when the couple first caught the property bug that led them to set up their own design and build company Frithsden Construction.

'Now, 15 years later we have built 12 new builds – all bespoke designs – and worked on 15 refurbishment projects using our trusted carpenters, plumbers and electricians, overseen by our experienced and driven site managers,' Julie says.

'We're not a big company. We prefer to commit to only one or two new builds a year and possibly one or two refurbishments. All our



projects so far have been in the Berkhamsted area.'

Since setting up the firm, a couple of the properties they built from scratch or restored became a family home for themselves and their two sons, now aged 17 and 12. They were renting, having sold their previous house, when they found the acre of land for what became Oak House.

'The existing house for demolition was on one side of the garden. We were able to live in that and be on the spot everyday to oversee the building of the new one in the middle of the plot. It couldn't have been better,' Julie explains.

Her in-depth knowledge of the construction process comes from playing a hands-on role in all the projects she and Anthony have been involved with for 20-odd years. Despite her clear talent she admits: 'I don't have letters after my name, that worries me sometimes.'

She says they've made the odd miscalculation in the past and learnt from the experience.

'There was one house we renovated and it won an award. We decided to have a large open-plan dining hall and dispense with a separate dining room. After we moved in, it wasn't long before we regretted not having a dining room. Also the boys'



'It's important that choices made when designing a home are not made in isolation'

playroom was too small. You need a decent sized family room. We haven't made that mistake again.'

When it came to designing

the house in the quaintly-named Nettlebed Road in Little Gaddesden, there was no doubt about the style it would take.

'We wanted to build a house that would sit well in the plot and acknowledge the countryside surroundings.'

'We felt a traditional Georgian style with classic dimensions and full height windows to allow the light to flood in would settle into the landscape and stand the test of time, especially if it was built with natural honest materials and build techniques.'

So the Flemish bond multi bricks for the outer walls were handmade by H G Mathews, brickmakers in



TOP LEFT: Period-style features echo the Georgian exterior

ABOVE: Huge kitchen-family-dining area nods to the rustic while being elegantly clutter-free

RIGHT: The couple wanted the stairs to be as impactful upstairs as in the hall

LEFT: Full height windows let light pour in, as here in the two-tone study





'There's not a kitchen appliance, not even a wooden spoon, to spoil the sculptural beauty'



nearby Bellingdon, Bucks, with traditional splayed headers over the windows. The slate roof and lead inset dormer windows with traditional lead roll mop detailing was all made by hand – the lead work was a labour of love, Julie recalls, 'it took ages'.

The deep soffit overhang and feature corbels all around the rooflines match the detail on the porch over the large panelled front door. And at the back of the house the anthracite grey bifold doors in the sitting room and kitchen remove the barrier between inside and out – a contemporary feature for modern living.

'As for the kitchen-dining room, we wanted to create a family and entertaining arena for everyone to come together, cook,

eat and chat,' Julie explains. The four-metre long island with double ogee (double curve) profile Corian worktop echoes the detail in the decorative 'coffer' ceiling with discreet LED lighting set into the coving.

'I particularly wanted a seating area with a TV at one end of the room so the children could be in the same room as me when I'm cooking their tea.'

Everything is in the detail: 'We wanted the internal doors to match the external French doors so we sent one of the doors to the joinery company for them to match the profile. None of the doors are off the shelf, they're all custom made because of the non-standard heights and widths.'

Julie adds it's important that choices made when designing a



home are not made in isolation, and to buy quality where it matters and save where you can: 'Spend your money on quality fittings for bathrooms then shop around for good prices on tiles,' she advises.

She points out that lighting is an area which is often overlooked in a build. 'It's seen more of a necessity than an opportunity to create different settings and feelings in a room. For example in the kitchen and lounge we used the Rako system that allows us to turn on up to seven different settings and dimming levels.'

Pendant lights over the island and five amp lamps give a softer glow when the task lighting is not needed. 'These days you can turn on all the lamps in a room with one switch. I'd rather have lots of lamps than a central light.'

The designer makes a particular point of working out where the eye will settle when you enter a room. So there was no question of choosing any old staircase for the hall at the Oak House. She and Anthony had a Georgian flight of stairs designed by Bourne End-based specialists Flair Stairs.

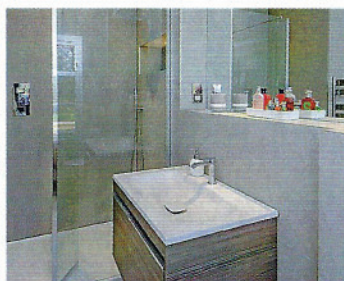
'It combines walnut handrails and treads with white painted Georgian spindles and risers. It was important that the second flight (up to the two bedrooms and bathroom on the top floor) didn't feel reduced or less important than the main



TOP: Vast master bedroom. Lighting plays a key role in the design

ABOVE: His-and-hers bathroom has lit recesses and mirror

RIGHT: Ensuite shower room - little pops of colour, as elsewhere in the home, lift the scheme



staircase, so we tried to keep the proportions the same.'

After such a mammoth effort getting everything just-so, family circumstances necessitate a move after less than six months in their incredible new home. For age-related reasons Julie's parents are coming to live with them, and a

house with two flights of stairs is simply not practical.

So Oak House is for sale through Savills in Harpenden for £3.45m, enabling a buyer to walk into a property a perfectionist couple built for themselves, except it wasn't to be.

Just one hitch - at the time of writing, the previous home on the plot has yet to be demolished. Since the Hayes' moved into their new place, bats have taken up residence in the old house and by law you can't evict them.

Humans always get the urge to move in spring; hopefully the feeling is shared by bats. If not, the new owners will just have to wait for the neighbours to fly off before enlarging the garden. ♦