

FIELD OF VISION

Set in beautiful Bedfordshire countryside, this modern interpretation of a barn combines rectilinear architectural lines with materials that complement its surroundings *Words* Oliver Bennett *Photography* Jefferson Smith



this picture
From renewable
coppiced woods
in Sussex,
the untreated
chestnut exterior
cladding has
already started
a silvery
ageing process



Often, British house names bear no resemblance to their location: Shangri-La on a ring road, for example. So it comes as a relief to find that Meadowview actually does have a wild common in front of it, and fields stretching out behind. As they say, this modern house does what it says on the tin. Indeed, the local Bedfordshire topography is meant to be part of the experience of Meadowview, built by Patrick Michell, a partner in architectural firm Platform 5, for his father David and David's fiancée Maria. From the front elevation is that large green; at the back, you look out at fields stretching into the flattish terrain beyond. 'When you go to the fields and turn back to the house, it looks as if it's floating,' says David, a retired mechanical engineer. 'The architecture is an extension of the location,' Patrick adds. 'It's about creating datums from a flat landscape.'

Meadowview is on the edge of a peaceful, straggling village. It's a big, long house – 330sqm – with a timber-clad, cantilevered first floor that somehow echoes a Tudor beamed house, above an off-white rendered ground floor with oodles of glass. It's a design that is undeniably modern, yet which nods to the Bedfordshire vernacular: a region that one is tempted to call England's middle east. 'It's a modern interpretation of a barn with an open ground floor, leading to a cellular arrangement upstairs,' as Patrick puts it. With four bedrooms, three bathrooms and a study, it's rangy and extensive for two people, but with intimate space, too.

Patrick and David both looked for a site – for quite a long time. When they found this plot, it was occupied by a Sixties bungalow of little merit. Nothing was salvageable and the only elements that remain are a few trees. 'They're the ones over a metre tall,' says Patrick.

The local planning department was helpful, if bemused. 'It doesn't see many houses like this around here,' says Patrick. 'It was out of its comfort zone, so

went to committee. We made the arguments and succeeded.' With a big rectangular footprint, the house is instantly recognisable from the street, but somehow manages to complement its surroundings.

The front garden – created by garden designer Graham Pavey – has lots of biomorphic curves, some in an enclosed area, which contrast with the rectilinear nature of the house. 'We went for walls and fluid forms,' says Patrick. 'It's a nice counterpoint to the geometry of the house.' The courtyard area is enclosed by caged ironstone from Banbury. 'We were thinking of using limestone, but ironstone is harder and more durable,' says David. 'I like the colourways: depending on the time of day, the stones go from blue-green to brown.'

Apparent in the house's frontage is a huge garage, accessible via the house. 'We designed the garage first, then added on the house,' says David, a mechanical engineer with a yen for gardening and fast cars.

It begs the question, what was it like to have a dad as a client? Did David have creative input? 'The architect would probably say too much,' he laughs. But father and son have remained on good terms. 'It's not generally to be recommended, but we've carried it off.'

In fact, David was very interested in the design side of the project. As an ex engineer, he had a handle on the systems aspects of the house, including heat recovery, underfloor heating and rainwater harvesting. 'It's practical, as you can't get rid of the water on the flat roof and the ground is clay,' says Patrick. They didn't go solar, however. 'We're thinking about it, as it's now economically possible,' says David. 'Previously, you had a long payback time.' They've aimed for sustainability with a strong dose of pragmatism.

Through the wide front door is a vestibule, which leads leftwards into the ranch-like open kitchen and living space, and rightwards into a corridor with a downstairs bedroom. 'For when Dad gets old and

above Created by garden designer Graham Pavey, the outside spaces were planned to be curvy to contrast with the house's architecture. On the other side of the caged ironstone wall is the courtyard **right** The double-height living area is a huge, light-filled space, featuring a run of glass windows overlooking the garden. Timber cladding makes a design feature of the cantilevered first-floor level



'One of the benefits of open-plan houses is there's no feeling that you've got to follow the wall space'



can't get up the stairs,' says Patrick, with unexpected candour. The chef-d'oeuvre is the double-height living space, lit by a skylight and windows to all sides. In the corner is a suspended fireplace, adding a James Bond-like touch to the room; in front of it are two white leather sofas and a Seventies G-Plan wardrobe on the wall. 'Very fashionable now,' jokes David. 'The moral is: don't throw away anything and it'll come back.'

There's a lot of glass here, adding to the sense of light penetration – but not so much it creates heat-loss issues. 'We're only 25 per cent glazed, so it wasn't difficult in terms of energy conservation,' says Patrick. The glass is good quality but standard, although David did specify structural bonded glass on the corner to have a break from the big wooden framing that prevails elsewhere. 'I would have loved folding windows here, but they cost £1,000 per metre,' he says. Still, a sweeping aesthetic has been created with long curtain tracking. 'Quite theatrical,' says David. 'You get that blackness at night.' The floor is Brazilian slate: as Patrick says, 'The Lake District slate is expensive.'

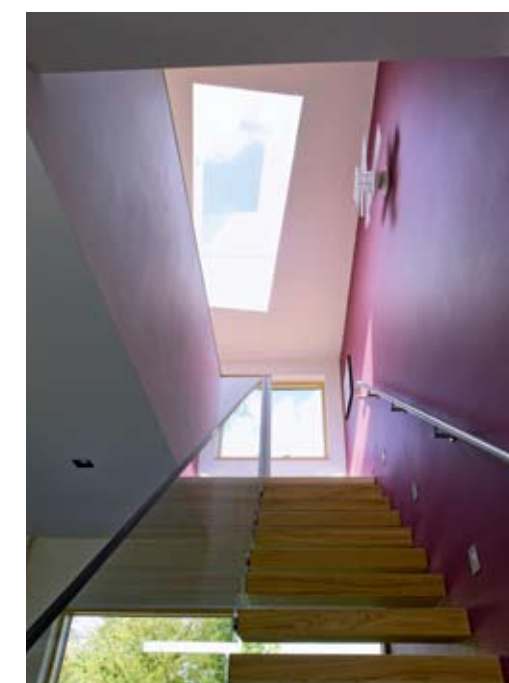
With double height and a mezzanine, the living room is a wonderful dramatic statement, and there's a sense of relief that it all came off. Firstly – partly because Patrick started the project in the swansong of the boom – it was difficult to find a contractor to take it on. 'It was technically demanding and there are few builders used to doing high-quality residential here,' he says. In the event, he couldn't get a quote from locals, and London builders couldn't complete the tender. 'We were surprised,' says Patrick. 'There's nothing that's particularly Chelsea spec: it's good-quality entry level.'

Eventually they found someone, the budget was tendered for £575,000 and settled at £550,000. 'Compromises were made, but nothing was altered too radically,' explains Patrick. 'We worked very hard to establish the details and avoid any changes.' Still, there was a pause for thought when the contractor went broke. 'Mercifully it had been all done bar the snagging.' One senses, however, that it wasn't without pain. 'We ran slap-bang into the recession,' winces David. Still, the house is complete and David and Maria moved in November 2008. It's a house that will mature well.

In the kitchen, the cabinets were made by a local supplier and face a vast island unit. But there's no sense of intrusion. 'That's one of the benefits of open-plan houses,' says David. 'There's no feeling that you've got to follow the wall space.' The granite worktop sparkles with mica, and David calls it, 'My bit of bling. When you walk past, it glitters.' Nevertheless, this created one of the few family disagreements: Patrick would have preferred plain black. 'Maybe Dad was right,' he says.

It's clear that David and Patrick get on well, and support each other's work. Around the house are several (rather good) townscapes, which turn out to be Patrick's work: 'A-level stuff,' he deprecates. Also →

left Keen cook David (below with son Patrick) wanted a big island unit in the kitchen. 'One of the advantages of open-plan spaces is you can have something this size,' he says below The staircase has a glass panel on one side and a brushed stainless-steel handrail





above left Light from the big window and skylight at the top of the stairs brings alive the painted wall on the stairwell above The master bedroom has an oversized beadboard with a shadow strip set into it for lighting. The interior doors are standard-size stock with a low-cost spray-paint finish
left The Jacuzzi bath has been positioned at an angle to make the most of the stunning views



Money matters

Land cost £400,000; **set-up cost for builder** £87,618; **insurances** £3,000; **demolition and site clearance** £7,835; **substructures** £33,486; **masonry** £15,659; **frame** £42,142; **structural/carcassing metal/timber** £19,841; **cladding/covering** £37,500; **waterproofing** £14,286; **lining/sheathing/dry partitions** £18,300; **windows/doors** £57,797; **surface finishes** £42,157; **decorations** £3,015; **fittings and sundries** £31,851; **service installations** £101,470; **external works, including landscaping, paving, stone wall** £45,619; **garden work** £60,000; **total build cost** £621,576; **total build cost per sqm** £1,750; **total cost (land plus build)** £1,021,576

Suppliers

Project team Architect Platform 5 Architects (020 7739 9812; platform5architects.com) **Structural engineer** MBOK (020 8568 4871; mbok.co.uk) **Structure** Steel frame Fredan (01933 440 135; fredan.co.uk) **Specialist glass** Culmax (020 8222 6677; culmax.co.uk) **Windows** Velfac (01223 897 100; velfac.co.uk) **Render** Sto (sto.co.uk) **Roofing** Samafil (samafil.co.uk) **Slate flooring** Rio Neblina from Kirkstone (020 7386 5600; kirkstone.com) **Doors** Shadbolt (01376 333 376; shadbolt.co.uk) **Rainwater harvesting tank** Installed by PS Clarke Groundworks (psclarkegroundworks.co.uk) **Precast concrete rainwater tank** Carlow Precast (carlowprecast.com) **Ventilation system with heat recovery** Supplied by Helios and installed by Allergy Plus (01926 612 690; allergyplus.co.uk) **Fixtures and fittings** Kitchen cabinets K2GO (01582 670 012; k2go.co.uk) Kitchen doors Parapan (0113 201 2240; parapan.co.uk) Bathroom sanitaryware Ideal Standard (01482 346 461; ideal-standard.co.uk) Towel radiators The Sussex Range by JIS (01444 831 200; sussexrange.co.uk) Shower Matki (01454 322 888; matki.co.uk) Timber flooring Admonter at Go Direct (0800 015 0805; naturalwoodenfloors.co.uk) Fireplace Ergofocus by Focus at Diligence International (diligenceinternational.com) **Furniture** Wall light on staircase Big Bang by Foscarini (foscarini.com) Pendant lights (in living room) Havana range by Foscarini (as before) Lights over dining table Floob by Kundalini (kundalini.it) Lighting Modular (modular-lighting.co.uk); Deltalight (0870 757 7087; deltalight.co.uk); Collingwood (01604 495 151; collingwoodlighting.com) Living room cushions Roger Lewis at Geoffrey Drayton (01992 573 929; geoffrey-drayton.co.uk) Rug Linie Design at Geoffrey Drayton (as before) Bedroom cushions Donna Wilson and Melin Tregwynt at SCP (020 7739 1869; scp.co.uk) Bedside lamp Established & Sons at Twentytwentyone (020 7837 1900; twentytwentyone.com)

adding touches of bright colour are accent walls in shades of purple and maroon.

The stairs lead to a wide landing with fabulous window and view. 'It's a different world up here,' says David. 'Great for sunset watching.' A skylight over the stairwell brings in yet more light on to the wooden olive ash flooring and emphasises the flat roof.

The bedrooms are ranged around this landing, including the master suite and bathroom with Jacuzzi bath. There are two further bedrooms upstairs – one is a guest room with Indian miniatures on the wall. On the mezzanine that looks over a balcony on to the living space downstairs is David and Maria's home office.

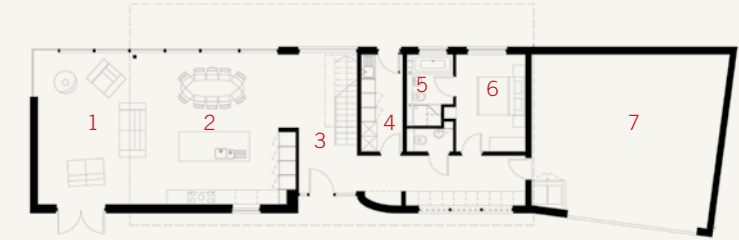
The large garden features a deck at a rakish angle, with large terrace, leading on to a path. There are trees, grasses and beds for growing food. There's even an orchard in the making. The biggest statement, however, is the pavilion. 'Sounds grand, doesn't it?' says Patrick. 'It's our stab at the English romantic landscape.' The decking extends over the pond to create a pier. Then, there's the view back on to Meadowview. The cantilever has a long reach on this side, almost creating an arcade on the back. It'd be an ambitious house anywhere: in rural Bedfordshire, it's an unexpected pleasure. **GD**

Like the look of David's landscaped garden and outdoor spaces? See page 63 for advice and ideas

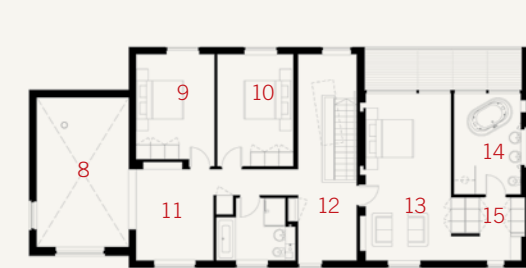


above Trees more than a metre high, like this one in the courtyard, were incorporated into the new garden design

Ground floor



First floor



Ground floor

- 1 Living room
- 2 Kitchen/dining
- 3 Entrance hall
- 4 Utility room
- 5 En suite
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Garage

First floor

- 8 Seating area
- 9 Bedroom
- 10 Bedroom
- 11 Study
- 12 Seating area
- 13 Master bedroom
- 14 En suite
- 15 Dressing area