

REACHING A HIGH POINT

Called upon to create a house that would fit the Suffolk landscape, Mole Architects came up with an intriguing sloping structure that graduates from one storey to two, with large windows placing the focus on dramatic river views

TEXT DOMINIC BRADBURY | PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MASSEY | LOCATIONS EDITOR DAVID NICHOLLS

EXTERIOR The house rises from one storey to two, with the main bedroom in the upper part. The windows on this side of the house face south, looking over the reed beds to the river, while the zinc roof and cladding unify the structure



The views from Marsh Hill are mesmerising. Looking out from Ben Baglio and Richard Wilson's new Suffolk home, your eye is drawn across the reed beds and the tidal waters of the River Alde, before reaching across to the green farmland on the opposite bank. This vista is one of the greatest joys of this magical spot on the edge of Aldeburgh and the distinctive shape and roofline of the house, designed by Mole Architects, echoes the rugged, undulating coastal landscape here.

'All the main rooms have windows facing south to these big views,' says publisher-turned-ceramicist Ben. 'The birds here are just fantastic, especially as the tide goes out and the wading birds come in. It's become a new interest for us. You see these amazing things and want to know what they are, so our knowledge is growing. We have marsh harriers and also an owl that comes by every night.'

Both Ben and Richard have strong connections with East Anglia, an area that they have loved for many years. The couple used to share an Arts and Crafts house in the nearby town of Saxmundham, but decided that they wanted a more rural setting that was still within easy reach of Aldeburgh and Snape Maltings, known for its concert hall and a key setting for the annual Aldeburgh Festival. Down a farm track, they came across a Seventies house in poor condition and

spotted the opportunity to replace it with something that was both contemporary and tailored to their own needs.

Having noted the design of The Dune House in Thorpeness – a collaboration between Mole and the Norwegian practice Jarmund/Vignæs – Ben and Richard contacted Mole's Meredith Bowles, who is based in Cambridgeshire. Meredith offered a number of design options initially, but his preferred choice was also the favourite for his new clients, with the house ascending from a single storey at one end to a two-storey section. The entire house is unified by the zinc roof, which is also characterised by a subtle and sculptural twist.

'This idea of going from a low point at one end to the rooms in the roof at the other end was really suggested by the site itself,' says Meredith. 'We wanted the house to fade to nothing at one end and the sense of lift and movement is a result of that desire, along with the need to connect each room to the river view. There's also a play of scales inside the house between the tall open spaces and the lower ceilings of the more intimate rooms.'

Meredith talks of inspiration gained from Scandinavian summer houses and the façade of white brick, while the crafted quality of the interiors suggests the influence of warm Modernists such as Alvar Aalto and Arne Jacobsen. Ben and Richard were also taken by Meredith's description



SITTING ROOM (this page and opposite) The large, open sitting room is furnished with several pieces from the couple's collection of mid-century modern furniture, while an eighteenth-century grandfather clock bought in Saxmundham provides an element of contrast





KITCHEN/DINING AREA (this page and opposite) A vintage Danish pendant light bought from Alfies Antique Market hangs above an 'EM Table' by Jean Prouvé for Vitra in the dining area. Laki Carpentry made the steel and granite island to Elaine Williams' design



of the roof as a gull wing, which seems apt given the richness of the bird life here. The intriguing form of the house itself is beautifully offset by the naturalistic landscaping by Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, where meadow grasses bow down towards the water reeds.

'Like the wing of a herring gull, the colours of the house are mainly whites and greys,' says lawyer-turned-archivist Richard. 'The climbing roof meant that we could have the main bedroom upstairs and set apart from the rest of the house, but without creating a full two-storey building, which would have been too invasive in the landscape.'

For the interiors, Ben and Richard turned to interior designer Elaine Williams of Interior Couture, with whom they had already worked on a number of occasions. Elaine worked closely with the owners and architects, creating a rounded and characterful home, full of texture and warmth, layered with many bespoke elements.

The entrance leads into a central 'great hall', with a fireplace sitting between large windows facing the Alde. It is a dramatic space, with a high ceiling and a sliced brick

floor, yet the mixture of mid-century pieces, artwork and ceramics ensures that the space is welcoming. A few steps lead down to a generous kitchen and dining area, lifted by a number of custom elements designed by Elaine, such as the island and the banquette that helps border the dining table.

'The south-facing dining area is one of my favourite spaces,' says Elaine. 'The banquette gives extremely comfortable seating for dinner parties and is relaxed, with these amazing views over the marsh to the River Alde. Ben and Richard were really looking for a clean-lined, contemporary country house, influenced by the mid-century aesthetic, as well as suiting their artworks and ceramics.'

Upstairs, the main bedroom is crowned by a picture window opposite the bed, framing a dramatic vista; the space flows directly into the bathroom, with its vibrant tile-work floor, while a dressing room and study sit alongside. At the opposite end of the house, back on the ground floor, are

two spare bedrooms. Here, the beds are placed at a slight angle to enhance the connections to the view, while an oak-paneled 'bulkhead' around the headboard lends the room a more crafted, cabin-like quality. Beyond these bedrooms sits one more space, offering a dedicated pottery studio for Ben and the perfect place to indulge his ongoing love of ceramics. Here, too, the view is a constant presence and an inspiration.

'The design of the house takes perfect advantage of the location with the positioning of the windows and the framing of the views,' says Richard. 'You really appreciate the landscape, but there isn't so much glass that you feel as if you are in a greenhouse. The interiors feel cosy and coherent but with a connection to this fragile, dynamic landscape' □

Mole Architects: molearchitects.co.uk

Interior Couture: interiorcouture.com

Todd Longstaffe-Gowan: tlg-landscape.co.uk



BATHROOM (opposite) Jean Prouvé's long-arm 'Potence' light illuminates the bath. MAIN BEDROOM (top left, bottom right) De La Espada's 'Hepburn' bed is focused on the view. STUDY (top right) A beni ourain rug adds softness. MAIN BATHROOM (bottom left) The floor tiles are Fired Earth's 'Evora'