

Open House - How we live in the Wychwoods A Mere Folly?

Whilst looking for somewhere to build their house near to their practices, this architect couple fell in love with a plot of land in the grounds of Shipton Court. Peaceful in the snow, the cross-shaped house now stands at the head of the old



water gardens. From the terrace, a stepped pond of trickling waterfalls and dainty lily pads extends to a mirror image of the folly at the far end of the water.

To secure planning permission, the council stipulated that the new residence must be an exterior replica of the nineteenth century summerhouse. Therefore the style and proportions were predetermined – a stone, gabled folly – but, inside, the owners were free to lay out their home however they chose.



It may seem like an easy task, to fill a cross; there cannot be such a huge number of combinations of rooms. Ultimately though, this is a home that is being created, a home in which to live, and getting it right is so vital. Where does one place the study, for example? Should it afford the evening sun? Or would it work better with views over the garden?



A Stunning View

Luckily, some elements of the original summerhouse at the far end of the lake provide some spectacularly beautiful spaces. The sitting room, for example, boasts a series of enormous windows, set into the pyramidal shape under the eaves that look right down the length of the pool. Low-backed sofas leave this view uninterrupted, and the walls are simply painted white with very few paintings, so as not to distract from the outside's 'living artwork'.



Opposite these windows, a wood-burning stove keeps the double-height space cosy. In fact, because of its central position within the house, it is able to heat all the rooms in winter, meaning the central heating can be left off.

Where to Put the Stairs?



The staircase, it appears, was the biggest headache of all. With the slanted roof, reaching the first floor could only be achieved along one of the arms of the cross and the architects did not want it to

intrude on any of the ground floor rooms. In the end a twisting flight was opted for, curving around the chimney and creating a striking focal point to the hallway with its wooden and glass balustrades.

Upstairs, a gallery-cum-workspace is created above the sitting room, benefiting too from the stunning water-garden view. To the left and right, quirky bedrooms nestle under the eaves, each with its own skylights - one of the rules stated that upstairs



windows were not permitted on the garden side of the house as they were not present on the complementary summerhouse.



An Easy House to Live In

The owners call it an easy house to live in, and this stems from its simplicity. There are no corridors, something that the owners were adamant about when filling in the shell. Instead, the spaces flow from one into the other. But it was the garden that really attracted the new owners. With nearly an acre of space to potter about in, the pottering ensures that a lot of time is spent out of doors.

Has It Been Here for Ever?

It is incredibly peaceful here, despite the main road being but a stone's throw, due to the towering wall of the Court's gardens and the rows of trees. At the same time, though, it is teeming with wildlife: ducks, rabbits, moorhens on the water, birds in the trees.

The house looks like it has been here since the water garden: the trees have grown up around it, the shrubs are scaling the walls. Yet having the opportunity to create a space that is so perfectly suited to the way you live has made this ersatz folly a liveable space.

Michael Cradock