

# RIXON

## ARCHITECTS

“The process was amazing, it was extremely collaborative, with lots of ideas brought to the table. Jonathan prepared a really clear fee proposal for us, so we knew exactly what was included and what would cause additional costs. And it felt like we were always moving forward. There’s nothing like seeing progress on your dream home to keep you going. Now it’s built, our home feels really personal because there are so many details we each suggested.”

### **Moving to the Cotswolds**

Homeowners Sam and Susie Andrews moved around the country during the earlier years of his medical career, living in London then Bath before deciding to settle their family in the Cotswolds. They chose a property in Painswick, for its proximity to Cheltenham and for its potential. However, the house only had two bedrooms, and without heating, it was fairly uninhabitable. The family moved into temporary accommodation to plan renovations to turn it into a dream home with four or five bedrooms. Having set their budget for a large extension, Sam and Susie began the search for a local architect. When a friend referred them to Rixon Architects, they were delighted Jonathan already had experience of low energy design.

Susie says, “When we bought the house, we initially thought we were going to do a renovation and an extension, so we knew we would need an Architect. However, we felt the first Architect we worked with was very fixed and didn’t really take our ideas on board. We wanted someone who would listen and challenge us if it wasn’t in our ballpark budget.

### **Cotswolds Passive House, Painswick**



Jonathan had a level of honesty and transparency about what he'd done before. He came across as dynamic and we connected on a personal level too. We found the first design session incredibly collaborative. He brought three or four concept sketches, initially looking at extending the existing building, and it was excellent that he so clearly listened to what we wanted." At that meeting, they progressed the idea of designing a complete new-build, which would enable their budget to go further because it was zero-rated for VAT. Given the existing building had structural mould problems and needed too much work, it made perfect sense to demolish it and replace it with a low carbon passive house.



### Interpreting the family's requirements

The Andrews' requirements for their growing family were clear: besides being a low energy house, they needed a very liveable home with spaces where individuals could be alone, and spaces where they could do things together. Although it was on a slope, Susie wanted the garden to fluidly surround the property, enabling their three children to freely cycle or run laps around it. This meant planning a gradual ramp down, instead of a retaining wall and steps.

Before starting the design process, Jonathan prepared a clear fee proposal for the work, explaining each stage, what was included and what would be extra. He also set up a mood board for the Andrews to contribute their ideas and created 3D CAD for the passive house.

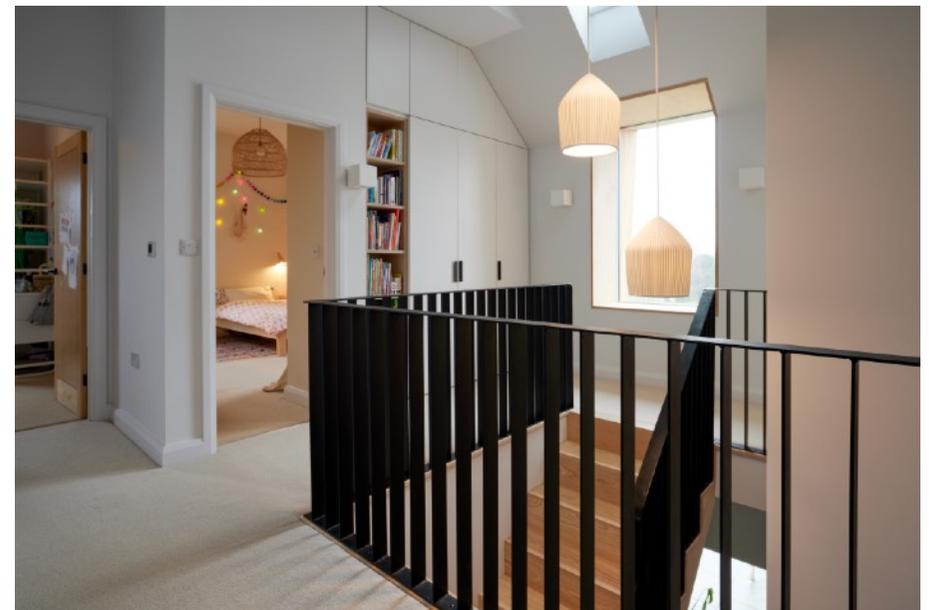


The high-vaulted kitchen living space became central to Jonathan's low energy design. He aligned the house with the sun trajectory, to gain from the winter sun but shade it with the veranda from the summer heat. The veranda also created a covered area for the children to play in the sun and rain. To bring the outside in, he created clear lines of sight from the ground floor entrance hallway through the kitchen and playroom to the garden. The feature staircase leads up to a large picture window on the landing, making the most of the view. Four of the bedrooms are on the first floor, with a fifth bedroom and second shower room on the ground floor. Jonathan planned the whole flow to suit their lifestyle. Susie explains, "The domestic vernacular was important to us, because although the house is modern, we needed it to function well too, living a busy life with young children. Our metal balustrade is one example where it looks great and we're not going to be constantly wiping hand-prints off it!"

### **Planning consent through to construction**

To achieve planning consent, Rixon Architects worked with their planning consultant, ensuring the success of the Andrews' application. Susie and Sam were involved in proofreading all the documentation, enabling them to contribute during the process. Susie remembers, "We wanted the council to understand that we were doing something considered in terms of making it a low energy house. It isn't just another large, modern family house, like so many in the Cotswolds."

At tender stage, the team interviewed four building contractors before selecting DJP Construction to complete the work. "Jonathan and our quantity surveyor held our hands through the process of finding the right builder. David [from DJP] in



particular was really personable, engaged and knowledgeable; we'd been advised to pick someone we felt we got on with well, which we did at that first meeting. And the low energy side of things was really important to us. So we needed someone with a really good eye for detail because the airtightness really depends on the level of attention paid to the junctions. David had brought the drawings with him and when he realised one of the architects was there, he had a specific query about a window detail. That cemented our choice." The builders stayed in touch with the Green Building Store, to help select and commission the MVHR (mechanically ventilated heat recovery) system. They also helped identify the best way to achieve the airtightness and future-proof the house. Thanks to a successful team approach - with an engaged client, a committed contractor, design lead and a quantity surveyor who knew everyone - the build progressed really well and the house was ready to move in before Christmas.

### **Achieving their lifestyle needs and better**

Since moving into their new home, the Andrews found the extra space has transformed their lives, after being in the rental for three years. Susie explains, "Above all, we wanted spaces for people to be alone and space for us to do things together. Shortly after moving in, I saw my youngest playing in the small nook under the stairs, where the window reveal is deep enough to sit on. Little details like that show me that we are living better, because of the design of the house. And we have more moments of calm, where we are relaxing together or our kids are in their own rooms, where they have desks and space to play - whereas before they had to share - it wasn't easy!"

The benefits of the passive house are already apparent. They have an automatic opening vent upstairs, if it does get too hot



in the house. And Susie remarks that they barely use the heating upstairs, in spite of a cold spell after they moved in. “It always feels warm and really comfortable. We have the underfloor heating downstairs, towel radiators in the bathrooms and undersized radiators in the bedrooms. With an MVHR system, the idea is that you don’t need to open the windows. However, I was worried it could feel stuffy or be noisy. I’m really relieved that I don’t even notice it, except on occasional early mornings when the house is all quiet.”

Summing up how they feel about their new home, Susie says, “It’s fascinating how design can affect so much, way beyond the visual aspects. Yes, it’s beautiful, but the house is also enabling us to live better; the family dynamic has changed since we moved in. There are simple things, like our large breakfast cupboard for our morning rituals. The children can be more creative with their Lego, because they can leave it out in the playroom and take time to build more. And we deliberately chose not to put a TV in our sitting area so we can completely relax in that space. The whole downstairs absolutely makes the house and it feels really personal to us.”

