

Starting OVER

Mike and Diane Smith thought their home of 40 years was forever, until the idea of building a modern property on the Dorset coast took hold

Words Sue Herdman **Photography** Jefferson Smith

this picture Large glass panels, grey brickwork, hardy steel and Western red cedar cladding make up the rear facade of this boxy modern build

this picture A perfectly positioned balcony off Mike and Diane's master bedroom gets the early morning sun

Between the beaches known as Steamer Point and Avon, near Christchurch on the Dorset coast, soars Friars Cliff. With its views of the Isle of Wight and its sandy stretches, this has long been a property hot spot. It's the kind of place you might visit and decide you want to retire to. And that is exactly what Mike Smith, a retired oil-company executive, and his wife Diane, a one-time art history lecturer, have done – except that they're not exactly retiring types. Not for them a cosy period villa; nor a uniform semi. When moving from their family home (Georgian, with a much-loved garden), they decided to invest in something they had always hankered after – a truly modern house.

As practical people do, Mike and Diane drew up a list of musts. 'We're not getting any younger,' says Mike, 'so it went like this: somewhere close to shops and life; low maintenance and heat efficient. We wanted four bedrooms. It wasn't to be too big and it had to be child friendly (for grandchildren). We wanted lots of light and we needed a house that one day, if necessary, we could live in, on just the ground floor.' At no →

this picture The house is designed around an inner courtyard, wrapped by hard-wearing slatted, iroko wood

AT A GLANCE

Names Mike & Diane Smith

Ages 74 & 70 years old

Location Friars Cliff, Dorset

Property Modern self-build

Bedrooms 4 **Bathrooms** 5

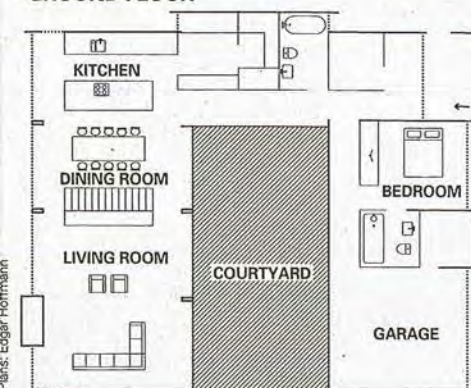
Project started November 2010

Project finished October 2011

Size of house 279sqm

The layout: 279sqm

GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



this picture The wooden dining table is handmade by Jonathan Matthews and offsets the white high-gloss units



this picture A long corridor from the front door leads directly into the light-filled kitchen



point did they detail how their new home should look. For that reason, they needed to find the right architect.

Having found their site – one street back from Friars Cliff, a suburban plot where a Fifties house had once sat – they then found architect John Pardey. His practice is far flung (one of his recent projects, Chattock House in Pembrokeshire, won the Welsh RIBA Award in 2013), but his office is just over the border into Hampshire at Lymington. 'We like his work,' says Diane, 'and our ideas aligned with his approach: nothing too purist, too hard or too showy-offy.' At their first meeting, the Smiths still didn't describe a look. 'It was more,' they say, 'that we outlined how we wanted to live.' From Pardey's perspective, that first meeting with clients is critical.

'I like to meet them in their current home,' he says, 'because it tells me so much about who they are. I could see how active

Mike and Diane are, and how important family and outside space are to them. Then there was the fact that they wanted a home that will work in the future. I found that humbling.'

He started with the idea of an inner courtyard 'This,' he explains, 'allowed a living space that would have light from the north, while gaining sun from the south, too.' The lower storey wraps around the contained courtyard, which provides a Zen-like place of calm. On warm days, the living room can open up into the space, creating an indoor-outdoor room. 'We love this,' says Mike, who has now spent more than two years in the house, experiencing every season. 'It brings in light. The central courtyard is sheltered from the sea winds, so we can sit out, or the grandchildren can play there almost all year round.'

The house has been created with a low, wide base, with a lighter, floating box above, set back a little. The base is clad in

The lower storey wraps around the contained courtyard, which provides a Zen-like place of calm

a white insulated acrylic render system that is self-cleaning, and the colour, Pardey says, 'picks up on the seaside vocabulary of nearby white buildings.' Covered in warm red cedar, the upper storey overhangs the southern part of the courtyard, providing shade to the living spaces. The front is crisp, with hints of the abstract Twenties-Thirties international style, while the back two-storey section is more Scandinavian meets Case Study House – both of which have been big influences for Pardey. 'I look to the modern past,' he explains.

The Case Study Houses (1945-1966) were largely constructed in Los Angeles. The concept came from the editor of *Arts & Architecture* magazine, John Entenza. With the aim of redesigning the modern home, he commissioned the best architectural talents of the time – including Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen – to create 36 →

above A Corian island unit divides the kitchen from the dining area, which opens on to the inner courtyard. Colourful Arne Jacobsen chairs brighten the neutral scheme

Interactive
image
gallery
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'We've had to say goodbye to certain pieces, but others, such as our Arne Jacobsen chairs have blended in'

Suppliers

PROJECT TEAM Architect

John Pardey Architects
(01590 626 465;
johnpardeyarchitects.com)

Builder and project manager Ridgetree (07872 120 132; rtprojects.org)

Structural engineer Barton Engineers (020 7631 0348; bartonengineers.co.uk)

STRUCTURE Gates, sliding doors, glass balustrades

and stairs Athena Fabrication and Welding (01202 721 568; athena.uk.com)

Top-floor cladding Vincent Timber (0121 772 5511; vincenttimber.co.uk)

Windows Alco Glass (01923 246 600; accordial.co.uk)

Render system Jub (0845 688 9866; jubrenders.org.uk)

FIXTURES & FITTINGS

Kitchen Kraftwork (07899 846 301; kraftwork.co.uk)

Bathroom fittings The Big Bath Company (01590 610 030; bigbathcompany.com)

Tiles Lea Ceramiche (ceramiche.it)

FURNITURE Bookcases, media unit and table

Jonathan Matthews (01305 251 536; j-m-designs.co.uk)

Sofa and footstool Minotti (020 7323 3233; minotti.com)

this picture The TV is hidden behind a sliding blue panel when not in use



designs for homes that could be easily and economically built. 'Steel and timber came from the programme,' says Pardey. 'It was all about the steel frame; and this is what I used here.'

With planning permission in place (a smooth process, thanks to the recent approval of modern houses close by), the build, which took just under a year, began. 'I'll never forget the frame going in,' says Diane. 'Suddenly we could get a true feel for the three-dimensional space.'

The completed form of the house, just as Pardey had planned, is very open. From the front lobby, a service corridor runs towards the kitchen, the courtyard lying along one side, flooding the space with light, while to the other lie useful spaces: a boot room, WC, pantry and utility. The corridor has the same floor tiling (a durable, Italian porcelain), as the courtyard and the open-plan kitchen, dining and living room at the back, giving the whole space a unified feel.

A pale oak staircase rises from the dining area. As you climb it come two visual treats. One is the thick birch-ply bookcases on the landing. Their colour was matched to that of the cover of an old red, leather-bound book Pardey owns. 'It's a rich hue,' he says, 'a bit orange, a bit brown. Colours →

this picture A comfy grey sofa and footstool by Minotti offer a place to relax in the open-plan living space. The modern wood burner set into the Dutch-brick chimney breast is a great source of heat



'I never introduce primary colours, or that Sixties neon lime, but use softer, layered tones'

this picture
Located at the end of the landing, the master bedroom features the couple's much-loved Gio Ponti chair bought on their honeymoon

this picture The bespoke bookcase adds interest and provides ample storage space

this picture All the bathrooms are lined with the same slate-grey tiles

are so important, especially in a house that is fairly neutral, such as this. I never introduce primary colours or that Sixties neon orange or lime green, but use softer, layered tones.' The second surprise is the row of narrow windows that lies underneath the bookcases. Not only do they give a view of the garden as you climb, but they light the underside of the bookcases, so that they appear to float.

At the top of the stairs hangs a classic Murano chandelier, purchased on Diane and Mike's honeymoon. 'We weren't sure if it would really work in this house,' Mike says, 'but we remembered how The Homewood, the Modernist house built by the architect Patrick Gwynne, had one at the top of the staircase too, which looked fantastic. We've had to say goodbye to certain pieces, but it has been revealing how others, such as our old Gio Ponti chair – bought when we first got married – or our Arne Jacobsen ones in the kitchen, have blended in so well.'

It's that sense of blending that works in this house. Inside, its long interior views lead always to light. With the absence of details such as skirting boards, the joins between floors and walls have been crafted seamlessly. From the outside, this house is so different from its neighbours that some might say that that's where the blending ends. 'A few say a spaceship has landed,' exclaims Mike, adding: 'Modernism is not, of course, for everyone.' But many, clearly, stop to look at the house. 'Everyone has an opinion on it,' Diane says, 'so, we always invite them in to take a look. And they all say the same thing: "Wow".' GD

STYLE FINDER

Follow Mike and Diane's lead with pops of colour and raw finishes

Compiled by Charlotte Luxford



▲ **Simple form** Essay table in walnut (H72xW190xD100cm), £5,786, also available in larger sizes and finishes, Fritz Hansen at Skandium (020 7584 2066; skandium.com)



▲ **Soft touch** Stripe throw in lambswool in blue and mustard (H120xW180cm), £115, Melin Tregwynt at John Lewis (0845 604 9049; johnlewis.com)



▲ **Design classic** Series 7 dining chair in lacquered ash in orange (H80.5xW50xD52cm), £534, Arne Jacobsen for Fritz Hansen (0844 800 8934; fritzhanzen.com)



▲ **Dramatic hue** Estate emulsion in pelt, £34.50 for 2.5L, Farrow & Ball (01202 876 141; farrow-ball.com)



▲ **On display** Antonn low shelving unit in walnut and lacquer in white (H100xW156xD34cm), £295, Habitat (0844 499 4686; habitat.co.uk)