

HANDCRAFTED HOME

*Philip Coe was just 23 when he built a
contemporary home for just £80,000
with his partner Flo*

Words **Heather Dixon** Photography **David Burton**



Homeowners Phil Coe and Flo Cooper
Location Yorkshire
House size 130m²
Build time September 2015 - September 2017
Construction Timber frame
Plot cost £65,000
Build cost £80,000
Value £210,000

Phil Coe was just eight years old when he built his first house. “My parents built their own place when I was very young, and the builders gave me a pile of bricks and cement so I could have a go. I also remember passing up tiles to them when they were building the chimney and generally getting stuck in wherever I could,” he explains.

The experience gave Phil a taste for construction, which would eventually lead to his first major project at just 23. “It’s something I’ve always wanted to do for as long as I can remember; I loved the whole idea of building my own place from scratch.”

At 16, Phil got an apprenticeship as a joiner and by the time he was 22 he was looking for his first self-build opportunity, together with partner Flo. He found one close to home, too — an old agricultural shed in his parents’ garden which had stood derelict for years.

While much of the existing fabric (including the asbestos cladding) would need to be stripped away, the concrete portal frame would provide the starting point for their new home. Phil presented his design ideas to local architect Ric Blenkharn, who suggested some key changes to draw light into the house. “My idea was to cram in as much as possible into the space, whereas Ric showed me that by taking the main living area into the roof space, creating a mezzanine, and altering the size and shape of the windows, I could build something really contemporary,” says Phil.

Planning proved straightforward (more on page 64). “The chair of the local parish council is a neighbour and was incredibly helpful, not only in terms of planning advice but also on a practical level,” says Phil.

A DIY Build

The first major job on site was to demolish much of the old farm shed, including the asbestos panels which had to be taken off site for safe disposal.

Phil decided to start afresh with the foundations, digging out the old concrete slab

floor and wheelbarrowing the rubble off-site. He then laid 1m-deep strip foundations, the damp-proof course and subfloor, working around the original concrete structural posts which would become an internal feature of the new house.

“I didn’t have any building experience but that didn’t bother me,” reflects Phil. “I knew the basics from college and could find the rest online. I watched a YouTube video to make sure I was laying the foundations properly; it’s amazing how much you can learn on the internet.”

The timber frame was the next job; Phil built the timber panels on site before they were lifted into position with the help of friends and family. He also built the roof trusses on site. “I managed to hire scaffolding at a long-term fixed

rate — another example of people’s support — so I could raise the trusses to roof height and fit them myself,” says Phil. “I then built and fitted 100mm ply panels on top and put OSB (oriented strand board) on the outside, during a week off work. I laid a waterproof membrane over the OSB myself which meant the building was almost watertight.”

Phil proceeded to make his own bespoke window frames — which are all different specs and sizes — which he spray-painted and fitted with pre-cut glass made to order. “It took a couple of weekends to make the window frames,” Phil says. “The bifold doors took a lot longer because of the mechanisms involved. I fitted these in after work. I was really fortunate because a local company, Richard James Kitchens, allowed me to use their workshops and machinery at weekends and evenings, which was incredibly helpful.

“We were amazed by the generosity of people who helped out in various ways. I think they could see that I was just a young person working hard to a very tight budget.”

Once the windows and external doors were in place Phil focused on the larch cladding. This proved to be one of the most challenging and time-consuming tasks of

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The Living Space

Architect Ric Blenkharn suggested creating the double-height, vaulted ceiling above the open plan ground floor living space in order to bring in more light and create a sense of space in this compact building. The statement Tom Dixon light fittings are one of the few items that Phil and Flo splashed out on in their low budget self-build. Polished concrete lends an industrial feel to the agricultural building which previously stood on the site. Phil polished the concrete floor himself but admits it was difficult to achieve the finish he wanted.





The Kitchen and the Staircase

Phil made all the kitchen units and the island himself; he used marble off-cuts sourced from Belgravia Stone for the worktops. He installed the pipework for the air source heat pump behind the kitchen prior to fitting the units. (The boiler was then connected to one end and the outside unit to the other.)

Phil made the inexpensive pine staircase too, which he and Flo whitewashed, before fitting the 15mm toughened glass balustrade. The original concrete portal frame has been left exposed in the double-height stairwell as a feature.

the entire build, involving endless ladder climbing and precise measuring. “Each panel was made on site and then fitted from the bottom up,” says Phil. “The panels were notched round the window frames and everything had to be in line. I would be up and down the ladder five or six times for each panel. It took several weekends to get all the cladding in place.”

Phil’s hands-on approach didn’t end with the main structure. Although he hired an electrician and plumber for the first and second fix work, and a plasterer, he fitted the plasterboard, laid the floorboards upstairs and made the kitchen cabinets, bathroom cabinets, hall furniture and the fitted wardrobes himself. He also took on the tiling and fitted the B&Q internal doors; Flo helped him decorate.

“Our first night here was surreal,” reflects Phil. “For two years, every spare minute, every weekend and every holiday was spent on the house, starting early in the morning and often working late into the evening. I still see things that could be better but overall it’s been an amazing experience — loads of fun and a huge learning curve.

“Would I do it again? Yes, like a shot. It’s a big thing to take on board but if you approach it with the right mindset it’s really not that difficult,” he concludes. 🏠



PROJECT NOTES

Suppliers

Design and build FloCoe

Interiors: flocoe.co.uk

Architect Ric Blenkharn:

brable.com

Cladding Silva Timber:

silvatimber.co.uk

Bathrooms Better Bath-

rooms: betterbathrooms.com

Tiles Monks Cross

Tiles and Bathrooms:

thetilecompany.co.uk

Air source heat pump

Husky Heat Pumps:

huskyheatpumps.co.uk

Lighting Tom Dixon:

tomdixon.net

Worktops Belgravia Stone:

belgraviastone.com

Glass Kimberlite Glass:

kimberliteglassyork.co.uk

The Build Timeline

Acquired the plot

Autumn 2014

Applied for planning

permission Summer 2015

Planning permission

granted Autumn 2015

Cleared site

September 2015

Foundations

November 2015

Blockwork January 2016

Roof February 2016

Cladding March/April 2016

Windows May/June 2016

First fix November 2016

Bifold doors installed

December 2016

Staircase installed

January 2016

Underfloor heating

installed March 2017

Concrete floor installed

March/April 2017

Plasterboarding and

plastering, bathroom

fittings April/May 2017

Second fix June/July 2017

Kitchen and air source

heat pump installed

July/August 2017

Finishings September 2017

Moved in September 2017

The Build Costs

Fees £3,700

Demolition and site clear-
ance and foundations

£3,500

Timber £5,500

Insulation £5,000

Front door and

windows £3,000

Stairs £1,700

Bathroom fittings £1,400

Tiles £1,300

Air source

heat pump £7,200

Bathroom cabinets,

kitchen units, appliances

£7,000

Corrugated roof £1,200

Lighting £2,700

Furniture £2,000

Floor polishing

machine hire £1,200

Landscaping £5,000

Underfloor heating £1,300

Remainder, including

plastering, plumbing

and electrics £27,300

Total £80,000

The Floorplan

The ground floor is predominately open plan — the double-height ceiling above the living space brings in light and gives the illusion of space. Upstairs a mezzanine

doubles as a study.

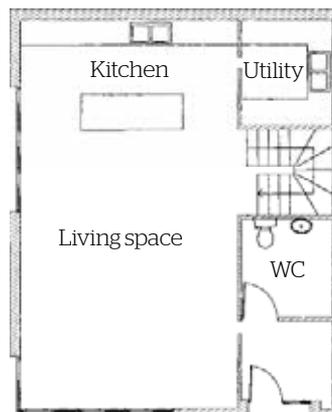


Why we Chose a Polished Concrete Floor

“We wanted to save money on the ground floor by having a polished concrete floor finish instead of expensive tiles. The concrete was poured and left to settle and harden for a couple of months. Rather than get someone in to do it, I hired a machine to polish it,” begins Phil. “It was a lot harder than I’d imagined to get the consistency and even finish we wanted because the consistency of the concrete had to be just right and the machine had to be kept absolutely level. I also rushed to try and save money. We ended up with some uneven areas, polish marks and cracks in the concrete, so we turned these into a quirky feature by filling them with gold epoxy resin [shown above], mixed into a paste and sanded off once it was dry.

“If you decide to polish concrete yourself, you have to start by rough grinding the surface with metal bond diamond abrasives that prepare the concrete for the final smoothing. You then apply a liquid chemical hardener to provide extra protection against water and staining. The aim of the final polish is to get a smooth, even finish, but we ended up with something much rougher and less perfect. We do like its character though and, in retrospect, it works with the agricultural history of the building.”

Ground Floor



First Floor

