



GRANDDESIGNS

MAGAZINE

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THE TRAILLS'S CONVERSION OF A DELAPIDATED BARN INTO A FUTURISTIC HOME MADE COMPELLING VIEWING IN THE LAST SERIES

Words by Dominic Lutyens. Photographs by Paul Massey





Left, Philip Traill with daughters Amelia and Helena on the L-shaped sofa downstairs in the central space - the Traills wanted to avoid boxy rooms. Right, the helix-shaped staircase twists up to the bedrooms



The luxuriously vast central area of the living room soars to a height of 8m plus. A spiral staircase sweeps up to a walkway connecting two monolithic, pod-like structures, one housing a master bedroom, guest-room and bathroom, the other two children's bedrooms. Unsupported by columns, this catwalk in the sky floats ethereally over the cavernous living-room. A smooth, chalky-white expanse, save for exposed rafters on high and blond wood floors underfoot, the entire space looks like the interior of a spaceship crossed with a serene, ancient chapel. Philip and Angela

Traill's converted barn is both futuristic and conscientiously green. While natural light floods in by day - so that electric lighting is unnecessary - by night, disco-vibrant light in turquoise or hot-pink splashes across the gigantic walls.

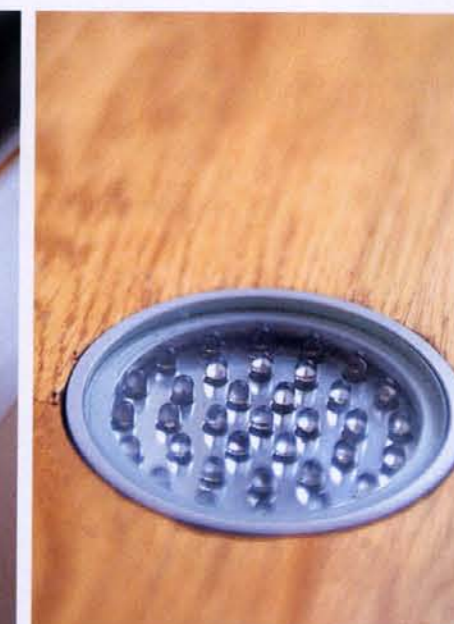
Step outside, however, and these hi-tech elements disappear. What you see is the timber-clad facade of an 1840s, Grade 2-listed threshing barn overlooking an undulating Surrey landscape, complete with a picturebook village. Only the architectural ingenuity and modernity of the barn's interior betray the fact that it's been radically transformed. A visitor would never guess that the building had once been on the brink of collapse, its roof partly covered by concrete tiles, causing it to sag severely. All in all, it's hard to see how this unprepossessing near-wreck could have inspired the Traills to convert it into the super-spacious, ultra-polished home it is now. But then a fair amount of lateral thinking went into the project: even the disturbing sight of a wasp's nest clinging to the ceiling implanted the idea of the two massive pods.

Sheer drive and determination also drove the project. The Traills had lived in London. But, ▶

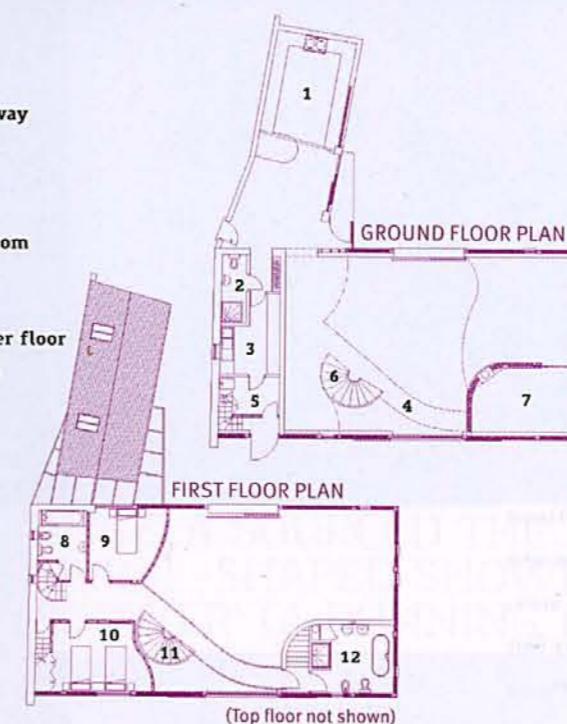
after the birth of their second daughter, Philip fell seriously ill with a brain tumour forcing the couple to re-evaluate their lifestyle. Their first thought was to move to greener pastures. Exchanging the stress of urban living for clean, country air was seen as vital for Philip's health. And so they settled in the Surrey village, where Philip's parents live. The once-dilapidated barn, surrounded by a cart shed (now a garage) and granary barn (now Philip's office), stood on land his parents owned. As a strategy consultant for British Telecom, and employed as a home-worker, Philip was able to remain on site to project-manage the conversion, as was Angela, who had given up her London job in marketing. The granary barn was the operational nerve centre for the project, which took two years to complete. During this time, the Traills lived in an adjoining cottage.

Did Philip worry that the inevitable strain of overseeing the conversion might adversely affect his health? 'No. It gave me a focus,' he asserts, as we sit in the kitchen (now changed beyond all recognition from dilapidated stable block to a practical, spacious room, annexed to the barn). 'It was very exciting to have this ambition to create such a beautiful place.' Angela, for her part, can't overstate the fact that this dream would never have been realised without Philip's seemingly superhuman determination. 'You have

Left, the two curved steel pods at either end of the central space are linked by a suspended walkway. From right, the children love to run from pod to pod; a detail of the banister; a sunken light in the living room floor; an old brick discovered during the build was incorporated into the kitchen wall.



1. kitchen
2. cloakroom
3. store room
4. suspended walkway
5. utility room
6. helical staircase
7. study
8. children's bathroom
9. child's bedroom
10. master bedroom
11. stairs to the upper floor
12. master bathroom



incredible drive. I've never seen anything like it,' she says to him.

Damien Blower, of architectural practice Stedman Blower, dreamt up the barn's original design, which, happily, chimed with the Traills's desire for something futuristic and organic. 'When we met him, we could tell he had the balls to do things differently,' remembers Angela. 'He showed us a dairy he had converted which had a striking curved wall. He noticed that our eyes lit up when we saw it, and our project snowballed from there.' Later, following the original design, architect Elspeth Beard produced the detailed design and became project architect. (As one who lives in a water tower she converted herself, she was eminently suited to the job.)

Although they finished on schedule, the Traills exceeded their original budget of £400,000 (financed by capital from their London house and a small mortgage), but only by £50,000. (To save money, they mucked in, fitting thermostats, cutting plasterboard and networking the wiring.)

Getting planning permission was a sensitive issue, however, since the barn stands on green belt land in an area of outstanding beauty. 'From the outside, it had to look like an old building,' says Angela. 'We wanted solar panels on the roof, but this wasn't allowed. Even so, sunlight flooding through the barn's huge south-facing windows keeps it amazingly warm.' In any case, states Philip proudly, insulation for the barn 'exceeds EU regulations. It saves us money on heating bills – and helps save the world's resources.'

The barn was first stripped back to its timber frame. Timber columns, ▶



Left, the Fundo spiral shower was supplied by Wedi Systems and, says Philip, 'covers you with water in a moment'. The floor tiles are made of sliced pebbles to create a beach effect. Above right, Angela insisted that the bathroom should have a basin each, a huge bath to share and a bidet. Lionel Daniels, the craftsman who made the kitchen units, also made the vanity unit and the bath surround

ANGELA SOURCED THE PEBBLE FLOORING IN THE SPIRAL-SHAPED SHOWER UNIT NICKNAMED THE 'SNAIL SHOWER' (A PUNNING REFERENCE TO 'TRAILL')

their bases embedded in concrete-filled holes, were put in to provide additional support. Top-spec boarding was used for insulation, and the roof's concrete tiles removed and replaced with handmade, second-hand ones. And the barn's old rafters were reinforced with steel plates in the parts where the pods (which are also supported by tailor-made, curved steel beams) would be bolted on to them. Douglas fir beams were fixed to these to conceal the metal, and sand-blasted to match the colour of the original oak beams. Sections of plaster-board joined to form sweeping curves created their rounded form. After four months, the pods and walkway were in place.



At this point, Philip set about networking the entire building with cabling for computers (the house has its own intranet), lighting (an i-Light system that allows for different 'mood' lighting in every room), music, security and phones. The wiring, partly laid by an electrician and partly by Philip and Angela, was 'future-proofed'. 'That means it's sufficiently flexible to be adaptable to any new technology that's thrown at us,' says Philip. 'I had no experience of all this. I learnt how to do it as I went along.' 'It's a big house, but, thanks to this, if you've forgotten to turn off the kitchen light when you go to bed, you can switch it off upstairs,' says Angela.

One of the barn's chief charms is its mammoth doors and haphazardly arranged windows. Yet these are highly considered. In the master bedroom, there's a window designed to give a romantic view of the church (where the Traills got married). And, with its soaring ceiling and predominantly open-plan layout, the building retains the atmosphere of a tradi-

'I DON'T THINK I COULD LIVE IN A HOUSE THAT WE HADN'T BUILT OURSELVES. IT'S A SUPERB FEELING KNOWING EVERYTHING IS JUST THE WAY WE WANT IT'

tional barn – albeit one that very much nods to a clean-lined, modernist aesthetic. The Traills wanted to create a space with a 'sculptural feel' – something the pods, which recall the white, pebble-smooth sculptures of Barbara Hepworth and Constantin Brancusi – amply evoke.

Tactile, luxurious finishes were all-important. 'Elsbeth gave us one of the best pieces of advice: invest in the things you touch every day – like the banister.' Angela sourced many of the fittings, such as the Arne Jacobsen-designed Vola taps in the bathrooms and pebble flooring in the spiral-shaped shower unit – nicknamed the 'snail shower' (a punning reference to 'Traill!'). In the living area an enormous, swanky, L-shaped royal-purple sofa contrasts with an antique dining table and sideboard.

Despite the Traills's passion for technology, the house is relatively eco-friendly. Rockwell, a natural, volcanic material, was used to insulate it. A rain-water-harvesting system, housed in a subterranean tank, provides all the water needed to flush the loos. And a heat-recovery system services three areas of the house. This ingeniously sucks air in from outdoors, which is then heated by outgoing stale air. 'You never have to open any windows,' says Angela. Paints, treatments for wood and carpets are all impeccably green. 'Most carpets are backed with latex, a toxic material. If you move into a new place fitted with them, you breathe in all these toxic fumes. We don't have that.'

Virtually all the work was completed on 28 November 2002 – the day filming of the barn for *Grand Designs* finished – and by Christmas Day, the Traills and their daughters, Amelia and Helena, had moved in. Today, they're visibly thrilled with the hard-won result. Not for one minute do they regret the slog demanded by the project. 'I don't think I could live in a house that we hadn't built ourselves,' they concur. 'It's a superb feeling knowing everything here is just the way we want it.' ■

For more information on the Traills's barn, visit threshingbarn.co.uk.



From far left, the kitchen includes 24 different wood inlays; curved wooden units; the Arne Jacobson-designed Vola taps. Below, the master bedroom has a view of the church in which the Traills got married. Right, Angela in the spacious kitchen





ON SITE



Clockwise from above, detail design and project architect Elspeth Beard with building contractor Peter Shoesmith; Claire Hobday and the Grand Designs TV crew in action; roofing contractor Alistair O'Neill and Peter Shoesmith; Helena Traill celebrates the completion of building of the roof; Kevin McCloud talks to Angela Traill during filming



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Bespoke sliding glazed window: barn door

Vista-Brunswick Ltd
(01175 955 1491)

Steel substructure and walkway

AJ Fabrications Ltd
(01483 276 016)

Garden design and landscaping

Chris Stokes, Garden Management
(01428 606 761)

For other suppliers and specialists, visit the Traill's website: threshingbarn.co.uk

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY



Far left, the utility room: all the house electrical systems (including two LCD touch screen controls for the lighting) are operated from here. Left, Paul Gill electrical contractor. The building has been networked with computer cabling, 'future proofing' it by trying to second guess what sorts of technology would be available in the years to come



TECHNI COLOUR

The main living space has a Deltalight Chameleon colour change system - the mood of the room can be altered by choosing a colour from a spectrum offered by the LCD touch screens