

A break from the norm

A worthy finalist in the LABC National Built in Quality Awards, 2 Victoria Place in Chippenham, Wiltshire, has been described as a modernist masterpiece, designed by former local authority architect Jack Konynenburg



This project was constructed last year on the site of a former transport yard, to the rear of a listed building, in the Chippenham conservation area. The owner, Jack Konynenburg, who designed and managed the scheme, is a former local authority architect, well-known for his more adventurous designs in the district.

The project comprises two compact linked-houses, curved on plan around a

circular courtyard. One, for the architect and his family, is two storeys, the other is single storey. Although the smaller unit has been provided for the architect's mother, who is mobility impaired, the houses can be linked to form a single, larger dwelling. The two storey house is 'upside down', with upstairs living room and downstairs kitchen/dining, bedrooms and garage/workshop.

The projecting first floor has curved doors to the front and

"THIS MODERNIST TOWN HOUSE HAS A SCULPTURAL FORM WHICH PROVIDES NOVEL LIVING SPACES, UNUSUAL VIEWS AND A WELCOMING COMMUNAL COURTYARD"

is reached via a glass block clad spiral staircase. Domed rooflights are provided for the ground floor internal spaces. Each house has its own south facing private courtyard. The shared front courtyard is paved, with a central tree, and contains car parking spaces for the new houses and existing building.

The single storey roofs are planted with sedum, which is prominently visible from the first floor. Along with the highly-insulated rear walls, the green roof helps the





development achieve better standards of u-value.

Holistically speaking, the architect self-builder is keen to point out that the site is sustainable in other ways – the compact size of the houses, the town centre location (alongside shops and workplaces) and the proximity to bus/rail transport interchanges.

This modernist town house has a sculptural form which provides novel living spaces, unusual views and a welcoming communal courtyard. In many ways, Jack's home is a Modernist's dream, packed full of quirky 20th century memorabilia.

However, the town centre location was a key criteria for the designer, who notes that comments such as "it should have been in the countryside" or "by the seaside" have entirely missed the point.

Jack said: "The town centre

location is the very essence of the project, and we hope we have shown that remoteness and seclusion are not the only way of providing living space in the modern world."

By pushing the houses back against the site boundary, there was little space for a conventional garden.

Instead, small segments have been carved out of the building's footprint, providing two small walled gardens, one for each property, and an upstairs terrace leading out from the first floor living room. As well as its striking modern aesthetic, Jack was keen to incorporate eco-features where possible, on a limited budget. Six domed rooflights percolate light into the green-roofed, ground floor kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and hallway areas, creating a cheerfully bright interior and saving energy on lighting.

"THIS INGENUOUS ROOF STRUCTURE IS A RADICAL DEPARTURE FROM THE NORM"

Plans for the future include solar panels and a ground-source heat pump.

Building on an established working relationship, North Wilts Building Control was able to work closely with the designer from the outset. Whilst being an architecturally fascinating project, it was the structural innovation of the main roof construction of the two storey house which drew particular accolade from North Wilts Building Control: "This ingenious roof structure is a radical departure from the norm, its form befitting the





◀ striking aesthetic of the building.”

The common rafters are in softwood, spanning from wall plate to curved ridge beam. The principal monopitch roof structure comprises the steel ridge section, which is curved to a relatively small radius, on plan.

This is ingeniously supported off the outside walls, at intermediate positions along its curved span, by means of inclined steel legs – forming a five-legged ‘tripod’. The legs are connected at their upper end

by stiff, moment-resisting connections, to prevent the legs from spreading.

Due to the extended lever-arm of the tripod structure, the legs are also tied-back to a secondary curved glulam beam, which sits some two metres below the ridge beam, at ceiling level. The connection between cranked steel legs and the exposed curved timber tension ring is made via elegant, curved timber tie-members, which are further guyed by stainless steel cables.

The attractive curved

“THE OVERALL EFFECT IS A GLORIOUS CENTREPIECE OF ARCHITECTURAL STRUCTURE”

hardwood beam and upwardly-curved, tapered glulam ties are therefore not only an aesthetic feature, but act to reinforce the moment-connections between legs and ridge beam, accommodating both bending and axial stresses.

The overall effect is a glorious centrepiece of architectural structure; the composite form acting as a three-dimensional curved roof truss, with the roof structure not only honestly expressed, but positively featured.