



Southern comfort

Transforming a Cornish ruin into a chic waterside home wasn't plain sailing for one family. The result, though, is a fantastic, chilled-out retreat, says **Emily Wright**

Linda Morey Smith knows a thing or two about refurbishments. The designer is world-renowned for transforming tired, old buildings into smart new spaces from one-off residential properties to commercial interiors for companies including Moët, Red Bull, Virgin and Asda.

Several years ago, Linda and her husband, art consultant Patrick Burrows, decided to take on their own project. They bought a home – a four-storey former seamen's mission in Fowey, Cornwall – with plans to renovate it to create a second home and a seaside retreat for them and their sons,

Felix, now 15, and Max, now 13.

They had no idea that this would become one of the most challenging refurbishment jobs they had ever tackled – despite Linda's 20-year career in interior design – as the reality of renovating a crumbling, water-damaged property soon sunk in.

So was it worth it? Linda explains how the project became a passion and how a crash course in marine architecture and an awful lot of patience has seen the wreck they bought for £850,000 transformed into a sea-safe haven now valued at more than £2m.

Cornish challenge

"We bought the house for the views," Linda says. "It was built in 1894 right on the old harbour wall by the Fowey estuary and ships still sail by right past the window. It is a very unusual place and we saw such potential."

"We knew it would be a challenge but we were not expecting it to be such a big project. We anticipated being on-site for six months and it ended up being two years."

"And that was after the year it took to get planning permission, which always takes longer if you are in a conservation area."

"When we started to take back the walls, we found they had just been layered and layered with plaster over the years as various people had obviously tried to cover up damp."

"That damp was an issue because the building was rendered in, which takes in water but doesn't let it out. As a result, pretty much the entire internal structure was rotten."

Linda and Patrick took immediate and drastic action and decided to gut the entire property right down



to the external walls.

"I remember standing there with Patrick at the bottom of the house in a 6ft hole we had dug to start the internal reconstruction," Linda says. "We looked up from there all the way to the sky – there were no floors, no internal walls, no stairs, and no roof."

"Then the tide came in and filled the hole with sea water and little crabs. And I knew we had our work cut out."

The floating house

The pair had to brush up on marine architecture to address complications they had never imagined. The whole base of the house had to be built up using waterproof membranes and a drainage system was built in. As a result, the sea water now penetrates the external walls but is prevented from seeping through into the building's internal structure and so drips down the inside of the external walls before it is flushed out under the building. "It's basically a floating house," Linda says.

And it was not just the inside of the house that needed special treatment. The new cantilevered balcony needed to be constructed using strengthened glass to protect it from being battered by sea water.

The property's exceptional location posed problems for the logistics of the build itself, however. "Everything

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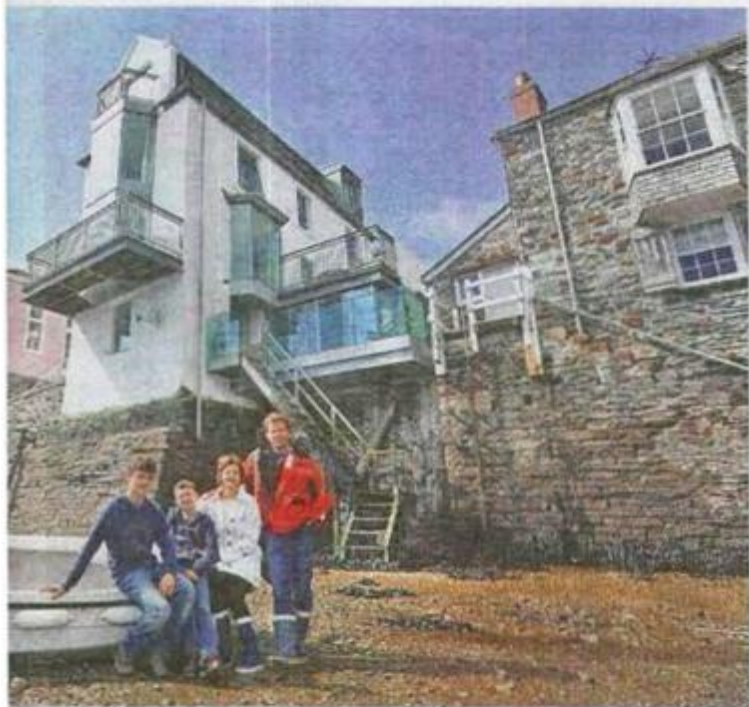
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takes a bit longer to arrive and get set up in somewhere like Cornwall compared to London," Linda says.

"We had to have some of the larger materials like steel and windows transported down the estuary on barges rather than try to manoeuvre them through a small town.

"And you are not supposed to have scaffolding up in the summer

months down on the harbour. For years we would go down to the property with our children and it felt a bit like going to visit a sick relative. I did have moments of thinking, 'I don't want to do this any more,' but as soon as we got down and saw all the boats and the beautiful location I remembered why we had taken it on."



Tacking the interior design

After more than two years, Linda was finally able to start working on the interior aspect of the project. The house is still made up of four floors with a ground-floor lounge, bedroom and office; a first-floor dining room and kitchen with a terrace complete with pizza oven; a second-floor double bedroom, bathroom and single bedroom with an

en suite bathroom; and an open-plan master bedroom and bathroom over the entire top floor of the property.

The style, she says, is contemporary but natural and, above all, comfortable. The timber floors mixed with glass and white walls overlooking the estuary create a calm atmosphere.

"We have created a very snug television room at the very base of the prop-

Shore thing: Linda Morey Smith and Patrick Burrows with their family at their Fowey home in Cornwall

JOHN LAWRENCE

erty," Linda says. "It has leather-panel doors and it is like a cosy enclosure, but there is one wall with a thick glass window so you can be curled up and catch sight of the ships sailing past."

As for sustainability credentials, the new drainage system and internal walls mean the property is extremely well-insulated, and local builders were used for all of the work. The floors are made with reclaimed pine and the roof is made entirely of reclaimed slate.

Now the house is complete, Linda and Patrick are based there with their children from July to September. But how does this work, considering they both have jobs that require them to be in London on a regular basis?

"We have tried every way of doing it," Linda says. "It's four and a half hours on the train from London, which is actually very doable. It is so worth it and so many people we know have places down on the coast that you end up seeing half of London when we are down here anyway."

And then there is the other small bonus that the couple have already added more than £1m to the value of the property.

Emily Wright is the features editor of 'Estates Gazette'