

CHOOSE FROM 30 STAYCATIONS & DAY TRIPS

# coast

OCTOBER 2019 £4.75

BECAUSE LIFE IS BETTER BY THE SEA

## EXPLORE DEVON

- Visit Devon's 10 best hidden gems
- Spend a weekend in Beesands
- Discover beautiful Woolacombe



**BEEKEEPING  
BY THE SEA**  
MAKING HONEY ON  
HASTINGS BEACH

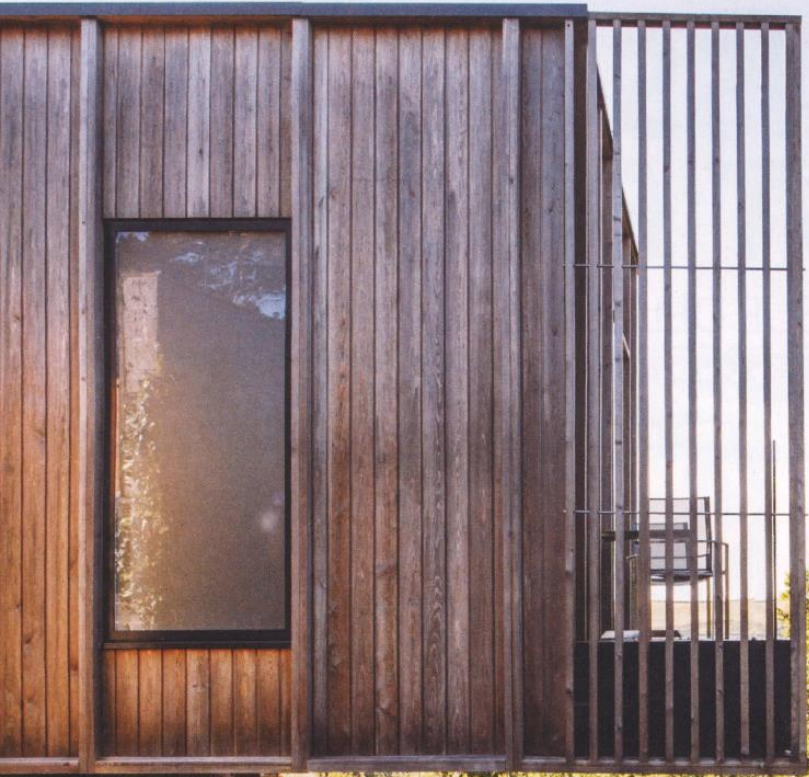
**TRY THE MINDFUL ART  
OF PEBBLE-STACKING**

**IMPROVE  
YOUR HEALTH**

*The GP who prescribes  
trips to the seaside*







# MODERN MIRACLE

When Maxine and John Fack were building their new home in Polzeath, environmental considerations were at the top of the agenda

WORDS ALICE WESTGATE





ABOVE Grey sofas by Loaf at John Lewis offer the perfect combination of simplicity and practicality  
LEFT The hot tub occupies a sheltered spot under the cantilevered master bedroom suite

As you sit out back on your surfboard, waiting to catch one of Polzeath's famous waves, you might just notice Dry Creek House peeping out from among the trees. This low-profile, low-impact eco-home is just three minutes' walk from the beach, yet it is beautifully cocooned by surrounding woodland.

Turn the clock back six years, and its owners Maxine and John Fack were living near Bristol, in a Georgian farmhouse that seemed empty after the departure of their grown-up children. 'We looked at each other in that leaky old place and realised it wasn't the house for our future,' says John. 'We wanted to find something smaller that was energy-efficient, but soon realised the only way to achieve that was to start from scratch and build our own home.'

Beguiled by happy memories of family holidays in Cornwall, and lured by friends and relatives who live nearby, the couple began searching for building plots around the Camel Estuary. 'The land had to be

within walking distance of a pub, a shop and a beach,' says Maxine. 'We also wanted it to be part of a thriving year-round community.'

### AN OVERGROWN PLOT

One contender was a sloping, rocky site above Polzeath. It was, says John, 'hideously overgrown' and home to an asbestos surf-shack that had been vacated 50 years before but still had teacups on the table. 'The plot already had full planning permission, but we didn't like the look of the house on the plans,' he says. 'Added to that, it was very expensive so we knocked it on the head.'

A year later, Maxine spotted the same plot up for sale again – for substantially less. 'Clearly no one had shown interest in it, so it had come down in price,' says John. The pair drove down to see it again one Sunday night and by Monday morning were on the phone to the agent. It didn't take long to seal the deal.

Maxine and John have seven children

between them, two of whom are architects, but felt it might be too close to home to employ a family member. So instead they appointed Matt Williams, a friend from Cornwall and a colleague of their daughter-in-law, to design the house and oversee the building work.

'Maxine and I created a storyboard made up of pictures of houses we loved but thought we could never afford,' laughs John. 'They were invariably in far-flung corners of Arizona or New Zealand, where people had built the most incredibly modern properties in glass and rock.'

### ECO-FRIENDLY FEATURES

Maxine and John also set out some practical requirements: they wanted the house to be as close to off-grid as possible, to be eco-friendly and low-maintenance, to be filled with light, and to merge in with the surrounding trees.

Undeterred by the steep gradient and the slightly unstable mix of broken slate and loose soil, Matt dreamt up a striking L-shaped house with its main living spaces and bedrooms on the first floor; beneath that is a TV room, a wet/utility





The upper level of Dry Creek House is clad in Siberian larch, which is particularly resilient to the coastal elements and will weather to a pale silvery grey. The lower floor is faced with local stone. The name of the property – Dry Creek House – is a translation of the Cornish word Polzeath









Reminiscent of a ship's galley, the kitchen is a mix of bespoke stainless steel and warm-toned maple



room, a plant room and a double garage. One wing is a cantilevered master suite that projects into the upper branches of the trees. This feat of structural engineering required part of the ground floor to be designated as a 'rubble room' and act as a counterbalance.

### VIEWS OF THE BEACH

As the building faces north, Matt added generous roof lights – a vast one above the kitchen and another that runs the length of the corridor leading to the guest bedrooms – to let in natural light. In the living area, he specified a set of huge sliding glass doors that lead to a balcony and give cracking views of the beach.

Matt also incorporated a host of green features, starting with what John calls 'supernatural amounts of insulation', plus a heat recovery and recirculation system. Solar panels and an air-source heat pump feed into a Tesla battery in the basement, and this allows the house to be off-grid for most of the summer. Rainwater is filtered through the building's sedum roof in order to supply three of the four loos, the garden taps and the washing machine.

The pared-down aesthetics of the house fit beautifully with its eco-friendly approach. The exterior of the upper part is clad in Siberian Larch, chosen to blend into the woodland canopy and withstand the harsh, salt-laden wind. Inside, oiled maple, white walls and polished concrete floors keep

things simple. Despite moving from a period house that was 'full of stuff', the Facks brought few items to Dry Creek House. 'Starting from scratch was joyful,' Maxine says. 'Before we moved we sold or gave away most things, but we kept six things each that were set aside until the house was finished. When they came out of storage, we wondered why we bothered.'

New items include grey sofas for the living area, simple platform beds, and dining furniture in marine grade steel that can survive happily indoors or out – perfect for flexible living in summer. The only traces of the couple's past life are some vintage collectibles – a retro cigarette machine and vintage model cars – plus a striking Art Deco floor lamp

in the sitting area and a pair of 1940s sea trunks that belonged to John's diplomat parents. 'Everything has to earn its place 10 times over before it's allowed to stay now,' says Maxine. As a result, the house has a sense of freedom and seems wonderfully unencumbered by the clutter of daily life.

### STREAMLINED LIFE

Life is so streamlined that, when John and Maxine's pop-up marquee and branding business means travelling for long periods, it only takes a few hours to transform Dry Creek House into a rentable holiday home. But the rest of the time they make the most of everything it has to offer, including the hot tub that nestles underneath their cantilevered bedroom. 'It feels as if you're bathing in the middle of the woods, not the middle of Polzeath,' adds John.

Last year Dry Creek House won top spot in the Cornish Buildings Group Awards. Matt was praised for an inspired design that made the most of an awkward sloping site, while Maxine and John were commended for having commissioned such an imaginative project.

'We feel so lucky to live here,' says John. 'Our bedroom has an east-facing balcony, so we often drink our morning tea there, looking down over the valley, sitting just 20ft away from the nesting rooks. It's our own private sanctuary and it's truly magical.'

**Dry Creek House is available for rent in July, August, and over Christmas and New Year (email [holidays@latitude50.co.uk](mailto:holidays@latitude50.co.uk), 01208 869090, [latitude50.co.uk](http://latitude50.co.uk)).**







ABOVE One of the internal doors was made to the wrong dimensions but, to save waste, it was repurposed as a headboard for the master bedroom  
THIS PICTURE The hot tub is the perfect place to relax after a long coastal walk or a session in the surf







John and Maxine enjoy time at the beach with Hendricks, their jet-black Springador, and Lola, their Clumber spaniel puppy





*Maxine & John's favourite things to do in and around Polzeath*

• **Surfside Café & Bar** (01208 862931, [surfsidepolzeath.com](http://surfsidepolzeath.com)) is a laid-back fish restaurant right on Polzeath Beach. In an old quarry directly behind the restaurant you'll also find the gorgeously quirky **Rum Bar** ([surfsidepolzeath.com/rum-bar](http://surfsidepolzeath.com/rum-bar)) which at night hosts regular live music and is beautifully lit to create a real Caribbean vibe.

• **The Mowhay Café and Gallery** (01208 863660) is just up the road in Trebetherick and is an excellent place to chill out and have morning coffee with a sticky bun.

• For a child-centred or dog-friendly meal, we head to **The Cracking Crab** (01208 862333, [winkingprawnsgroup.co.uk](http://winkingprawnsgroup.co.uk)). It's on the west side of the beach,

which enjoys the best sunsets. Kids and adults alike love the dressing-up box in the middle of the restaurant.

• If we need any beach gear, from surfboards and bodyboards to wetsuits and beyond, we head to **Busty Moo's Magic Surf Hire**, which is run by our neighbour and operates from Easter to October.