

# Seaside HAVEN

It was all about family when **Kieran & Claire** built this dream beach retreat on a tight plot in North Cornwall

WORDS ALEXANDRA PRATT PHOTOS SIMON BURT PHOTOGRAPHY / LATITUDE 50

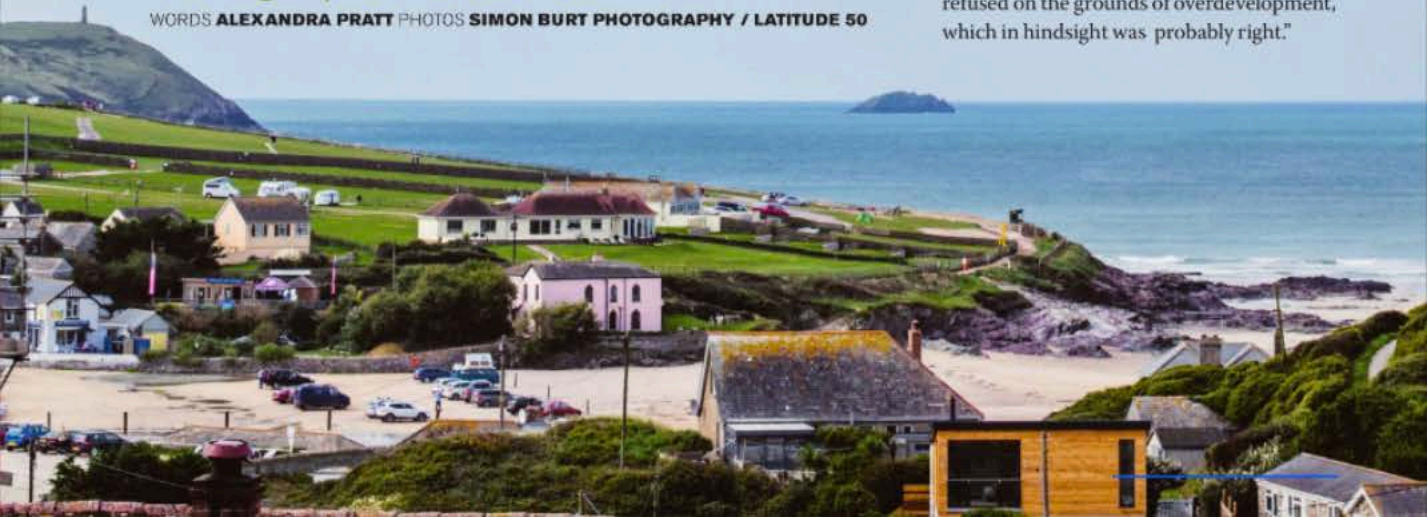
Situated next to the coastal path just a few metres from the beach in the popular village of Polzeath, Kieran Coles and partner Claire Guthrie found the land that would soon be their bespoke holiday home. "I'm from Bude originally, and Claire and I used to go to Cornwall a lot," says Kieran. "I wanted to get the kids into surfing, so we started to look for our own place in the area, which led us to this plot with planning permission."

The space they'd selected was compact, overlooked and difficult to access. Plus, when the couple first saw it, this scrap of land housed a disused railway carriage that had been converted into a dwelling and was covered in asbestos boards. But Kieran and Claire recognised the plot was in a highly desirable setting and had the potential to become just what they needed.

## Planning the scheme

It took a lot of imagination for these first-time self-builders to conceive the plans and – alongside their architect – create a simple, beautiful and well-thought-out abode. After they snapped up the plot, they quickly dismissed ideas of building the quaint thatched cottage that had already been granted detailed planning permission. Instead, they looked towards a more modern home. "Our design inspiration was all around what would work for a family of six," says Kieran, whose four children range in age from nine to three. "I thought about what rooms we would use the least, which is why we have an upside-down layout with three bedrooms and a bathroom on the ground floor, but open-plan living upstairs."

That upper level maximises the footprint of the home and coastal setting by creating volume and a sense of tranquillity with vaulted ceilings, as well as a connection to the outside through full-height glazing and a Juliette balcony. "We originally applied to build something bigger," says Kieran. "It was refused on the grounds of overdevelopment, which in hindsight was probably right."





## WE LEARNED...

**REGULAR COMMUNICATION** with your contractors is very important, especially if you can't be present on site every day.

**SELECTING TRADES** you can trust is crucial. We were confident in the people we chose and they have certainly delivered.

in Winchester, so we had to have a lot of trust in their work. They were key to this project being such a success and going smoothly."

Once work began, the project had no further delays and was quickly out of the ground, using 14 piles, driven deep into the sandy soil and with a steel ring beam on top. The ground floor is made from conventional cavity wall blockwork, finished in modern white render. A timber frame level sits on top of this and is clad in oak. This has only been given one treatment and will weather over time to an attractive and natural silvery-grey.

One side of the property is built into the sandbank, which required a reinforced retaining wall. Originally, the plans had the

be on site as much as he could. Running the project from a distance proved to be his biggest headache and placed a large claim on Kieran's already demanding working week. "The distance meant I couldn't just pop by," he explains. "I managed via daily updates, with photos every week and regular site visits every few weeks."

Kieran was instrumental in developing some of the wow factor features, including the glazed ceiling/walkway in the entrance hall (see the closer look box on page 50 for more) and the staircase. Claire, although pregnant with their fourth child during the build, was also heavily involved in the layout and design, thinking clearly about what would work for them as a family. Downstairs, all the children sleep together in a bedroom with two sets of bunk beds, so it feels like a fun sleepover. The bathroom's ensuite the walk-in shower is large and powerful enough to wash the sand from all four at once (although there is a surfer's shower outdoors, too).

The couple rethought the culinary zone a couple of times, too. "Originally, the kitchen was planned as a U-shape," says Kieran. "But Claire didn't want that; she needed it more free-flowing. So we went and marked out the breakfast bar on the floor to make sure all six of us could sit around it." The clever integration of extended seating

different areas together, won't fade in the strong sunlight or wear, and is easy to clean. "It was expensive, but have a great finish, which doesn't show up the sand," says Kieran.

With no mains gas in their village, the couple were forced to consider alternative heating systems. After some research, they decided to opt for an air source pump to heat the water for the underfloor heating system (UFH). The initial outlay for this was more than they had originally budgeted for, but Kieran cannot fault its performance, even through two Cornish winters. They also opted for a woodburning stove in the living area upstairs. Although this is an attractive and ever-popular feature in the living room, Kieran feels it wasn't really necessary, since the UFH, insulation and glazing mean their home stays comfortable year-round.

### A fantastic result

Despite a well-run and relatively straightforward project, there's always the odd alteration a self-builder might make after living in the space for a while. "Now we've spent a lot of time here, we've decided to add a small window into the bathroom for ventilation and more natural light," says Kieran. "We are also now removing the stone and resurfacing the parking area and cladding the wall there."

Apart from these relatively minor tweaks, Kieran is delighted with how smoothly the process ran and, of course, with the chic, pared-down result. "We did what we could on a budget in such a tight

The wood effect pebble stone tiles in the bathroom continue the relaxed natural styling



The double bedrooms have been carefully styled, with 'under the sea' wallpaper and hardwearing Amtico luxury vinyl tile flooring

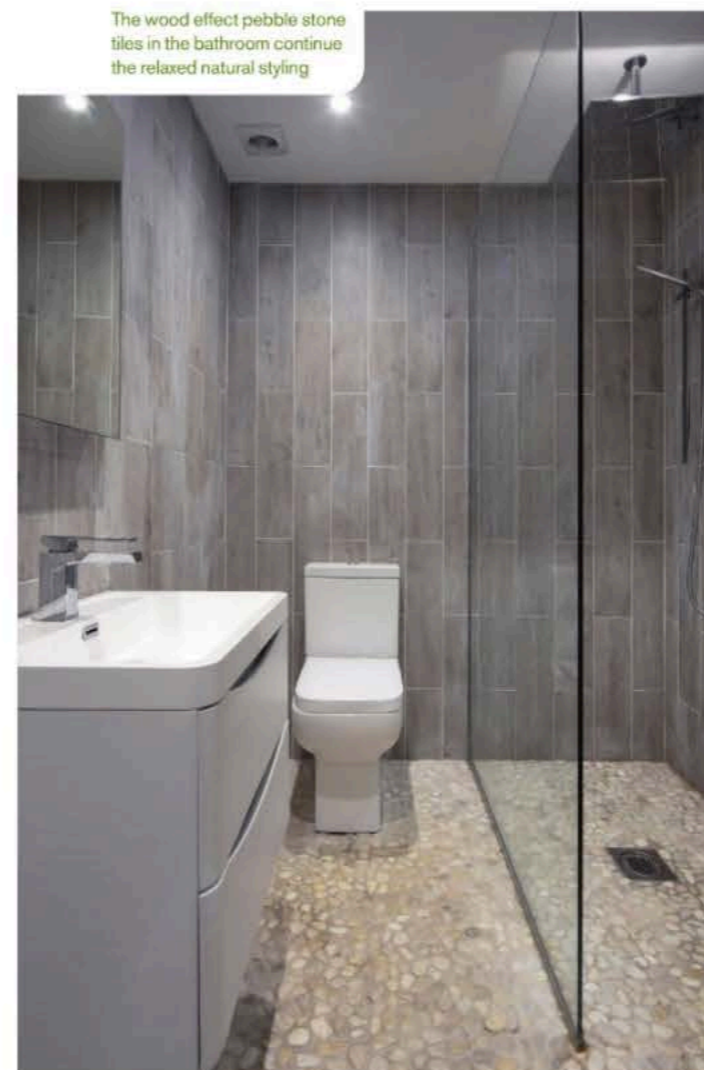
sandbank running up to the balcony, but Kieran amended these to create a ground-level decking area instead. It was an excellent decision as this low-maintenance, private space has quickly become his favourite part of the seaside property. "I love just being out there with the kids on a sunny day," says Kieran. "We get to sit away from the road, but you can hear the beach life."

### Design specifications

Despite having an architect, main contractor and project manager, Kieran was very involved in several aspects of the design and tried to

into the kitchen island also frees up space in the living area by taking away the need for a dining table. Choosing simple white kitchen units has enhanced the light and airy feel upstairs. The space is highly functional and central to the family's everyday life. The mid-range units by Howdens are complemented by hardwearing, high specification Silestone quartz composite worktops, which were also sourced from a local supplier.

The couple also went for another durable material choice in their flooring, opting for Amtico luxury vinyl tiles (LVT) in 'worn ash' for a wooden effect. Laid throughout the property, it ties all the



The compact children's bedroom has two sets of bunkbeds, making full use of the space





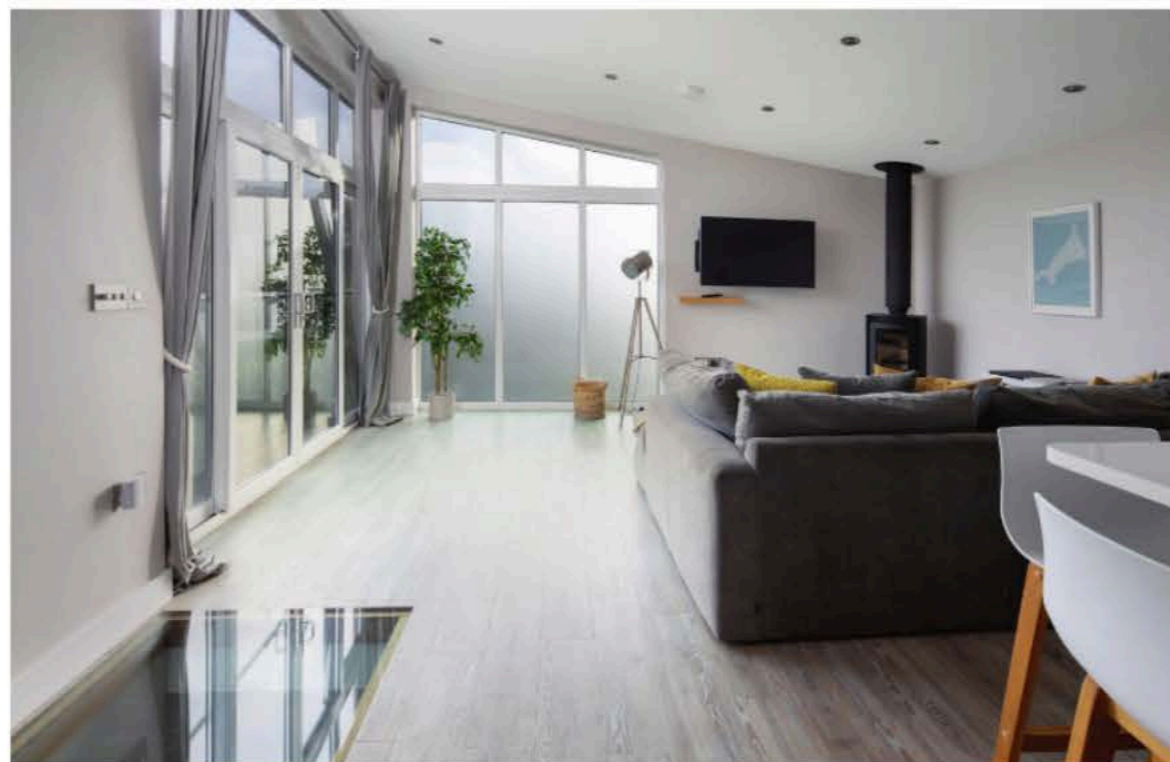
The glazed ceiling ensures light from the upstairs windows is shared with the ground level

Their second application was granted, albeit with some conditions that were inevitable on such a tight plot. For example, the floor-to-ceiling glazing on the gable end is opaque to avoid overlooking. Plus, the ridge line is too low to allow for a direct sea view, but Kieran is sanguine. "It doesn't impact on us; we enjoy the far-reaching views across the village and up the valley," he says.

**Starting work**

Although keen to dig their toes in the sand and enjoy their new beach life, Kieran and Claire delayed the start of the build. "We could have commenced in the summer, but the area is crazy around that time," explains Kieran. "Being near the coastal path means a lot of footfall too, so we waited until the end of the season to reduce issues with lorries." Instead, they used the time to find the right people to work on their project.

Kieran found their architect Tony Jeal and builders, Dingle and Way, through personal recommendation. Both were local firms, which was an important consideration for the couple, and they certainly chose well. "They were great," says Kieran. "We're based

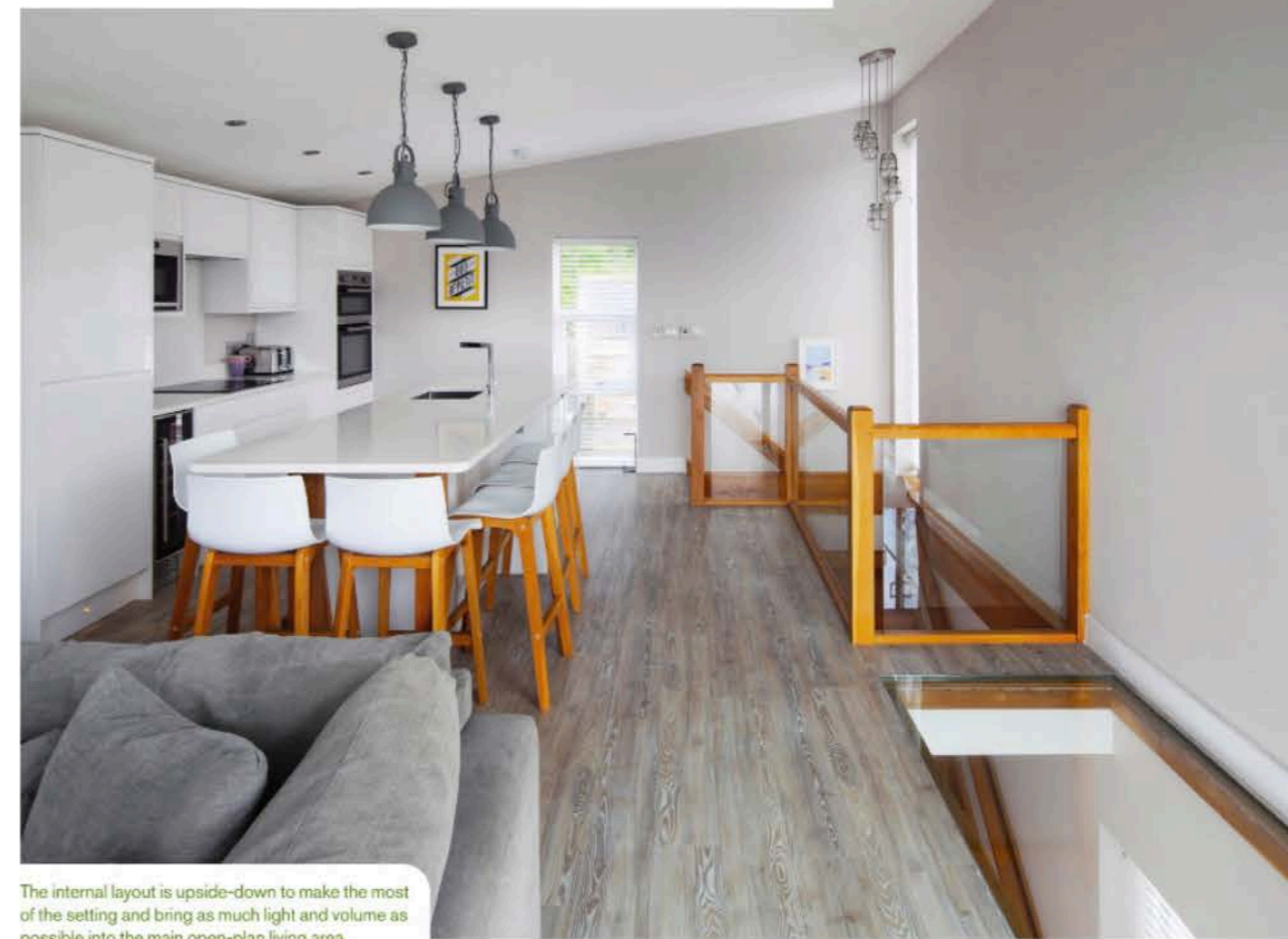


**FACT FILE**

**NAMES** Kieran Coles & Claire Guthrie  
**OCCUPATIONS** Financial consultant  
**LOCATION** Cornwall  
**TYPE OF PROJECT** Self build  
**STYLE** Contemporary  
**CONSTRUCTION METHOD** Brick & block and timber frame  
**PROJECT ROUTE** Commissioned architect & main contractor  
**PLOT SIZE** 190m<sup>2</sup>  
**LAND COST** £191,000  
**BOUGHT** 2014  
**HOUSE SIZE** 100m<sup>2</sup>  
**PROJECT COST** £200,160  
**PROJECT COST PER M<sup>2</sup>** £2,002  
**TOTAL COST** £391,160  
**BUILDING WORK COMMENCED** Oct 2015  
**BUILDING WORK TOOK** 36 weeks



The upper storey is timber frame, with oak cladding, which will weather to a silver colour



The internal layout is upside-down to make the most of the setting and bring as much light and volume as possible into the main open-plan living area



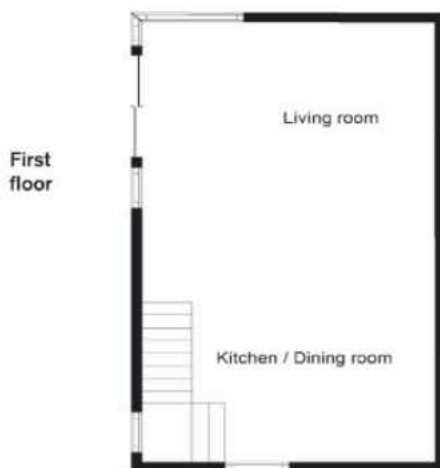
## closer look

## Glazed flooring...

Despite hiring a main contractor, project manager and architect, Kieran was very involved in the build, with his keen eye for design. "I knew light flooding into the entrance would make it a real feature," says Kieran. With this in mind, he specified a large glazed section to the ceiling in the entrance hall, which becomes a glass floor in the upstairs living area. This allows light from the upper storey to filter downstairs. Combined with the glass balustrading around the staircase, this creates a light and open hallway.



### Floor plans



**Build It**  
HOME DESIGNER

House plans re-created using  
Build It 3D Home Designer software.  
[www.buildit.co.uk/3dsoftware](http://www.buildit.co.uk/3dsoftware)



### TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m <sup>2</sup>	Cost %	Total cost
Architect, survey & insurance fees	£40	2%	£4,000
Preliminary works	£35	2%	£3,500
Groundworks	£250	12%	£25,000
Ground floor cavity walls, stairs & doors	£449	22%	£44,860
Scaffold	£18	1%	£1,800
First floor timber frame	£389	20%	£38,870
Roof	£86	4%	£8,630
Windows	£150	7%	£15,000
Air source heat pump & underfloor heating	£80	4%	£8,000
Log burner	£35	2%	£3,500
Kitchen	£30	2%	£3,000
Bathroom	£40	2%	£4,000
Additional finishes incl. oak stairs, glass ceiling, Silestone worktops & Amtico flooring	£200	10%	£20,000
External works	£50	3%	£5,000
Extra finance fees	£150	7%	£15,000
<b>Grand total</b>			<b>£200,160</b>

Note: The costs shown here reflect the original prices for materials, labour and services at the time this project was undertaken. As a general guide, inflation in the construction market runs at about 3%-4% per annum.

### Useful contacts



ARCHITECT **Tony Jeal, Keystone** 01208 863250 [www.keystonearch.net](http://www.keystonearch.net)  
 MAIN CONTRACTOR & PROJECT MANAGEMENT **Dingle and Way**  
 01208 850240 [www.dingleandway.co.uk](http://www.dingleandway.co.uk) SILESTONE WORKTOPS **Brea Granite & Slate** 01209 712754 [www.cowleygranite.co.uk](http://www.cowleygranite.co.uk) WINDOWS & JOINERY (INCL JULIETTE BALCONY, GLASS CEILING & OAK STAIRCASE)  
**Camel Group** 01208 814581 [www.camelglass.co.uk](http://www.camelglass.co.uk) KITCHEN AND INTEGRATED APPLIANCES **Howdens** [www.howdens.com](http://www.howdens.com) FLOORING  
**Bodmin Flooring** 01208 76859 [www.bodminflooring.co.uk](http://www.bodminflooring.co.uk) WOOD BURNER  
**Allen Valley The Fire Place** 01208 852000 [www.stovesincomwall.com](http://www.stovesincomwall.com)  
**Stay at Seabreeze via Latitude 50** 01208 669090 [www.latitude50.co.uk](http://www.latitude50.co.uk)