



Contemporary THINKING...

ALEXANDRA PRATT meets a couple who have turned their dream into reality with the creation of a very special property

Tom and Jane Gordon fell in love with a location, buying their house off-plan and collaborating with local experts to create a unique property with spectacular sea views. The couple were looking for a retreat from their busy London lives, where Tom works in theatre.

"The house didn't exist; we fell in

love with a plot!" he laughs. "We took a chance on a very steep rocky slope and a view of the bay we could just about see on tiptoe. We wanted a home where we could host our friends and family and, if things work out, maybe retire to one day."

Contemporary in design, the house works with the difficult location near to St Ives in Cornwall, spreading across three floors, with a garage and storage

in a further basement level. The six bedrooms can easily accommodate the couple's family of three grown boys; Marcus, Peter, and Jamie, all of whom spend time at the family home.

With that irresistible Cornish seascape on their doorstep, it felt natural to have a balcony on every level. The middle floor, which boasts uninterrupted views, is an open-plan kitchen, dining and living space fit for a movie star.





Individually fixed and grouted brick slips on the walls add a cool, almost urban, vibe.



It's the perfect place to sit and watch the sunset with a glass of wine.



The lighting in the home is exquisite.

Having bought the property off-plan from Mark Vercesi at MV Developments (mvdevelopments.co.uk), Tom and Jane made it their own by adapting the internal layouts and bringing in local interior designer Nicola O'Mara (nicolaomara.com) to pull together and curate their styling ideas.

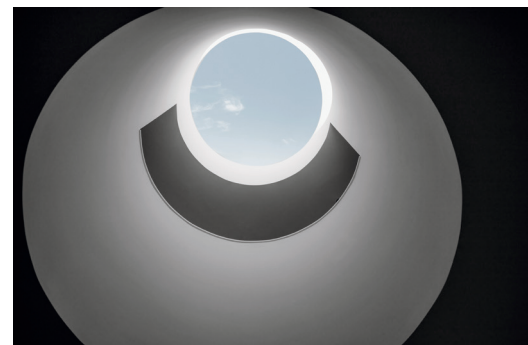
"Marc, the developer, was very accommodating," says Nicola. "The finish is superb, with great attention to detail."

Tom and Jane were inspired by the work of famous 20th-century sculptor Barbara Hepworth. Enthused by the natural world around her studio in St Ives, Hepworth created fluid shapes from solid stone, examples of which can be seen in a local museum.

Tom and Jane specified a bespoke curved staircase with an offset skylight which resembles a shell, and which was influenced by Hepworth's *Pelagos* sculpture.

Each room of the house is individual in style and stamped with the couple's personality. There are no square bedrooms, with Tom insisting on a curved hallway, finished in stone-like polished concrete, which opens onto three of the bedroom suites.

"We're fans of mid-century and spare, but elegant, Scandinavian design," says Tom. His brief to Nicola included both the simplicity of Scandinavian form and a warmer palette of ocean-inspired colours, such as teal and deep green.



NICOLA'S FIVE TIPS FOR THAT CONTEMPORARY COASTAL LOOK

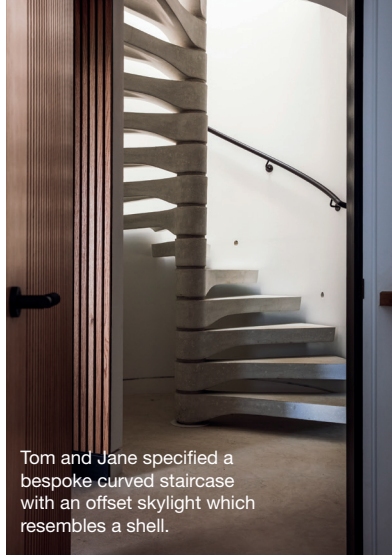
1 It can be fun to make each of the bedrooms and ensuites unique.

2 When you have a large open-plan space you need to connect the zones without being obvious. Take away barriers so it flows via natural thoroughfares.

3 Don't be afraid of colour. You can use it in small amounts and it will lift a room.

4 Use work by a local artist, or even one significant image, as inspiration for a whole house. It will take you on a journey through different colours and shapes.

5 A bath outside could be a cold-water plunge or a place for a sunbather. Either way, it's the ultimate way of bringing the inside, out!



Tom and Jane specified a bespoke curved staircase with an offset skylight which resembles a shell.



"It is very well thought out," says Nicola. "The house is all about the flow. For example, each bedroom has a different feature or finish, and I would feed this through into the ensuite in some way, such as via a coordinated onyx tile."

Although the colour scheme connecting all the main rooms is neutral, Nicola introduced warmth and texture via natural materials, such as the Douglas Fir flooring upstairs.

"It's so beautiful, I just want to touch it," admits Nicola. Individually fixed and grouted brick slips on the walls

add a cool, almost urban, vibe, while contemporary timber cladding on the walls and even the ceiling defines the sitting area of the central open-plan space.

"Nicola brought her talent to bear and soften and warm what might otherwise have been a little too austere," says Tom.

In the bedrooms, this contemporary effect is tempered by both colour and unusual finishes introduced by Nicola, such as the wicker wallpaper feature wall in the office, or the dark-coloured cork wall tiles in the snug.

"I think cork is going to be 



The top floor boasts unrestricted views in two directions.

TOM AND JANE'S FAVOURITE THINGS TO DO IN ST IVES

- We love to eat out in St Ives and there is something tempting, whatever you are in the mood for. Our current favourite is the Rum and Crab Shack (rumandcrabshack.com). The menu is fabulous, the atmosphere is addictive and of course, there are over 100 rums to choose from!

- Porthgwidden in a tiny sandy cove in St Ives known for its multi-coloured beach huts. There's a little cafe here, too so we have an excuse to sit and enjoy the view!

- Although lots of people visit the Tate Gallery in St Ives, we prefer the more intimate Barbara Hepworth Museum and Sculpture Garden (tate.org.uk/visit/tate-st-ives/barbara-hepworth-museum-and-sculpture-garden). Walking around her home, studio and garden makes it easier to connect to Hepworth's work and it's a very meditative space.

- All our sons enjoy surfing when they are here, and the best place to catch some waves is Porthmeor Beach. The St Ives Surf School (stivesurfschool.co.uk) runs classes for those new to the sport.

- Nearby Carbis Bay feels almost like a Balearic island, with the blue sea on golden sand. It's a shortish walk along the coast path, although there is also a little train, which brings us back to St Ives in a few minutes.



The house is all about the flow.

very big in the future," says Nicola. "It's an amazing material and can be laser-cut into geometric patterns."

The top floor boasts unrestricted views in two directions; out to sea and across the bay to St Ives. On this floor, Jane and Tom have created two master suites, with a highly unusual bathtub outside on the balcony, which has frameless glazing, so nothing gets in the way of that view. It is, of course, the ultimate way to take the inside out and, whether it's a cold plunge or a warm soak.

"You can't get closer to the sea," says Nicola. "It's the perfect place to sit and watch the sunset with a glass of wine."

The lighting in the home is exquisite, from the huge organic forms of the Tom Dixon pendants Nicola specified in the sitting area, to the handmade clay light shades by Irish company Mullan. Highly





sustainable in manufacture, they reflect the theme of concern for the natural world. This is put to practical effect with the heating system, which is an eco-friendly air source heat pump.

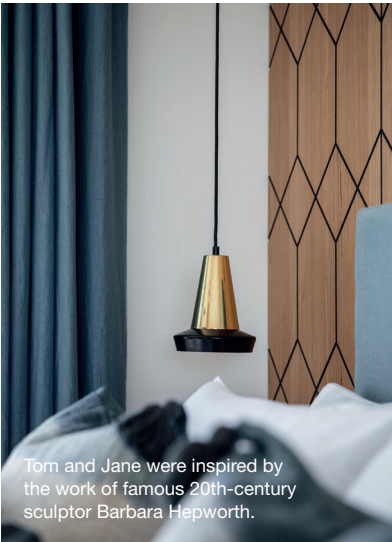
“Our superb project manager, Jo Godolphin, of Pink Pebble (pink-pebble.co.uk), and Mark Vercesi built us something amazing in very challenging circumstances,” says Tom, who had to contend with Covid, three different prime ministers, racing inflation and supply chain problems during the build process.

“Nicola is an amazing collaborator, she listens so well and doesn’t impose her own taste, while carefully guiding us not to make mistakes! We value that approach dearly.”

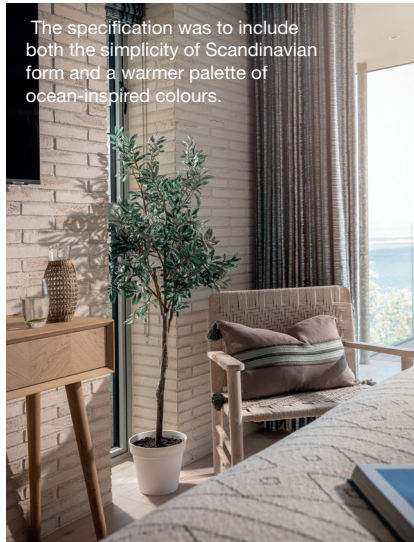
Now the build and the internal finishing are completed, Tom, Jane and their family are thrilled to spend time in their new Cornish retreat.

“We love the views framed by the building, the flow of the spaces and the comfort and visual appeal of each room when you get there,” says Tom. “Credit to our architect, our construction team and Nicola, to whom we will be forever grateful!”

• To stay at Pelagos, visit boutiqueretreats.co.uk.



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