

# HOME LIFE

Get the home of your dreams

## GREAT OUTDOORS

Make the most of every summer minute in your garden

## MADE IN DEVON

Turning concrete into stylish homewares

## PROPERTY NEWS

Expert advice for home buyers and sellers

## FRAMED IN OAK

Friends would often tell Jo and Louise Roberts that they should build a house in their garden because of its incredible views over the South Devon countryside. The result is Little Farthings, a handsome, oak-framed, modern house that blends in seamlessly with its rural surroundings. The eco-friendly building stands on the site of what was once a simple, two-bedroom log cabin, built 13 years ago for family use and then as a holiday let in the grounds of Jo and Louise's former home, near Totnes.

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Pictures, Carpenter Oak Ltd



The exterior of Little Farthings

# Our oak -framed new home

They already had the garden, the view and the dream location. All Jo and Louise Roberts needed now was the house. **CHRISSY HARRIS** visits a home that was just waiting to be built

**I**t started out as one of those after-dinner discussions. Friends would often tell Jo and Louise Roberts that they should build a house in their garden because of those incredible views over the South Devon countryside. So, they did.

Little Farthings is a handsome, oak-framed, modern house that blends in seamlessly with its rural surroundings.

The eco-friendly building stands on the site of what was once a simple, two-bedroom log cabin, built 13 years ago for family use and then as a holiday let in the grounds of Jo and Louise's former home, near Totnes.

"We had lots of guests staying in the cabin over the years and they always used to say to us, wow, what an amazing place," says Jo, a retired GP. "You just take it for granted, don't you?"

"People kept telling us how they loved sitting on the terrace, watching the sunsets," adds, Louise, 58, a retired anaesthetist. "And we'd quite often sit up there in the garden with friends and family in the summer, having supper, and they'd tell us how lovely it was and how we should build something more permanent up there. We'd say, 'yeah, yeah, we'd never get planning permission'. And that's where it ended."

The seed had been sown, however. When the couple began to think about retirement and downsizing, they started looking around for suitable houses and locations – but kept ending up right back where they started.

"We were thinking, well, actually, our house is really well located," says Louise, describing how they both love the area and Totnes and its great transport links. They also loved their home of 23 years, the place where they had raised their two children, now aged 28 and 26. The idea of building on the site of their garden holiday-let gradually became more appealing. "Jo's dad had



## 'It's great how quickly that this place has turned from being a house into a home'

said to us when we built the cabin that we ought to think about building something more permanent up here," says Louise. "We started to think, maybe this could work..."

After discovering that they could probably get planning permission because of a change in restrictions, Jo and Louise paid a visit to timber-frame specialists Carpenter Oak, based just down the road in Cornworthy.

"My word, we walked into their show barn and just fell in love with it," says Louise. "It was just everything about it," adds Jo. "I mean, look at it, it's just instant character."

The 'green' oak frame skeleton of Little Farthings is its finest asset, with the beautifully rustic timber the focus of nearly every section of this three-bedroom house.

The inside has been built around it, in every sense. Interior windows have been added so you can see the different joints and trusses. Specially designed lighting makes the craftsmanship shine.

Little Farthing's oak frame is a nod to its log cabin predecessor. The couple have stuck to the theme by replicating the cabin's open-plan layout in their new home. Together with Luke Sutton of Totnes-based Roderick James Architects, Jo and Louise came up with a clever, free-flow design which makes this building spacious, yet comfortable. Little

Farthings feels almost modular, with each section defined by that oak.

"I really love the way we've been able to create this open-plan feel, which is very different from anywhere we've ever lived," says Louise. "I think we've got to thank Luke for that, in terms of his guidance and suggestions."

The couple were able to move into Little Farthings in December 2019, four years after they first sat down with their architect.

Jo turned 60 last year and the family were able to have a lockdown-limited party. The folding doors to the living area were thrown open, a marquee set up in the fabulous garden and the 30 guests were able to make the most of the fantastic weather.

"It was a brilliant evening," says Jo. "It's great how quickly that this place has turned from being a house into a home

"It didn't take long at all," adds Louise. "Next door is where we raised the children and where we lived for 20-odd years. I thought I'd be more emotional about moving out, with all the memories it holds. The first night we slept here, I remember thinking... gosh...this is slightly weird.

"But after that it just felt so right." ♦  
[roderickjamesarchitects.com](http://roderickjamesarchitects.com);  
[carpenteroak.com](http://carpenteroak.com)

### THE RIGHT ARCHITECT

Jo and Louise 'can't speak highly enough' of their architect Luke Sutton, of Roderick James Architects, who guided them through the entire process.

He says: "The beauty of timber-framed buildings is the ability to create dramatic, light-filled spaces that are fun, informal and welcoming.

"Working with Jo and Louise to realise their dream home, it was essential that the house related to the garden and reflected their outdoor lifestyle. A split-level ground floor and the ability to access the garden from all the key internal spaces helped to achieve this.

Combining traditional materials and local craftsmanship with contemporary detailing and the latest renewable technology, the outcome is a really special house."

### KITCHEN WITHIN A KITCHEN

One of the additions Jo is most pleased with is the extra oven and huge extractor fan, installed in the utility room next to the kitchen (by Peter Booth Kitchens, Abbotskerswell). It means any particularly powerful culinary flavours can be prepared out of the way of the open-plan kitchen and dining area. "It's a smelly cooking room!", says Jo. "It's such a good idea."



Photo: Steve Hayward

The beautifully simple bathrooms work in harmony with the wood



### LIVING (NEARLY) OFF GRID

Jo and Louise wanted to make their home as eco-friendly as possible. Four bore holes have been dug to supply water and heating, plus solar panels outside help to power the building.

"We're almost off grid, which is a nice feeling," says Jo.

### TREE-FRIENDLY BUILD

Little Farthings was built with its garden and existing trees in mind. The beech tree out the front takes centre stage and now has an impressive-looking owl box attached (currently occupied by a family of jackdaws). Two nearby ornamental trees have withstood everything a large-scale build could throw at them. "The garden was inevitably trashed - those two trees are the only surviving remnants," says Louise. "They represent triumph over adversity."

### COURAGE AND CONVICTION

The couple carried out a series of renovations on their previous home and also had experience of doing up a property in London. "We did go into this project with our eyes open," says Louise. "You have to."

There were some hold-ups with panning and a setback when the company employed to install the ground source heating went bust.

"We've watched enough episodes of Grand Designs," says Jo. "We knew there were bound to be things that come and catch you out."

Photo: Steve Hayward