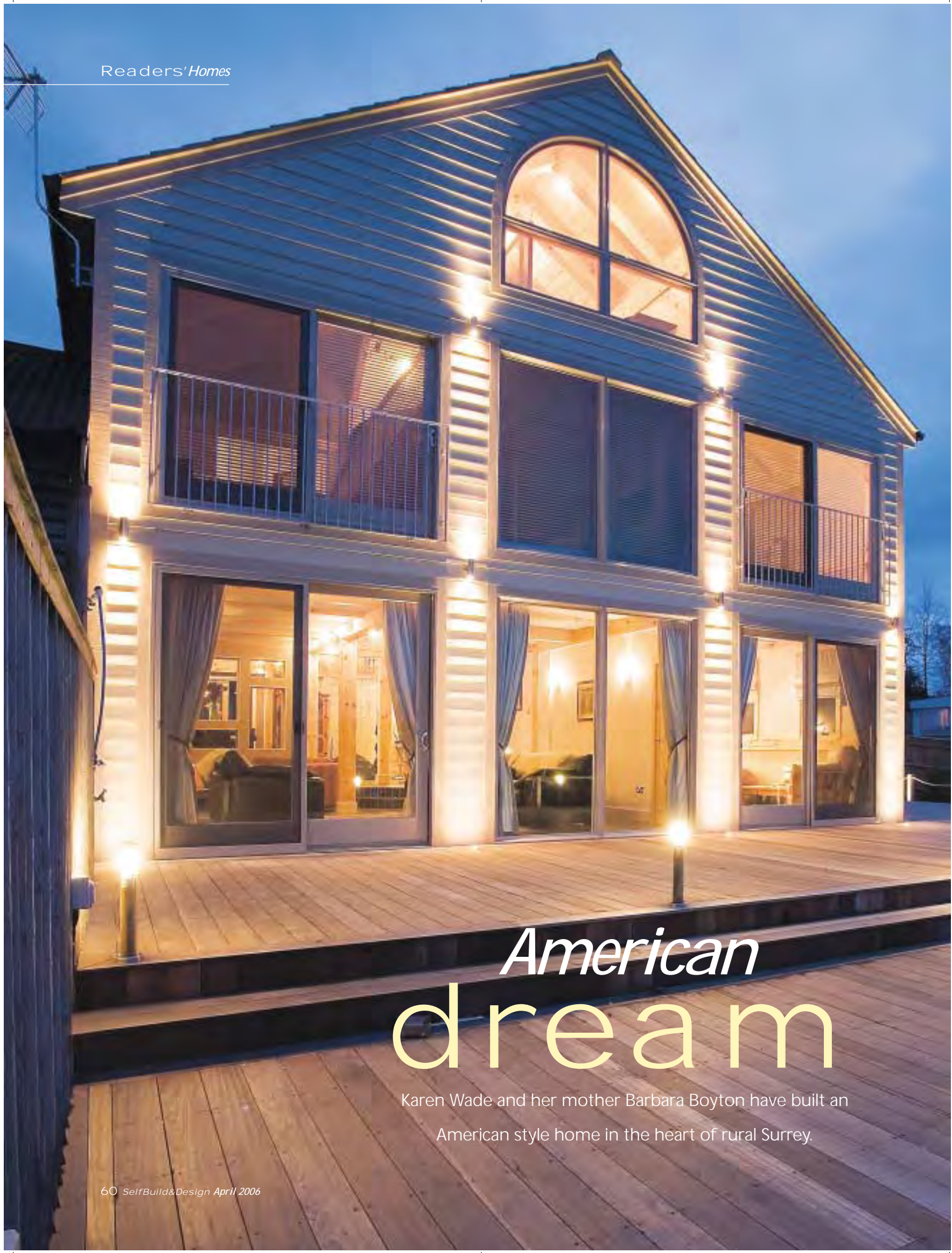


Readers' Homes



American dream

Karen Wade and her mother Barbara Boyton have built an American style home in the heart of rural Surrey.



Words by Ross Stokes Photos by Steve Taylor

Tucked away off a network of quiet country lanes, Wishanger Lodge lies in the heart of rural Surrey where every second property has stables, and the fields and paddocks have more horses than sheep.

From the decking of their new home looking out over the horse paddocks below us, it is easy to understand why Karen Wade decided to move here with her mother, Barbara, and her three children to help further her eldest daughter Lola's prospects as a national showjumper.

But what Karen and Barbara bought three years ago bears little resemblance to the property as it is today. And how they came to build their dream American barn-style home in a quintessential English setting should inspire many would-be selfbuilders in the opportunity starved south east.

"We were living on the Isle of Wight and had decided to move because it was becoming too difficult ferrying horses backwards and forwards," Karen explains. "I had actually been to Farnham and visited all the estate agents and told them my budget. They virtually said forget it, you won't get a property for that price. So we were really seriously looking at properties up north."

But a chance conversation with the agency which was handling the sale of her own property, changed her attention back to Farnham.

"I phoned one day to find out how our house sale was going and asked them if they had anything interesting on their books, as they were local to Farnham. They said there was a funny property which would suit us in terms of location and acreage and stables but the accommodation was fairly non-existent."

The property was on the market with a guide price of £400,000. "We looked at it that day because we



Wishanger Lodge looks particularly impressive at night, because of the extensive lighting. The new deck provides a perfect party setting.

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Above: Beneath the blue limestone flooring is underfloor heating, powered by an oil-fired boiler.

Above right: The main bedroom has a mezzanine bathroom.

happened to be on the mainland and I immediately decided that we definitely should have it. The view was stunning, the area was stunning, and I knew that whatever you spent on the property you would get back."

Karen and Barbara co-owned their existing home, and had renovated several previous properties before so the prospect of buying what was essentially a series of semi-derelict outbuildings with accommodation above wasn't as daunting as it may have been.

The property had been part of the Wishanger Estate, which had been split up and sold to a single buyer who didn't want the stables. Buying the property proved less than straightforward, though, as the vendor lived next door and, perhaps understandably, was very particular about who he sold it to. Karen and Barbara eventually bought the property in August 2003, more than eight months after their first visit.



"The stables were in a complete state of disrepair," Karen recalls. "The living accommodation was literally the first floor. There were a couple of bedrooms, a bathroom, a corrugated tin roof, with straw for insulation."

"And lots of mice," laughs Barbara.

They did have a bathroom and hot water, though, and they installed a wood burner which was to be their main heat source for the next two years, while planning permission went through.

Karen and Barbara had initially thought about renovating the existing property, but soon realised it was beyond repair. They fancied a barn-style home to suit the location, and they had always liked American houses, so when Barbara saw an advertisement for Timberpeg Homes in a magazine, she decided to give them a call.

"I was very impressed by Barbara," recalls Jonathan Cobb, from Timberpeg Homes UK. "I jumped straight into my car to see the plot for myself."



Jonathan is trained in Timberpeg's method of design, manufacture and building, and he was able to sit down with Karen and Barbara and sketch out some initial ideas.

Although Timberpeg has over 50 standard designs, almost all of the post and beam frames they deliver are custom designed to meet specific lifestyle, budget and site requirements.

Karen was quite specific about what she wanted, not least an open plan airy interior, with at least four bedrooms for Barbara and her three daughters Lola, then aged 16, Gemma 12 and Eliza 10, as well as Barbara.

After this initial consultation, Jonathan started doing his own research and contacted local architect Elspeth Beard after being impressed with one of her projects which he'd seen on Channel 4's *Grand Designs*. He went to see Elspeth armed with a 'section' of a Timberpeg house so she could see for herself the company's method and quality of construction.

Timberpeg post and beam homes are built with large vertical timbers (posts) and horizontal timbers (beams) which are joined using mortise and tenon joints to form a structural framework. The exterior shell is then built around the outside of the frame, leaving the frame itself exposed internally. Aside from the post and beams, no interior partitions are required to support the upper floors or roof so the interior can be left completely open or divided into smaller rooms.

This method of construction naturally lends itself to open plan living with vaulted ceilings and cathedral spaces.

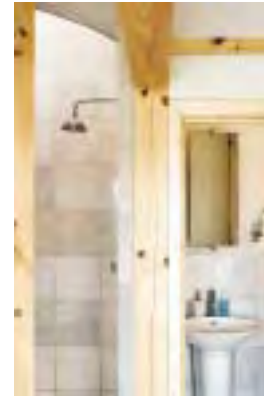
Elsbeth visited the site to discuss Karen and Barbara's requirements before submitting a detailed planning application. This was rejected on the grounds of size, rather than style, which prompted a rethink. The internal layout was rearranged, and Barbara's bedroom and en-suite reduced in size.

Planning permission was finally granted in early 2005 and Jonathan was able to place the order with

Above: The spacious, light interior is bordering on minimalist.

Above left: The contemporary style kitchen has granite work surfaces.

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Above: The post and beam frame, exposed timber cladding, and cathedral living spaces add to the barn-like feel of Wishanger Lodge.

Right: The American style Wishanger Lodge has been designed to blend in with the Surrey countryside.



Timberpeg for the frame, based on Elspeth's drawings. The frame cost \$142,000, and a \$4000 deposit was paid for Timberpeg to produce a full set of CAD working drawings. By March, Barbara and Karen had signed a contract, with the first delivery scheduled for May.

Timberpeg supplies all the basic components of the build, including the frame, insulation, exterior cladding, roofing, doors and windows (through American company Andersen), which are prepared to individual specifications and shipped directly to the building site.

In the meantime, local builder Simon Thayer agreed to project manage the build in his spare time. The block and beam foundations were prepared for the timber frame which duly arrived just as Lola and her mother were preparing to go to The Horse Show.

"We were away from the Wednesday to the Sunday and when we got back the frame was up," Karen recalls.

The frame is made from eastern white pine, a sustainable Grade A timber, and mortise and tenoned with oak pegs.

Bob Britton, one of Timberpeg's technical staff from America, flew in to supervise the erection of the frame by a local crew.

"We were away from the Wednesday to the Sunday and when we got back the frame was up"

"They loved working on it," says Jonathan about the crew who took just 28 days to complete the external shell, before moving onto the internal drylining.

Externally the frame is clad with cedar clapboard, pre-painted summerhouse beige, a colour which Karen selected from a brochure to blend in with the existing paint work in the yard.

Internally, the timber cladding has been left unpainted to complement the impressive post and beam frame, with the overall sense of space and light further enhanced by the vaulted ceiling and double height Andersen windows in the entrance hall and dining room.

The build took just 14 weeks, though the workmen took the entire month of July off for holiday. The total cost was around £230,000, with £11,000 of that allocated to lighting alone. This lighting extends onto the new decked area, making it ideal for parties and social gatherings in the summer - something Karen and her mother are looking forward to, now the house is finally finished.

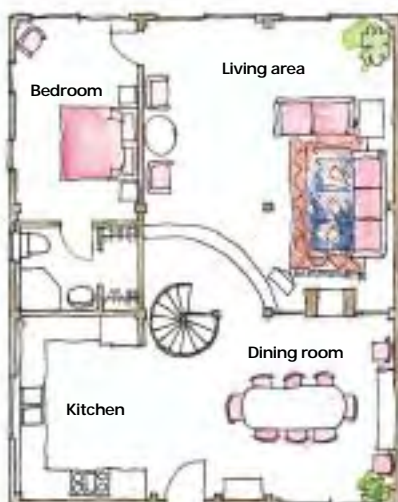
"We've always got people calling in, and we owe a lot of people return hospitality," she says. In the meantime, Karen is pleased with her new American home which she describes as truly individual. And being virtually maintenance free it will give her more time to devote to her daughters and their horses.



Contacts

Timberpeg (Kit home supplier):
01727 823032, www.timberpeg.co.uk

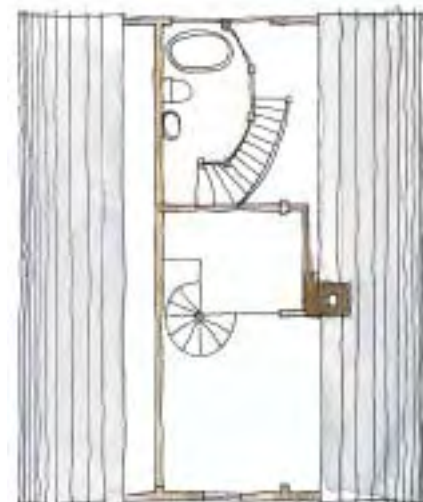
Ground floor



First floor



Loft



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Pics: Jonathan Cobb



The old building before work.



Demolished!



New foundations are put in



Timber frame arrives on site.



The rafters.



June 1, 10am



June 1, 1pm



June 1, 5pm

Wishanger timeline



June 2, 10am



June 3, 3pm



June 2, 11am



June 3, 5pm



June 7



June 7



June 10



June 10



June 17



June 20



June 29



June 29



July 6



Mid July



Mid August



Mid September