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The Daily Telegraph Individual Homes Builder of the Year Awards

OUR awards attracted entries from the creators of the best, most imaginative and stylish new houses in the country. The idea is to provide recognition and encouragement for people who are not satisfied with mass-produced houses.

These people take a pride in their environment and have made a significant contribution to it.

Until we started the competition their work went unrecognised. Architectural prizes were for big public projects, not real houses.

The competition has grown over the past three years and is now established as the showcase for homes that people have either built or crafted for themselves, with entries ranging from pretty thatched cottages to hi-tech fantasy homes.

It is not necessary to

have done all the work yourself. Some people employ a builder to do the lifting and fitting, while others find a romantic ruin and do everything themselves. But everyone who entered had recently completed a home they care about.

Our partner in this competition, *Individual Homes*, the leading consumer magazine for people who design and build their homes, agrees that the quality this year is much higher than in previous years. In general, the projects are more adventurous and executed with more confidence and flair.

First prize is a week's holiday for two in Venice, including accommodation in a converted 14th-century palace, now a leading hotel. The winners of other categories will receive a bottle of champagne.

Picture: JOHN EDWARD LINDEN



Open plan: this energy-efficient house in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, cost about £300,000 and wins the owners, Elizabeth Monk and Michael Winter (pictured left), a holiday in Venice

Passing the test of character

A woodland house that needs no central heating takes our top prize. **Tom Rowland** reports on the winners

The Overall Winner

ELIZABETH MONK and Michael Winter, aged 34 and 36, from Tunbridge Wells in Kent, have created an elegant house of great originality set in a mature wood.

From the outside it has a slightly Japanese look, with laminated wood beams arranged in pairs to support the roof, and sturdy cross-members. The artistry has been to make the whole building look light and airy.

A full-height wall of glass runs the length of the main living, dining and kitchen areas on the

upper floor and the house has been carefully sited so all of these large glazed panels face south to maximise solar gain and light.

The roof, walls and floors are so well insulated that the house needs no central heating to keep it warm and even on the coldest winter day the heat gain through the coated low-energy double-glazing, backed by a single wood-burning stove, keeps it warm.

On hot summer days, the open windows cool the house.

The roof is covered in copper

which will eventually go green to help the building merge into its surroundings, while rainwater collected from it is stored for household use, making the house virtually self-sufficient.

Only three trees had to be felled to make way for the home. Instead of conventional foundations, concrete pads have been placed between the tree roots, on which stand the legs that support what is a massively strong wooden box.

The structural timbers you can see are glue-laminate beams, but Michael, who is an architect, has developed a timber-frame building system for the house, based on internal wood beams made of

scrap timber. These are cheap, strong and used inside the walls and floors in place of solid timber studs. The cavities are filled with cellulose insulation made from recycled newspapers, an environmentally friendly product that reduces heat loss.

At 2,900 sq ft, the house is double the size of a conventional four-bedroom house, and its high ceilings, bare wood floors and soaring internal spaces create the atmosphere of the very best of contemporary design.

It cost £235,000 to build, which at about £70 per square foot is not cheap, but the price was increased significantly because the

underground water-collection pool had to be built to a high specification to conform to building regulations.

They spotted the woodland site in an auction catalogue and bought it for £65,000. A local joinery company was hired to do the construction work, and the couple managed the project between them. "When we sit on the veranda in the evening and look out over the woods, it all seems worth the effort," says Elizabeth, an accountant.

The home won the most energy-efficient house category and was also unanimously voted the best contemporary house by the judges.

