

# KENT LIFE

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# Life is environmentally friendly in The Boundary House

How Michael Winter created a low energy home for himself and his partner and won an award for his exciting design along the way.

**T**HREE years ago Michael Winter and Elizabeth Monk bought half an acre of woodland along Upper Cumberland Walk, tucked between the Nevill Cricket Ground and the railway line. He wanted to build a 'green' house - to fit in with the wooded setting, with low energy consumption - and within a sensible budget.

Elizabeth concentrated on organising the financial side of the project - she is a chartered accountant - while Michael set about designing the building and managing the many different building contractors. He was able to fit the house into an existing clearing in the wood: only three trees were removed to make room for it.

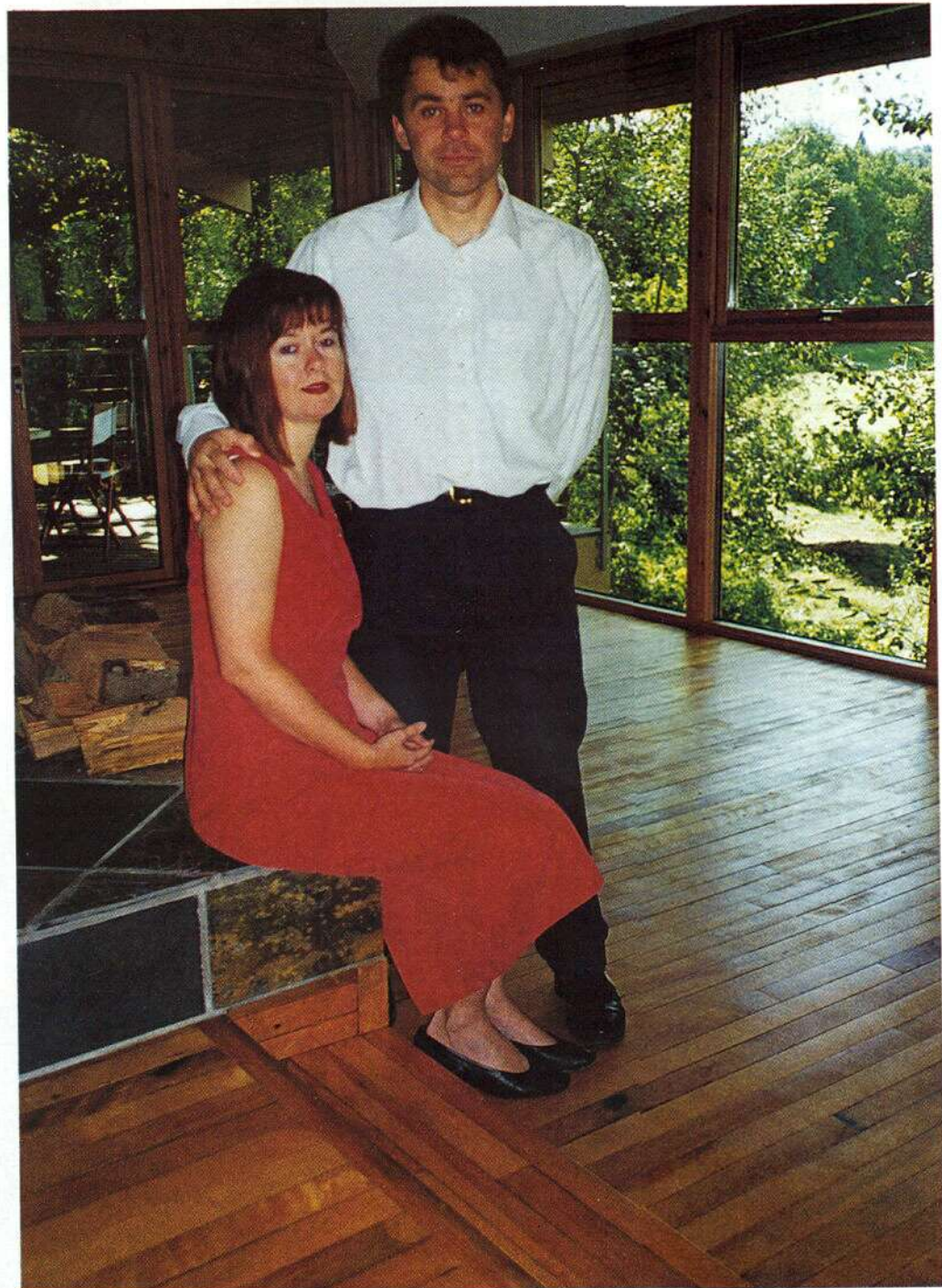
Michael chose a timber frame for The Boundary House. It is raised off the ground and rests on small concrete pads to minimise damage to tree roots. The outside of the house is clad in timber. He commissioned Chris Arnold of Speldhurst to put up the frame and the house's wooden cladding and to do the many pieces of joinery.

The main living areas and bedrooms of the house face south, with a wall of glass and timber framing to get as much solar heat as possible and, on the first floor, to provide a panoramic view of the cricket ground. Deep, overhanging eaves keep the house cool in summer. There are only a few windows on the north side so the heat loss is minimised and passing trains can only be heard faintly.

The house is highly insulated to make the most of this passive gain: the cavity walls are filled with cellulose fibre made from recycled newspaper. Incoming fresh air is warmed by waste heat from the kitchen and bathrooms, processed through a combined heat exchanger and heat pump. Most of the water used is rainwater which drains from the roof into a large tank and is heated by solar panels.

The main living area is on the first floor, giving a superb view over the trees. Because heat rises, it is warmer than the ground floor where the bedrooms and bathrooms are.

Michael and Elizabeth have kept the interior of this upside-down house very simple, using hardwood floor reclaimed from an old school for the living area. The Boundary House, built within a budget of just over



£200,000, has won a Royal Institute of British Architects Downland Design Award (run annually by the South East Region of RIBA) and was described by the design jury as "a spacious and stylish family house which appears to sit in the trees and is

... deeply relaxing to be in."

And Elizabeth's verdict?

"When we first found the site I honestly couldn't see its potential, but the strain of the building works really has been worthwhile. I look forward to getting home every



*Facing page: Michael Winter and Elizabeth Monk at home at The Boundary House in Upper Cumberland Walk, Tunbridge Wells.*

*Above: The decking leads off into the trees that surround the property. The entire house is supported on relatively small concrete pads to minimise damage to the trees.*

*Left: Inside the house.*

night as it is so peaceful.”

The Boundary House is now just about finished - the bathrooms still need some work - and the couple are staying put to enjoy the results of their hard work. Michael is dividing his time between working for a practice in London and designing one-off houses in the Tunbridge Wells area. He is delighted to have won the award.

“It just goes to show that a ‘green’ building can be an acceptable and interesting piece of architecture,” he said.

“Tunbridge Wells does have a reputation for being stuffy and conservative and there has been little new contemporary architecture here. It would be good to think that our house could be the first of several new buildings in the town to be designed with the local ecology and global environmental needs in mind.”