

# Estates Gazette

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**FOCUS: RESIDENTIAL**

## Michael Winter, architect

A narrow and overgrown plot of land, sandwiched between the Hastings-to-London railway line and a cricket pitch, might not sound the most appealing location on which to build a new home. But architect Michael Winter got good vibes about it when he first saw the site.

“We wanted to move out of London, but it took us two-and-a-half years to find a decent site – something that was exciting,” he explains.

Winter, whose work includes commercial projects with Fitzroy Robinson and freelance residential contracts, believes the main asset an architect can offer is the ability to see the potential of a location. And that is what happened when he set eyes on the deserted plot at Tunbridge Wells.

“We wanted to create an ecologically friendly house there,” says Winter, who

paid £65,000 for the land. A subsequent £235,000 in building works included not only building the house but also construction of a road and the supply of services.

It took just nine months for the Winters’ environmentally friendly house to come to fruition. While conventional foundations involve the removal of surrounding trees, the Boundary House is built on stilts. This, combined with its snaking shape, which takes account of existing trees, meant only three trees had to be felled to make way for the house.

It is built with living space upstairs and bedrooms downstairs – living accommodation receiving the benefit of warm air naturally rising. Central heating has been replaced by four alternative heat sources – the passive heat from the sun via an expanse of south-facing triple-glazed windows, a wood-burning stove, electric

towel rails and 18in of roof insulation made from newspapers.

Solar panels provide hot water while rainwater is collected from the roof, passed through a UV treatment system and used for washing and irrigation. “I wanted to prove that it is possible to create a ‘green house’ that is normal looking and contemporary,” says Winter, who designed and project managed the work himself. “I believe the finished object is strikingly modern.”

The house makes use of lots of open-plan space and timber floors – some of which are reclaimed from a school in Dartford.

Since its completion in 1996, the Winters have found themselves in the public gaze. The house has become part of the visiting schedule for sustainability tours, been profiled in environmental magazines, won a *Daily Telegraph* “Individual Homes Builder” award and has even featured on television in a guessing game about property values.



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