

Welcome to the HOUSE OF FUN

Building your own home should be the perfect opportunity to fulfil your wishlist – however wild and wacky.

And this is how the Aylmer family approached creating their holiday home on the North Cornish Coast.

PHOTOGRAPHY: EWEN MACDONALD



FROM the moment you step into the black painted and larch clad building that has become Barford Beach House, you are captured by the playful interiors that manage to balance an eccentricity of style with beautiful finishes.

Barford Beach House is the work of Ken and Illona Aylmer and their family – who number Barford as their third adventure in self-building and by far their most extensive.

Sitting on cliffs close to the surf haven of North Cornwall's famous Widemouth Bay, it features six en-suite bedrooms, a sauna, its own cinema room, a huge master suite featuring a brass bath and bespoke boat inspired wooden bar – and a secret bunker-style games room with its own bar in the cellar. Outside there are views of breaking surf and access to a small secluded beach which can be best enjoyed from the large upstairs terraces linking the bedrooms or the landscaped gardens, or the outdoor wood fired hot tub (protected by a windbreak created from an eight-metre long railway track found in the grounds).

Here there is also an abandoned fishing boat installed into the grounds of the house which previously featured as part of Luke Jerram's Withdrawn art installation project in Bristol's Leigh Woods which doubles as a fun play house. Outside is also

home to a vintage Airstream motorhome decked out as an extra bedroom.

It has taken two years to create this stunning new home which was completed in June 2017. The new property follows a similar footprint of the building originally on the site – a typically uninspiring beige 1930s seaside bungalow just begging to be bulldozed. But the original idea looked very different and had involved keeping some of the existing structure. "It was an old bungalow with a bedroom," says Ken Aylmer. "Our plan was to put another floor on top. When it came to

doing it they were going to have to take off the roof and cut out sections of the wall to put down steel supports - and there would be nothing left."

So they went back to the drawing board to create the stunning new build – although Ken has paid homage to the old building by recreating the original bedroom in the same ground floor spot. A second

floor provides the sleeping space for the family.

Outside the house is constructed with larchwood cladding which will soften to a silver colour and a dramatic black render – something the architect had their doubts about. "We hadn't thought about the outside," admits Ken. "The architect's design had white and timber but when I looked at it, it kind of irked me and I thought of dark blue or even black and there was quite a lot of

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Above: The home has been decorated with an eclectic mix of furniture and accessories such as this repurposed set of chemist's drawers topped with antique cushion mirrors

Left: The black render on the exterior was Ken's idea and admits the architect took some convincing



Above: The cabin bed in one of the children's rooms features its own porthole window from which to enjoy the view

Below: The rear of Barford Beach House looks out on to the Atlantic coast with a balcony running along the first floor



umming and arring with the architect. Now nobody can visualise it any other way – and it really goes with the windows.”

As you might expect for a house built on the coast, there are plenty of opportunities to make the most of the light, from the double height zinc-clad glass entrance atrium where a collection of former 1960s Paris street ‘bauble’ lights have been recommissioned into a stunning central chandelier. These lights, weighing in at 20kg each, were no easy feat to install – and required the patience and ingenuity of builder Jon Hoyle of Host Construction to safely install. “We had talked about a disco ball, but that wasn’t quite right, but I loved the disco-light style. These are so beautiful at night,” explains Ken.

Interior designer Marcus Crane adds: “We always knew that there as going to be something huge there. We went to various places and discovered these at Alex MacArthur Interiors in Rye.”

The specialist antiques and interiors company also supplied the collection of cushion mirrors at the top of the main staircase.

The warm Cornish sunshine floods the ▶



The double height atrium leads you up to the first floor where the family bedrooms are housed

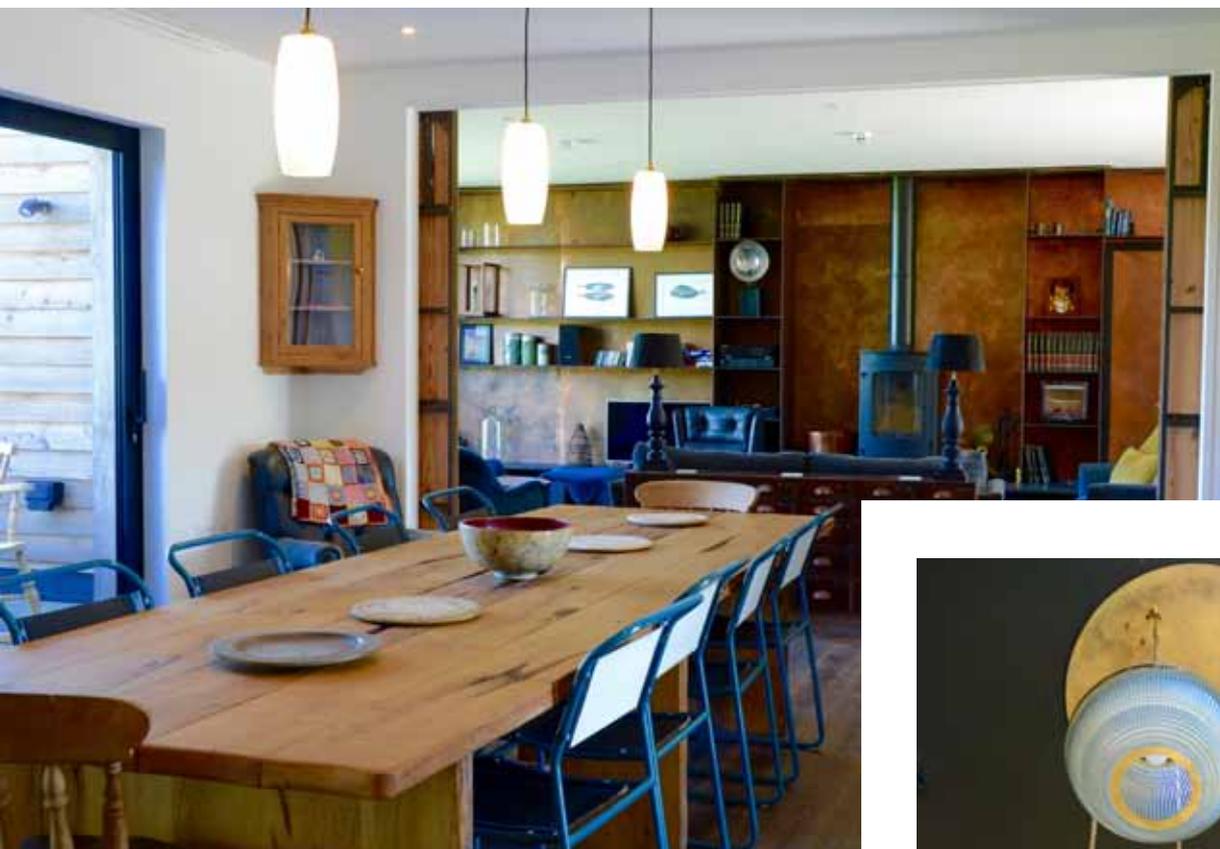
house where glass has been used to its maximum to make the most of all available light from both the north-facing and south-facing views. The warmth that the light creates makes the underfloor heating pretty redundant, although a welcome idea for winter use when even Cornish thermometers can approach zero.

The interior of the building is a reflection of the family who now own it. Much of the eclectic mix of industrial luxe furniture, Moroccan tassel fringed bed throws, to vintage angelpoise lamps and vibrant art work has been sourced by Ken and his family from fairs, antique shops and eBay. While interior designer Marcus brought in fabrics from designers such as Romo, Emin, Lewis & Wood and Savannah.

An open plan living/kitchen area dominates the downstairs, where an unusual copper clad kitchen featuring deep smoked oak flooring leads into the dining space where a 3.5m long 18th century Persian granary oak dining table dominates (it was found in a barn in Iran before being stored in a warehouse). The living area features leopard print fireside seating, and the walls are clad in timber reclaimed from the original house



Every opportunity is taken to bring in the wonderful light from the Cornish coast



Left: Now you don't! The clever disappearing wall can be opened up to create one large downstairs living space

Below: A collection of former 1960s Paris street bauble lights have been recommissioned into a stunning central chandelier



– complete with old holes for pipes. Piano legs have been repurposed as lampstands and a wagon wheel found on the property is now a lamp base. A central feature is the 1970s glass-topped display table which has been brought back to life by ebonising the wood and inserting beautiful blue butterflies.

A unique architectural touch here is the clever disappearing wall that separates the kitchen/dining room from the living room to maximise the versatility of the space.

Upstairs the large master suite (at an impressive 50sq metres) is a real lesson in luxury; there's a giant bed (of course) smothered in sumptuous throws, a seating area and direct access to the balcony which runs across the rear first floor so the sea views are enjoyed to the fullest. In one corner, a decadent bespoke cocktail bar beckons, its construction is reminiscent of the highly-polished hull of an old wooden sailboat. It is the bathroom that brings a gasp – featuring a stunning William Holland brass bath where a porthole window goes through the bedroom to the floor length windows and the view beyond. The bathroom itself is finished in dark local slate, while an old sewing machine stand already owned by the family has been repurposed to hold the sink. "My wife and I have been dragging this old sewing table around for 20 years and have finally found a home for it," he explains.

The idea, says Ken, is that the master suite can double as a self-contained hideaway for the parents. "Our kids are going to start taking this place over and



The master suite is around 50sq metres in size and features wall to wall windows overlooking the sea and features its own seating area set around a wood burner - as well as a bespoke cocktail bar

we can shut ourselves off in this room.”

At the moment, their three children have their own playrooms – and each bedroom has been designed with the young occupant in mind. Their son Leo’s love of the Narnia Chronicles inspired a secret doorway through his wardrobe (past faux fur coats, of course) into the adjoining bedroom and has a cabin bed accessed by a ladder where he can stare out at the view through a perfectly positioned porthole window.

A second bedroom for their daughter Ella, 18, features an en suite bathroom papered in pages from Alice in Wonderland, made during a muck-up day at school, and which is also home to a silver bateau bath. Her sister Scarlet’s room features a four-poster bed created by scaffolding poles.

Part of the wow factor of Barford, is the incredible attention to detail. I find myself stopping awhile to admire the perfect tiling in the en suite bathrooms, the careful positioning of the brass portholes that offer sea views from the beds and bathrooms, and carefully chosen accessories that reflect the family’s tastes.

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Perhaps there is no better space to reflect this taste than the downstairs rooms where the old cellar is now home to a sauna and cinema room (which features a 4K projector and a vintage cinema What’s On show time board). “I’m hoping to change it each time we play a film,” explains Ken who tracked it down.

From here you can access (through a secret tunnel) The Bunker. This secret underground games room/bar with leather banquette seating, retro arcade games – including the original Star Wars game – and a classic pinball machine that Ken used to play in the 1990s. Above the bar sits gold lettering declaring Pleasureland – itself an eBay find by Ken. “It’s totally over the top,” he admits of the room which is also decorated with hundreds of tins of food – in case of emergency. “The kids and I have a thing of what we would do in the event of a zombie apocalypse. So we went along the theme of a bunker. There’s a sound system, a bar with a sink and a fridge, a pool table and a banquette built into the retaining wall.

At a cost of £1.2million, the family have had to recoup the cost through letting it as a luxury rental (find out more from holiday specialist: tregullandandco.co.uk) but the family has refused to compromise on making the house and its contents a reflection of their own tastes. This is a forever home for the Aylmers, even if it’s not currently a permanent one. ♦



Above: The double height zinc-clad glass entrance atrium to Barford Beach House

Below: A sauna and steam room sit in the bottom of the building

Right: Once you’ve relaxed in the sauna and steam room its time to drench yourself an invigorating bucket of cold water

