



COUNTRY Revival

For this, our special 'Homes' edition we have been allowed to take a peek at one of West Wirral's most exquisite redevelopment projects.

This 'labour of love' which is home to well known local couple Bob and Bernie Owens, represents a triumphant collaboration between this visionary couple and some of the regions most talented design, build and restoration experts.....



Bob and Bernie Owens first stumbled upon the rather tired and gloomy looking Hill Farm a couple of years ago. The landmark property, which sits alongside the main Thurston crossroads (now roundabout) dates back to the late 1800's and originally stood in around 100 acres of working farmland. The site was still home to herds of cattle and pigs until just a few years ago when it was bequeathed (in the absence of any living relatives), by its former owner, to a loyal farmworker and favoured charity.

The couple could immediately see the potential of the property, with Bernie claiming an almost 'Love at First Sight' moment. They took a huge risk and put in an offer, knowing that if they failed to get the planning permission they needed,

the property could become a bit of a white elephant.

With one failed attempt at planning behind them, the couple decided to enlist the help of acclaimed local architects, Stephen and Sally Bromilow. Another husband and wife team, the Bromilows could immediately see the potential of the property and helped the Owens realise their dream of creating a unique family home.

The key thing for Bernie and Bob was the absolute need to increase the size of the property significantly - by an additional 50% to be precise. Undaunted, the Bromilow's set about negotiating the complex planning system for them and 12 weeks later received the green light to move forward with the re-development.



Unique Retreat

Such a special building demanded a special approach. Together, the Owens and their architects created a stunningly sympathetic design for the extension of the property; building on the existing style to create a seamless link between the old and the new, whilst giving the family everything they wanted from a dream home.

The Owen's drafted in a team of specialist craftsmen to help with some of the more detailed aspects of the project - no detail was left to chance and the whole project was sympathetically extended and restored by utilising a clever mix of state-of-the-art technology and age

old techniques.

As the whole dwelling was constructed using local sandstone, the new gable wall was re-built using existing materials and all of the external cladding was finished using local, reclaimed stone. The painstaking and highly skilled job was fulfilled by Barnston based stone masons Stone Heaven. John O'Grady and his team are true artisans and specialise in reclaiming stone and re-working it as well as all aspects of architectural stonemasonry. Even the stunning new fireplace in the main living area was built from reclaimed stone, and what a magnificent centrepiece it makes.





Wonderful Windows

The windows and doors also played a huge part in this projects – it was essential the new units reflected the age and character of the property whilst keeping up with modern day standards. Liverpool based specialists M and R joinery were appointed as the key contractors for this aspect of the development because of their unrivalled expertise in the field. The team, who have worked on a number of high profile historic projects across the UK, including a stint working alongside TV's Sarah Beeny on her popular Restoration programme, are sash window and doors specialist, so Hill Farm was just their type of project.

The existing windows were old and fairly innocuous brown UPVC units which really did not sit well with the character of the building. The M and R team made all the windows and door to measure and designed them to be 100% in keeping with the style of the house.

The final box sash windows represent the finest you can buy, combining historic detail with modern day standards for quality and style to last. Completed with a high quality factory paint finish (Bernie chose Farrow and Ball Bone, which the team matched perfectly) every item was sprayed prior to installation for the ultimate finish and efficiency.



The Finishing Touches

As the owner of super-stylish homes and fashion mecca, The Front Room in West Kirby, Bernie really came into her own when adding those all important finishing touches to the house.

From the stunning tumbled limestone floor (Dijon – by Mandarin Stone) to the exquisite bespoke kitchen fitted by Bobby himself, the final look is nothing less than magnificent.

Growing up on The Kings Road in London meant

Bernie was submerged in a melting pot of different influences all of which have impacted on her own unique style. From Vivienne Westwood to her life-time love affair with the Designers Guild Shop, Bernie's terrific eye for style and obsession for detail can be seen throughout the house.

With show-stopping lanterns, super-cool cushions and stunning objet d'art throughout the comfortable somewhat 'French' inspired interior, its no wonder that Bernie, Bob, their family and of course Gorgeous George (the to-die-for dog) plan on making Hill Farm 'home' for years to come.



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When we were approached by Bob and Bernie Owens to look at the extension and refurbishment of their Thurstaston farmhouse, Hill Farm, we thought what an exciting and interesting project to be involved with, and what a fantastic opportunity to work on a local historic landmark.

When, at our first meeting they told us they wanted to more than double the size of the existing property, as well as construct a large double garage in the extensive grounds, we thought it may be tricky to achieve, but we were well up for the challenge.

They had been advised previously, that Planning Permission would not be granted for their proposals, however, their vision and determination meant that they were undeterred, and so asked Bromilow Architects Ltd. to step in and help them achieve their dream.

We were very pleased that a previous client had recommended us to them, and were sure that we could negotiate the complex Planning system for them.

Hill farm is located within the Greenbelt, and so we had to call on our previous experience of achieving greenbelt approvals to help us out. As a practice we also have a very good working relationship with Wirral Borough Council Planning Department,

and so lots of pre-application discussions were had with them. Some encouraging, and some not so, but we remained focused on achieving Bob & Bernie's vision.

We needed to approach the design of the proposal differently than a standard house extension, which Planning Policy usually requires to be set back from the main existing house. Due to the large increase, we felt that the building should not look like it had been extended, but appear to be a larger version of it's original self, and remain looking like the stone farmhouse that it always had been for 200 years.

We worked through this design approach alongside Bob and Bernie during our design sessions with them in their sunny garden. We always have initial design and briefing sessions with clients very much involved, usually around their dining table during the early stages of a project, with pencils, marker pens, and lots of tracing paper! These enjoyable sessions help us to get to know clients better, we learn what their likes and dislikes are, their style and tastes become evident early on. This method enables clients to have a bigger input into the design process, and feel more involved. It also prevents abortive design work, which sometimes happens when initial concepts are drawn back in the office

without the client being there.

Because of the large additions that were required, we needed to call on our knowledge of the recently updated Permitted Development legislation. This is when limited development is permitted without the requirement for Full Planning Approval. This small allowance, as well as the main Greenbelt policy for house extensions, enabled us to achieve the large additions required.

We were delighted when the Planning Approvals came through after a very smooth consultation process, and Bob & Bernie were thrilled that they could now make a start on the building work.

A very considered and well thought through solution, time invested during the crucial design process and an in-depth knowledge of Planning Policy and Processes are what have made this a very successful project. Great clients who knew what they wanted to achieve, had the confidence to pursue it and who were receptive to the design process made this project a joy to work on.

Together, we have created a fabulous family home which is both modern and contemporary, yet retains the essential character that makes this historical farmhouse the landmark building that it is.

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The Architects View