

this picture and right The almost-cubic house is a mix of slate, crisp white render, timber boarding and glazing. The aim was to create a simple yet unique response to its site in an old slate quarry with magnificent views of the surrounding fields and sea



DARING DI^{TO BE}FFERENT



When her family's beloved holiday home burned down, Emma Abdy Collins took the bold decision to replace it with an unapologetically contemporary building. Their new house is an eco-friendly show-stopper whose design credentials managed to win over reluctant planners Words Katherine Sorell Photography Chris Tibbs

What would you do if the pretty holiday home your family adored burned to the ground – walk away in despair? Rebuild it exactly as before? Or go for a brand-new, eco-friendly design that makes the most of its remarkable setting? Daringly, Emma Abdy Collins opted for the latter, and the result is a phoenix-like triumph arising from an appalling disaster.

As the crow flies, Camel Quarry House is about halfway between Padstow and Wadebridge on the north Cornwall coast. It overlooks the cycle path

between the two towns, but is, for cars at any rate, well off the beaten track. Negotiating high-hedged, winding country lanes and then bumping across five fields certainly builds up the anticipation before the isolated property comes into view. And when it does, boy, is it impressive. A simple, almost cubic shape, composed mainly of slate below and glass above, it is undoubtedly contemporary yet also intrinsically sympathetic to its surroundings, with a strong, uncomplicated form paying respect to the somewhat anarchic combination of →

'I saw this design as a true vernacular response, a tailored solution to this unique site'





rolling green fields with ruined stone walls, water-filled quarries and heaps of slate piled all around – a striking reminder of the area's industrial past.

Emma bought the original property, a former quarry manager's house, in 1994. Until the fire in 2002 she and her husband Jamie visited frequently with their six children, so she knew exactly what she wanted from the new build: a practical, low-energy house with lots of bedrooms, a large living/dining/kitchen space, a huge laender, a hidden utility area and an attached but separate granny flat. Emma had saved the slates from the old house and aimed to re-use them, but she wanted a completely different look. 'I didn't want it to remind me of what had happened,' says Emma, 'and I certainly didn't want a mock cottage. The council had given the impression that it wouldn't be averse to a modern building.' Having come across architect Fiona McLean's work in one of the national papers, she asked for an initial drawing. 'I didn't give her a design brief because I wanted to see what she would create without any interference. She came down with a sketchbook and drew a square house with a central staircase and lots of glazing and we went from there. I obviously had lots of input, but the house is Fiona's baby.'

Using the same footprint and roof height as the original, Fiona designed a house with six bedrooms, plus a self-contained flat, on the ground and first

left and above
The second floor living space is glazed virtually all the way round and furnished with neutral colours that don't distract from the incredible views. Floor lamps positioned at regular intervals provide atmospheric and flexible lighting. Full-height doors to the terrace fold right back so that the space flows seamlessly.

right and below
In contrast with the ground and first floors, with their separate, more private rooms, the huge living area/kitchen at the top of the house is completely open plan. The windows are triple-glazed so it's a comfortable family space whatever the weather. The oak floor and wooden Venetian blinds keep the look warm





left and below
left The pale neutrality of the rest of the second-floor space allows for the dramatic statement of a black kitchen. The cupboards are painted, the island unit has a worktop made of concrete and the splashback is granite, with a matching black range cooker
below Emma and her son Edmond

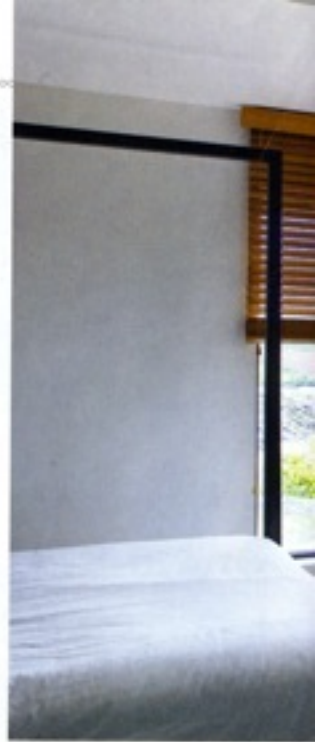


floors, tucked coily inside massively insulated masonry walls. On the second floor she floated a huge open-plan living space, with a kitchen at one end and an outdoor terrace with built-in barbecue running along one side, and featuring triple-glazed doors replacing virtually every wall to give uninterrupted views of fields, sea and sky. Eco features were a key part of the design: photovoltaic cells on a small section of pitched roof for electricity, ground source heat pumps for underfloor heating and provision of drinking water from the property's own spring.

'To have recreated the old house would have been impossible,' says Fiona. 'Its replacement would have needed modern building standards and a



'We'd been coming here for a long time, so I knew what we needed. The house is incredibly functional'





copy would have been a sham,' says Fiona. 'A vernacular-style replacement would just have been a superficially familiar, soulless pastiche. I saw this design as a true vernacular response, a tailored solution to this unique site, responding to it in a fresh and creative way, built to modern standards and integrating low-energy technologies.'

Then, another blow. The planning authority, out of the blue, turned down the application on stylistic grounds. 'It was hugely stressful,' recalls Emma. 'But what was lovely was that not one single person (in the locality) was against it, and lots of people wrote in favour of the project.' Emma appealed and at the two-day public inquiry, Deyan Sudjic, director of the Design Museum, spoke in her support, backed up with letters from neighbours and leading architects, including John Pawson, Tim Mather and Alfred Munkembeck. The refusal was overturned and, at last, she could go ahead with the work.

In all, the build took the best part of two years, with Emma and Fiona project managing between them, Emma travelling down from the family's main home in Gloucestershire at least once a week. It went relatively smoothly, apart from teething problems with leaks in the terrace, and the render – a special mix that doesn't require painting – being wrongly applied and falling off. At the same time, Emma employed renowned landscape designer Mary Reynolds to design a wild and magical garden, which features spiralling stone walls, grassy mounds and beds planted with sea thrift, as well as a hot tub, fire pit and bicycle store. Tim thrilled →

far left A corridor bisects the building, with glass panels at each end to introduce natural light. A tall, narrow bookcase draws attention to the height of the space **above and left** All the bedrooms have simple white walls, timber floors and huge windows. In some, a freestanding bath is used as a stylish feature – an easy way to give each room individuality

right and below
The busy terrace has an inbuilt barbecue plus different types of seating to provide varied areas for groups to congregate: from benches to wooden chairs, to soft sofas and beanbags



with the garden,' says Emma. 'It's absolutely authentic to the house. Although there isn't a single straight line in the garden and hardly a curve in the house.'

Inside, everything necessary for coastal living with a large family has been provided, from a butler's lift to take the shopping upstairs to a deep sink for washing wet suits. 'We'd been coming here for a long time before, so I knew exactly what we needed,' says Emma. 'The house is incredibly functional.' But while the detailing of the entire house is subtle – slate floors downstairs, crisp white walls, slender doorways, concealed cupboards – the top floor unashamedly steals the show, its breathtaking views providing a year-round, irresistible draw. The made-to-measure kitchen features black-painted cupboards and shelves, while Emma, an artist and interior decorator, has furnished the →

