

BuildingFutures
AWARDS
2013

BUILDING TRUST



Award Category: Design Excellence sponsored by Sika

Project: Crowbrook House, Hunsdon

Client: Brigid and Mark de Rivaz

Project Team: Knox Bhavan Architect LLP, Gavin Charles, Philiam Construction & Development Ltd. John Graham & Stephan Piasecki, Fluid Structures Ltd, Paul Bastick Associates, Ian Thomson & Company Ltd.



Crowbrook House replaces a poorly constructed 1970s bungalow. The house is set within a category 1 conservation area and its immediate neighbouring building is a Grade II listed building. Materials had to be carefully chosen to be appropriate and sympathetic to the surrounding historic fabric of the village.

Crowbrook House is a modern and energy efficient reinterpretation of the local vernacular, using standard building components and traditional materials. Described as a 'simple house made special', it addresses disability without making it an issue. The key design parameters set at the outset were minimal circulation space; a close relationship to the garden; composition of views; use of simple materials; careful detailing of simple local vernacular materials in a contemporary way; sliding storey height doors and fixed glazing to achieve a sense of space and light, and bulk and massing in sympathy with its local context.

At the centre of the home are the kitchen, dining and living room occupying a free-flowing single space with a raised ceiling area that catches the light and increases the volume of the space. Large sliding doors open this space out onto the garden creating an inside/outside space in the summer with lots of light and views in the winter.

Crowbrook House has been carefully orientated to make full use of passive solar gain whilst reducing heat loss and solar glare. The north wall is heavily insulated with no openings whilst the southern elevation has an overhang to shade windows and protect against excessive solar gain in summer months. In the winter, when the sun is low in the sky, light comes streaming in through the south facing windows.

The building has a timber frame and breathing wall system, similar to lime plaster in historic buildings, to maintain a constant humidity; allowing the building to move/breathe; reducing the risk from condensation, and creating a healthy environment. With LED lighting, low energy water devices, PV and solar thermal panels feeding under floor heating, water butts, and a planted green roof, energy efficient construction and orientation benefits are boosted further.

Judges comments:

“This is a delightful and truly inspirational house in a quiet village setting. The house is a contemporary interpretation of traditional forms and materials which sits happily within the mature garden belonging to the 1970s bungalow that it replaced. The house provides flexible accommodation on a single level to meet the mobility needs of the client, and in so doing creates a series of light and airy spaces that flow together to make a satisfying and uplifting whole. The detailing and use of materials is immaculate throughout, and has been carried through with a calm and careful logic that never ceases to impress. This could be the best house to have been built in Hertfordshire in recent years.”