

DETAILS

What A new-build house in a walled garden, integrated with a series of refurbished 19th-century bothies
Where East Neuk, Fife

NO BOUNDARIES

Like the ancient walled garden that surrounds it, this stunning contemporary home blends different colours, textures and shapes to form a contrasting yet beautifully harmonious whole

Words **Fiona Reid** Photography **Liz Lees**

"WE WERE INTERESTED IN THE SENSE OF SPACE YOU GET IN A NEW YORK LOFT AND LIKED THE IDEA OF BRINGING THAT TO A SCOTTISH GARDEN"

The weathered stone wall is incorporated into the main body of the new zinc-clad house. Through the wall and into the rebuilt bothies are the bedrooms and the guest wing. The reshaped and revived garden is flourishing, along with its famous roses



"The whole idea was to have a garden house, with the house just flowing into the garden," says Peter as he recalls the earliest discussions that he and his wife Bettina had with architect Philip Flockhart of Morris and Steedman Associates. The couple were in the fortunate position of having acquired a prime site in Fife's East Neuk: a mature walled garden that was home to a small cottage and a series of greenhouses, with a row of 19th-century bothies on the reverse side of the wall.

When it became clear that the cottage was so poorly built that the best option was to tear it down and start again, Peter and Bettina were faced with the exciting – and challenging – prospect of designing a home that would integrate the bothies, while creating a new living space that would sit within this beautiful garden and complement it.

"One of the concepts we liked was a loft," says Peter, "the sense of space you get in a New York loft apartment, and the idea of

bringing that to a Scottish garden." Likewise, Philip recalls the couple discussing barn-like spaces where, again, volume was key. The couple lived in the United States (although they have family connections with the UK; indeed, Bettina has known this garden since she was a child), and had grown accustomed there to an indoor-outdoor lifestyle where the boundary between the interior and exterior was blurred. The question was how to make this work in Fife with its rather different climate, and how to integrate the new elements with the existing structures.

Arriving at the house today and noting the Douglas Fir cladding at the entrance juxtaposed against both the old stone wall and the patinated zinc of the new building (which extends above the wall, wrapping over it to meet the slate roof of the bothies), there is already a sense that old and new are cohabiting very nicely indeed.

This is especially apparent once in the garden, which has ▶



INTERIOR STYLE

Understated and eclectic, with contemporary furniture and classic pieces, underpinned by a love of natural materials and the colours of the earth and landscape

[Opposite and below] The tranquil living area has a Barbas woodburner set in Portland stone. A pair of Eames stools sit by the fire. Rugs from Morocco and Iran and original Jieldé lamps add a warm, personal touch



been reshaped with the help of Chris Kusske, a garden designer friend from Connecticut. It's said that a picture is worth a thousand words, but what a picture can't give you is smell. The softness of this garden balances the architecture's graphic quality, and this is enhanced by the perfume from the abundant roses that Bettina and Peter inherited here. This garden doesn't just look soft, it smells soft too. It makes a stunning backdrop to the house.

"It's a great skill of Philip's to fit such a modern building into an old space," Peter acknowledges. Credit also goes to Elie-based contractor Kenneth Garland, whom the couple employed after local recommendations. As Bettina says: "Local friends recommended him highly, and it's to Kenny's great credit that he took the job on."

The choice of materials was key. Philip specified Anthra-Zinc – a pre-weathered zinc developed by VM Zinc where the surface treatment gives the material a patina immediately after rolling. "It's a warm, charcoal-umber colour, which looks good in the garden," Philip observes.

Caithness stone was used to form a wide terrace around the building, and the same finish continues inside, enhancing the indoor-outdoor flow. The slabs form the floor of the kitchen and study areas that bookend this open-plan living space, and frame the Douglas Fir super-wide floorboards that define the sitting and dining areas. These Dinesen boards are beautiful (architect John Pawson used them in his London home): the timber is



prepared with lye, then treated with white soap, creating a subtle bleached effect that hints at a Scandinavian aesthetic.

The light is striking, both as it pours in from the front south-facing elevation, where sliding doors open on to the terrace, and from a bank of roof lights that extend along the building, forming the meeting point between this new element and the rear (existing) wall. Although the couple plan to hang artworks here, as it is this wall becomes a piece of art every time it rains, as the reflected raindrops cast shadows from the roof lights above. ▶



The second surprise is the volume of this space, which feels even larger in the flesh. “I’m always quite wary of large volumes to live in,” says Philip, “so we placed the study, the fireplace and kitchen as objects within the canopy, to establish a normalised ceiling height. You get the sense of those elements anchoring you within the space.”

The fireplace wall between the sitting and dining area houses back-to-back Barbas woodburning stoves, and both are framed in Portland stone. The wall in the dining area is clad in those same Douglas Fir boards – an inspired touch by Philip that enhances the welcoming and enveloping feel of this space.

The kitchen is by Bulthaup, and Peter and Bettina chose its clay colour for its warmth. “It’s earthy and natural,” Bettina

observes. A Stateside designer friend suggested the high counter behind the sink (“It hides the mess when we’re entertaining,” says Bettina), while industrial-style stools, found in an antique shop in America, reflect the organic aesthetic. “The word ‘organic’ is exactly what we were striving for,” agrees Bettina.

The couple relished the chance to furnish the house from scratch and took time to source the right pieces – the Vaughan pendant over the dining table took two years to find, for example, and its arrival signalled the completion of the house in 2009. As Philip says: “Peter is interested in detail, while Bettina is interested in aesthetics and comfort; she tempered our architectural ways and softened the spaces. That’s why it’s such a nice house.”

Bettina did most of the sourcing in the States and the style ▶

BEST BITS

“There’s a tranquillity here that’s really extraordinary,” says Peter.

“I love being so connected to the garden,” says Bettina. “Being able to spend hours and hours in my garden is a joy.”



[Left] The Bulthaup kitchen was chosen for its earthy, organic colour. The stools were found in an American antique shop. [Above and below] Paintings and objets d’art are on display throughout the house





[Above] The open-plan kitchen-living area in the guest wing reflects the style of the main house – albeit on a more compact scale. [Left] Wood panelling and stone flooring give the vestibule an earthy feel. [Below] The windows show how thick the walls are in the old part of the house



is eclectic and understated. There are also rugs from Iran and Morocco and classic Jieldé floor lamps, alongside easy sofas and a coffee table that reminds Bettina of Giacometti's sculptures. The dining table, a commission, was made from timber from an elm tree in Pennsylvania that predated the American Revolution, "so we have a piece of old Americana here," Bettina says.

One of the first pieces she bought was a 1950s leather sofa that is now in her study, which she found in a London market before the house was designed. As Peter says: "That's when we knew we were going to have a modernist house." The artworks are by friends, including a sculpture by Sir Anthony Caro in Bettina's study. This interior was never about 'trends': rather it is reflective of the couple's mature and confident tastes.

The living space may be the highlight, but the former bothies (which now form the master suite, guest bedroom with en-suite and Peter's study, plus a utility room, larder and WC) were as carefully considered. Muted wall colours from Farrow & Ball and Zoffany provide a backdrop for Bettina's old and new pieces, and the aesthetic here references Scandinavia and New England with painted wooden panelling and seagrass flooring.

There is also a self-contained guest wing within the bothies, created from the former potting shed, and the deep-set windows illustrate the thickness of these stone walls, contrasting with the lightness of the wraparound glazing in the living space. This is a house of contrasts, yet the effect is entirely harmonious. "It was a team project," says Bettina. "The more we got into it, the more passionate we became. It's a privilege to build something new." ■

**Morris and Steedman Associates, 0131 226 6563,
www.msastudio.co.uk**