



Above: Colin's compact kitchen, complete with tiled floor and island-style chopping board

With more than 40 years building experience under his belt, Colin Evans couldn't have been more qualified to build his own house. He had carefully restored his current home, a Grade II Listed watermill, over a period of 14 years, but this would soon be too large for him as he was about to be divorced. With his life changing, he decided to plan a home in which to enjoy his retirement.

Fortunately, Colin had the luxury of owning a suitable plot already. "I bought the plot in June 1999 for £123,000," he recalls. "This included an existing cottage and 10 acres of adjacent field." At the time, he'd been warned that he was paying over the odds for the land, but since then he's made the pleasant discovery that nearby sites that are less than half an acre are selling for similar prices. "I knew what I was doing," says Colin. "I've been buying land for long enough to know a good deal when I see one."

Colin was drawn to the site because it hadn't been touched for 40 years and some of the hedges were 9m (30ft) high. He recognised the potential of the plot and was excited at the idea of having lots of open space around him. He also knew that replacing the cottage with a new house would be the most realistic option. "The cottage was really beyond repair and I knew it would be easier to knock it down, start again and capitalise on the land," he says.

Oak-framed design

Wrexham Borough Council would only allow a new house that had a similar footprint to that of the existing cottage, plus a little extra by virtue of permitted development rights, so Colin had to take this into account when drawing up the

plans. The architect's first set of drawings resulted in a three-bedroom home with a family bathroom and an en suite to the master bedroom. There would also be a kitchen and larder, study, cloakroom and utility room. To maximise the potential of the property, Colin decided to make the sitting room two storeys high, which would make the room more impressive and allow for a galleried landing, without increasing the overall area.

Having always been a great lover of wood, Colin knew that he wanted to build an oak-framed house. "I'd always adored timber and had seen a few oak-framed houses built throughout my career. As time went on, I knew that no other method of construction would do," he says.

He did some research and contacted two design and package companies, Border Oak and Welsh Oak Frame, for initial consultations. "I was impressed with both companies, but I felt that Welsh Oak Frame was more suited to me because it was smaller, more personal and had completed a few more houses around this area," says Colin, adding that his professional relationship with the company was excellent throughout the build.

After deciding to use Welsh Oak Frame to design and supply the structure for his house, Colin asked its design team to start drawing up some more plans for him. He was pretty flexible about the look and layout of the building, but wanted get as much out of the plot as he could. "We knew that permitted development hadn't been used up, so we hedged our bets a little and drew up plans for a house slightly larger than the cottage," he says.

There was a contingency plan in case permission was denied, says Colin. "We'd drawn in a utility room which I >