

From dated to dramatic

How a sad, dated bungalow became a stunning contemporary family home





Potential is a word that's bandied about freely in property circles. Estate agents use it all the time to make less-than-perfect houses seem more desirable

When Sara and Dave Fitzharris viewed a 1930s bungalow in a Kent village, it had potential written all over it – but they needed a large helping of imagination, too, to persuade them to buy it.

Says Sara: "We had been living in Canada for six years and moved back to the UK for family reasons in 2013. We rented a property at first, then looked around for something to buy.

"When we first saw the bungalow, it was a bit of a mess. It had four small bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and two bathrooms, but it was in a poor decorative state and in need of a lot of TLC.

"There was no insulation, and the doors and windows were very badly fitting. You could actually see daylight through the bottom ledge of the patio doors in the living room!

"Despite all that, we could see the potential and we loved the position and outlook. It's great for getting the fast train link at Ashford, and having a livery yard next door was a real bonus as we have two ponies."

The couple employed an architect, and ideas for the property slowly developed as they explored their options. "Luckily, there were no problems with planning permission," says Sara, "probably because most of the major changes were happening at the back of the house.

"When it came to finding a builder, I googled Checkatrade for local companies, then did some research before contacting some of them. There was no contest though. As soon as I met Lee Fletcher, Company Director of LJ Fletcher Builders, I liked him and felt he was very honest and helpful.

"My first instincts were right. Lee and his team did a brilliant job and gave us invaluable advice along the way, although he never forced his views on us."

The groundwork started in September 2014, and building work commenced in March last year. And like any major building project, it was quite disruptive.

"We were down to using just a couple of rooms at the worst part. Our son had to move out and we used a caravan for everything except sleeping and showering.

"The disruption was hard but the most challenging aspect of the whole project was the sheer number of decisions we had to make!"

The building work took seven months, with another three allowed for Sara to decorate, although she still hasn't quite finished. It overran by four weeks but came in pretty much on budget.

Today, that dated bungalow is unrecognisable. It has been replaced by a contemporary home that's perfect for family life. There's a spacious entrance hall that leads to a big open-plan living/dining/kitchen/family room with a pyramid ceiling and skylight, and a wall of bifold doors overlooking the garden and countryside, filling the large space with light. There's also a snug/living room, utility room and study. The master bedroom has an en suite, a large walk-in closet/second study, and doors leading to the garden. There are two further generous double bedrooms, one with an en suite, plus a family bathroom.

Sara and Dave are thrilled with the result. "My favourite space is the open-plan family room," says Sara. In fact, my only real regret is that we didn't have enough money to have made the bungalow even bigger!"