

Robert and his partner Alan first moved to their bijou home in Kenilworth, Warwickshire back in 1977. Their home had served them well with both partners out to work all day, but with retirement fast approaching, the house was starting to feel a bit too small for full time living.



For a number of years they had wrestled with the idea of moving or extending. They were happy where they were but the prospect of extending filled them with trepidation, as their home was surrounded by close neighbours forming a mews. They also felt certain that their beautiful garden and immaculate house was bound to feel the full impact of any building works and so the decision was delayed until a chance occurrence

in the summer of 2007.

Robert had gone to drop some music off a few roads away and was struck with what he described as “a stunning remodel of a perfectly ordinary 1960’s semi.” He plucked up courage and knocked on the door to find out who had done the design and building work. He said, “It was amazing because being a semi, you were able to see what it looked like before and after and yet it sat perfectly in keeping with its next door neighbour. So it was the owner of the 1960’s remodel who put us on to The Design Centre, and that is how we first met David Smith.



“When David came to see me, he took the trouble to really understand how we wanted to use the additional space and we had it in our minds at that point about a possible loft conversion to give us an additional room. But it was dining space we really needed as we loved entertaining and when guests came around we were squeezing them into our sitting room. David also appreciated the efforts we had gone to with the garden and suggested making the garden integrate with the house by creating a garden room, which would double up as a place to house our music and books. We were lucky in that the garden is fairly substantial and could accommodate the proposed extension.”



David Smith is a builder, turned designer and planning consultant. Rarely do you get someone who has complete knowledge and experience of developing the concept right through to completion. Rules on permitted development then allowed a small extension of three by three metres without the need for planning permission, which could have been tricky given the close proximity of the neighbours. Robert and Alan

wanted someone who could offer a complete project management service as well as provide input into the interior finishes.

“The problem with many garden rooms is that it can make the room they extend from quite dark. But as Robert and Alan’s sitting room already had limited natural light I incorporated a glazed link which allowed substantially more light into the sitting room than was originally the case and allowed the garden room to be closed off to recoup the cosy atmosphere on dark winter nights,” said David.

“It was a stroke of genius and so too was the lantern effect glazing around the perimeter of the roof of the garden room which added additional height to the room giving an impression of being much bigger than it actually is,” added Robert.



The conceptual design was finalised fairly early in the process, then the hard work started in terms of developing the concept into something that could be realised with minimal impact on the garden or existing home. The way forward was a steel framed cube, manufactured off site and craned into place. Alan said, “The day it arrived the neighbours said it was the most exciting thing to happen in the road for years!”

On David’s advice, Alan and Robert had spent considerable time and effort gaining support from their neighbours, taking them through the design and what the build process would involve. And true to their word, when the construction phase started, it was on schedule from start to finish. The house was sealed off, preventing any dust permeating their home. Robert said, “It took four months to build including all the finishing touches like the wonderful book and CD shelves we have to accommodate our collection and of course the specialist lighting. We have since hosted lots of dinner parties and people are really impressed with how the contemporary design sits well with our more traditional home. Even now three years on we get real pleasure from how special it is. The box hedging is less than a metre away and the builders took great care not to damage any of the planting and as a result we have established planting surrounding it and the garden room looks like it has always been here. Even the postman really likes it!”

Both Robert and Alan agree that if there were ever to do it again they wouldn’t do anything differently. In Robert’s words, when choosing a designer and builder “go with your gut instinct, you know when you first meet someone whether you can work with them or not. Any build process involving your home has a huge impact, so they have to appreciate what’s important to you as the client and David and his team certainly did”.

