

NATURAL LIVING

A Question of Balance?

David Wright embraces Natural Sustainable Living.

To those of a certain age *A Question of Balance* will connect with the Moody Blues album of 1970, slightly geeky long hair boys with hippy clothes. However the concept articulated in this album equally applies to a new generation of families with a desire for natural sustainable living. The desire to live in a natural and sustainable environment is usually driven by a need to express a personal lifestyle identity, environmental consciousness and an eye on legacy. However, rarely does anyone talk too seriously about the relationship of sustainable living with natural living – there is a balance to be found. How do you combine sustainability compliance with cost, practicalities of building and good natural design. It is a question of balance.

A main tenet of sustainability is cost efficiency and current data identifies an additional cost factor for an excellent eco-home rating of between 5% and 25% for a new-build or conversion family house. Data on payback for renewables can be highly leveraged with very few technologies performing in accordance with manufacturers claims. Wind turbines depend on topography and base load requirements, solar panels on sunshine hours and orientation and biomass heating on inconvenient fuel storage and delivery.



Sealed flue focal features are achievable.



Factory finished 16 year warranty sustainable pre-finished cladding as an alternative to pvc.

Getting the balance right.

Much of sustainable building is now covered by Building Regulations which will continue to develop sustainable compliance criteria in the future. The challenge therefore lies in creating desirable, design focused living spaces with a balance of practical sustainable design features. Achieving an eco-home rating on a quality family house can be a torturous exercise. Our in-house philosophy is to concentrate on cost efficient, practical construction, good design, flexible family space, high level energy efficiency all finished with natural materials. The consideration of future asset value and marketability is also important. Eco rating has anecdotal benefits in marketing and also theoretical benefit on stamp duty for the buyer.

However energy efficiency is the easiest quick win. High level insulation is cheap to install and will repay the cost of installation very quickly. Air tightness of the house envelope is an essential component of energy efficiency and is reliant on good design specification by the architect and good construction practice by the contractor. The air-tightness policy should exclude extract fans which are essentially heat extracts. A filtered heat recovery system which will circulate air between rooms and take a percentage of fresh air from the outside is also generally recognised as a cost efficient installation and will assist with allergies. A highly efficient boiler (heat source) combined with zone controlled under-floor heating provides efficient heat distribution with no unsightly and inconvenient wall radiators. Solar thermal panels are usually the best renewable energy source for pre-heating hot water which, with good orientation and location, should give most of the

house hot water requirements for several months of the year. With a home owners grant from The Carbon Trust the capital cost is recoverable within an acceptable period.

Balancing that natural home comfort feel

We regularly despair when we hear of expensive new build homes, some ranging into seven figures of purchase cost, fitted with veneer or (even pvc!) wrapped mdf 'oak' doors and skirtings, pvc windows and doors, pvc eaves and soffit cladding, standard wall radiators and budget ceiling extract fans. Whole roof-spaces are wasted in favour of cheap inflexible roof trusses. Families are not made up of plastic beings so why should their houses be plastic environments.

Quality FSC certified softwood (clear pine or douglas fir) door-sets and skirtings are readily available and very design friendly. FSC certified timber flooring obviates the need for carpets thus avoid potentially harmful dust and dirt collection. Natural wood windows which are aluminum clad on the exterior for non-maintenance can complement a comfortable natural interior.

Sustainable policy also includes building life cycle. But what about family life cycle? Good flexi-space planning such as easily demountable partitions and pre-designed future extensions can provide options for changing family circumstances.



The warmth of natural timber.

Although technical knowledge and competence is important, good architectural design and space planning is the over-arching key. Money spent on a quality experienced architect for design and project management is a good investment. Someone who can listen and articulate your vision of family life and convert it to a cost efficient sustainable reality. For that extra bit of guilt free comfort –heat the outside jacuzzi from solar panels !!

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