



# DESIGN LEGACY

**Wendy Flynn** takes a closer look at Nick Carroll's local project which embraces the landscape so well that it is built into the ground itself





**W**orcester architect Nick Carroll is on to new “endeavours” with designs for a quartet of luxury homes on Yew Tree Hill in Droitwich which will take full advantage of lush rural views.

He is the architect behind the *Grand Designs* house, Endeavour, built by former RAF pilot Jon Flowers and his GP wife Gill on a steeply sloping site hugging the Malvern Hills. The stunning home built in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty was designed to meld into the surrounding landscape while taking full advantage of the panoramic views.

It was a challenging project, not only because it needed to win planning permission in a sensitive area, but also because the site was built on such a steep gradient that many builders wouldn’t take it on. With the whole project at risk because of the groundwork involved Nick redrew the architectural plans to make it work while retaining the original vision.

“I wanted something natural coming out of the hill and connected into it. I literally pulled the design up out of the ground and folded it around to make the best of the views to the front, and then connected it back into the hill with a garden to the rear,” he says.

The five-bedroom home is built into the hill on three levels, starting with a narrow base and getting progressively wider as you

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head up, with each level revealing more. The light-filled open plan kitchen dining area on the uppermost level has a wall of glass, and the room seems suspended in a landscape of undulating hill with a view of the sheep grazing below.

When it comes to designing homes in sensitive locations an architect is mindful of conservation and protecting the character of the city or countryside. Yet when it all works in harmony the resulting building leaves “a legacy of design”.

Six years on from the *Grand Designs* project Nick is poised for some fresh endeavours.

“I have found another hill in Droitwich,” he says cheerfully, clearly undeterred by any of the previous challenges.

The Yew Tree Hill site has planning permission for four homes which will share the same design hallmark as the much-loved Malvern Hill’s upside-down home. Nick says the luxury homes will be “reassuringly

expensive – energy efficient, adaptable for family life and above all exciting and different” with a price tag in the region of £1.2 million.

He says he is an architect first and foremost and will always be a designer at heart, but the Yew Tree Hill project is his own development – and it is not his first.

I ask what prompted the move from architecture to becoming a developer along with running the architect’s practice and he responds without hesitation: “power and control.”

He is only half joking – because taking on his own projects allows him to give free rein to his creative vision.

He says he was in his forties before he relaxed enough to have some fun with architecture and realise that there are no rules: “The buildings got funkier and curvier, and people started to take notice.”

His first contemporary “box house” design – Ancarva in Cornwall – was designed to ➔





take advantage of breathtaking views over a tidal lake near Whitsand Bay on the secluded Rame peninsula. The brief was to design a timeless home, one that would wow, inspire and be a delight to live in. Simple lines and plenty of glass were used to create open internal spaces that link seamlessly with the outside, a true urban retreat in the country. It is now available to rent as a boutique holiday home with direct access to the water.

“There is a public right of way along the front of the house and the home has its own personal jetty. The front gardens are not private (although there is a private space to the back of the house) and there is a real sense of connection to the public. This is a house that is meant to be viewed – not hidden away,” says Nick.

**H**is first solo development was building two traditional bungalows on a site carved out from the large garden adjoining his old home at Fernhill Heath, which were snapped up by retired downsizers. He invested the profit from that development into a contemporary development of three homes at Wyre Piddle. His aim was to bring together the best aspects of modern architecture.

“At Wyre Piddle I was attempting to bring together aspects of modern architecture because I believe most developments are not of good modern design. I wanted to show what you can achieve for the same sort of value that you would pay for an estate home of £600,000. It is an open plan living experience with the views from the first floor.”

Within 24 hours of advertising the homes on Rightmove, he had sold all three off plan, a clear indication that people want homes that are not carbon copies of similar estate homes up and down the country.

His latest venture is in urban, micro-living, having bought the empty Phoenix House building on Broad Street and also one at The Foregate in Worcester, which he transformed into modern rental units aimed at young professionals. The concept is very much like a hotel, but here you rent a compact studio apartment with your own kitchen, dining, sitting area and sleeping area with ensuite bathroom.

Nick sees this very much as a regeneration project, transforming a down at heel sixties building and creating a new sense of vibrancy in a tired urban landscape.

“The Council should be encouraging developers. It only takes two or three of us

to bring life back into lower Broad Street and make it vibrant again,” he says.

Following the success of the Livity aparthotel which he says is always fully booked, he is now embarking on a similar project with a building in the Foregate, although he reckons it took him as long to gain planning permission (a year) as it will take to complete the building works.

In the meantime, he combines his own development projects with taking on private residential and commercial commissions. For example, he is currently designing and building a £5 million leisure centre in Aberystwyth, a coastal town in Ceredigion in West Wales for Allens Caravans.

But when all is said and done, he sees himself not so much as a developer but as an architect and builder of dreams.

“I am still essentially a designer. I cannot see myself not designing and making dreams into a reality.”

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