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DREAM HOMES

- Clifftop build in Cornwall
- Eco-friendly oak-frame home
- Bespoke Suffolk hall house

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New build
CASE STUDY

HIGH HOPES

Roger Davis built his gravity-defying granite house in a dramatic and challenging clifftop setting on the north Cornish coast.

STORY: **DEBBIE JEFFERY** PICTURES: **UNIQUE HOME STAYS**

For Nikki Davis, Galleon is far more than just a house. Her father, Roger, built the detached granite property for himself and Nikki's mother Margaret a few years ago, but tragically he died shortly after completing the project.

"Dad put everything into this house," explains Nikki. "As a carpenter he was busy running three businesses, and his own build had to be fitted in between jobs, which meant it took a while to complete. He did a great deal of the work himself - right down to building the wooden beds - so for me it's steeped in family history."

In some ways Roger became the owner of his plot by accident, when in 2000 he attended an auction and successfully bid for the land on behalf of a relative, who then changed his mind about proceeding.

Roger was legally obliged to complete the purchase, and became the owner of a damp and dilapidated chalet on a tranquil site in an amazing coastal setting, which he and the family would often visit to enjoy far-reaching sea views over Portreath beach.

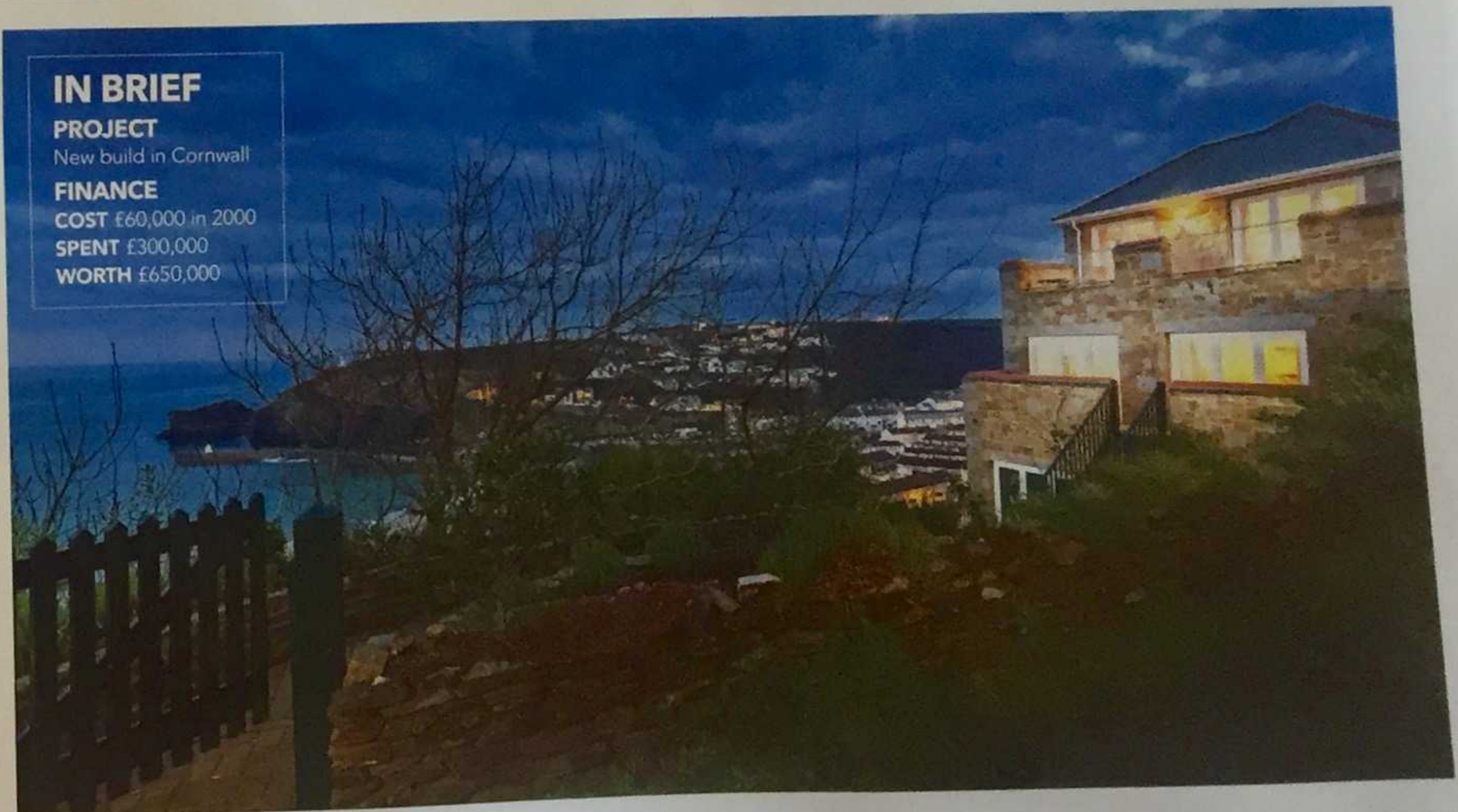
EXTERIOR

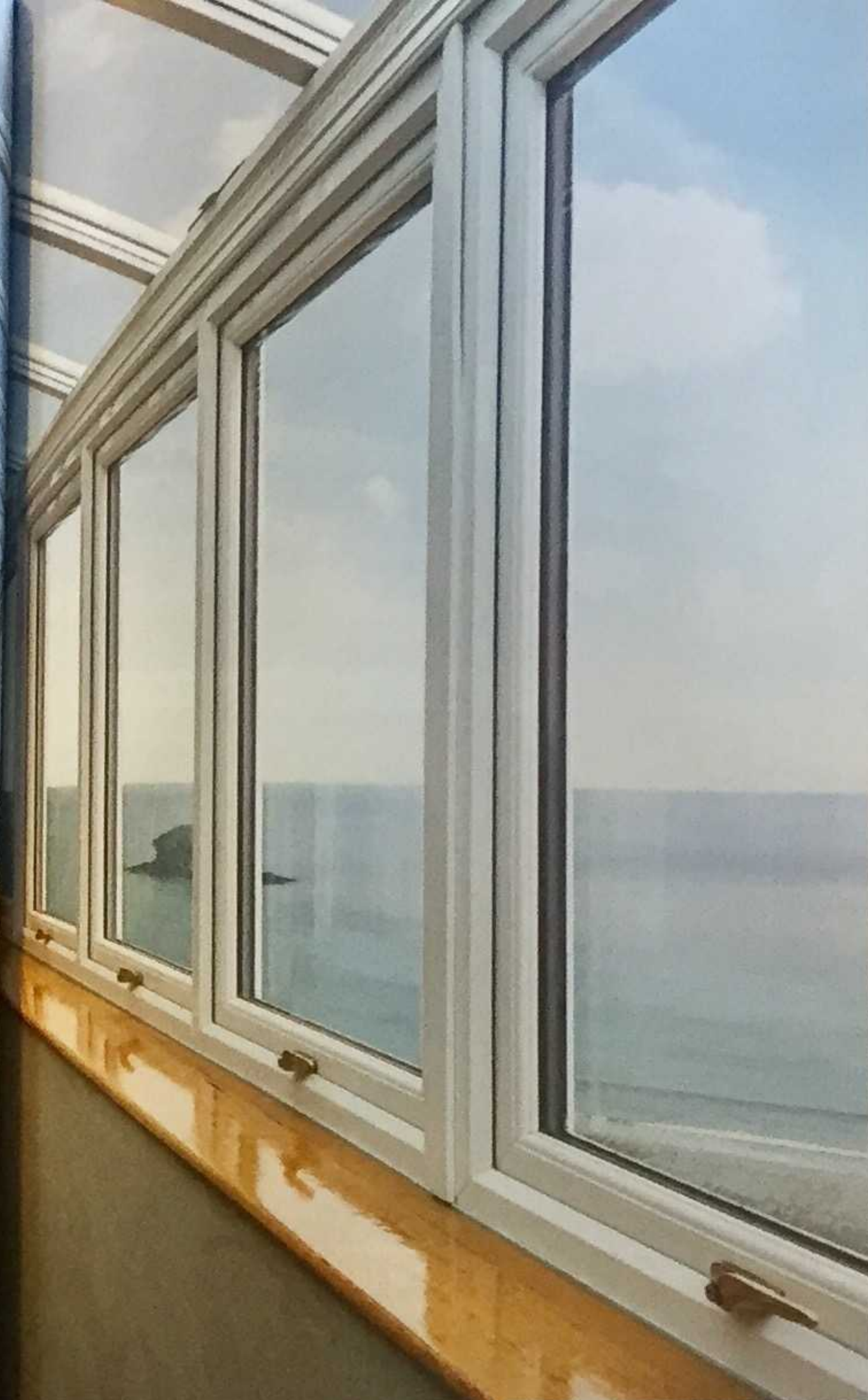
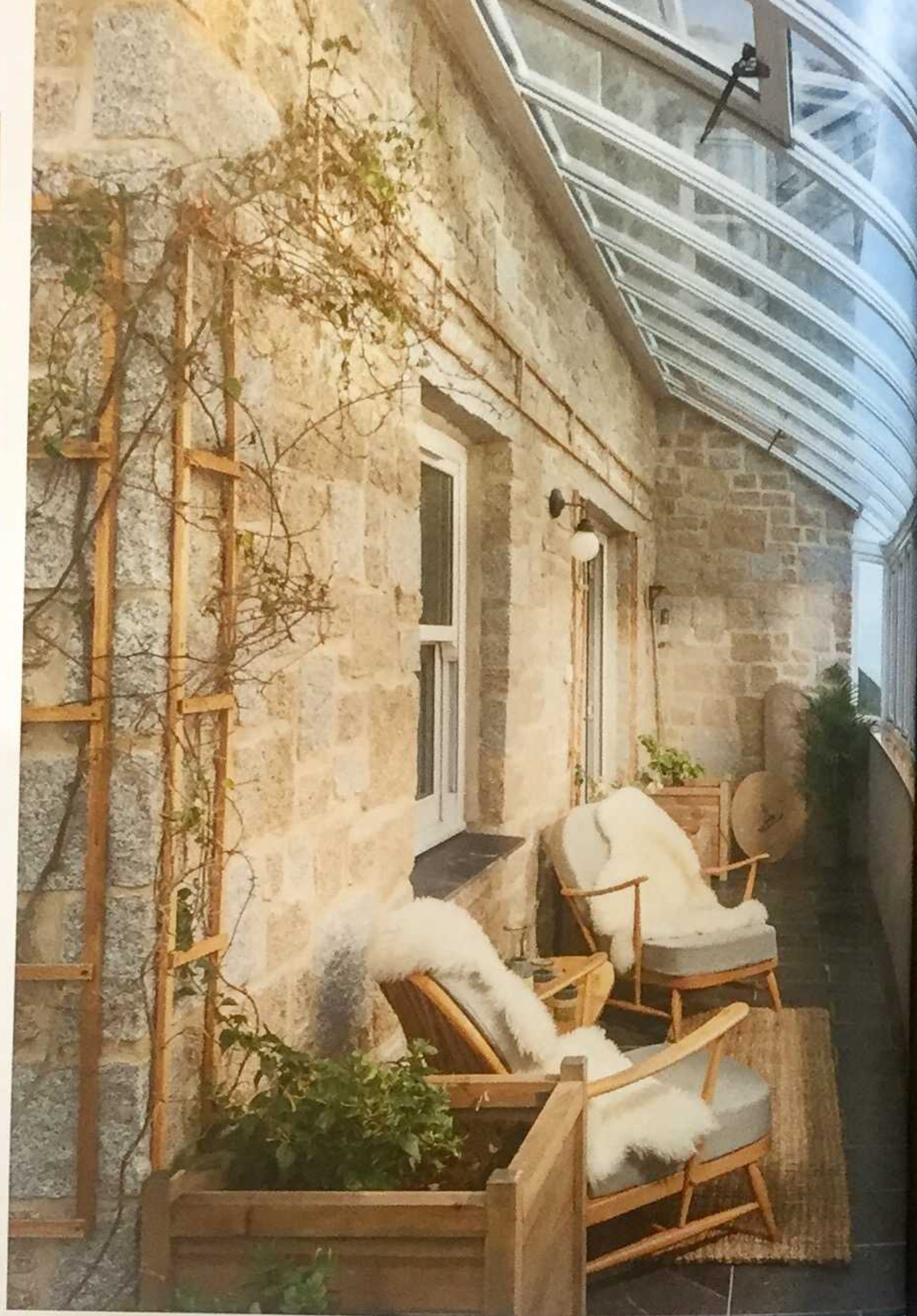
The new granite beach house has been carved into the side of the cliff. An open-plan living area opens onto a large patio, with smaller patios and balconies dotted all around the house to take advantage of the sun and views. Steps lead down to a lower deck, with a lavender walk through to the garden and planted beds.



IN BRIEF

PROJECT
New build in Cornwall
FINANCE
COST £60,000 in 2000
SPENT £300,000
WORTH £650,000





CONSERVATORY

A conservatory with day beds provides a relaxing reading area with incredible views to sea.

KITCHEN

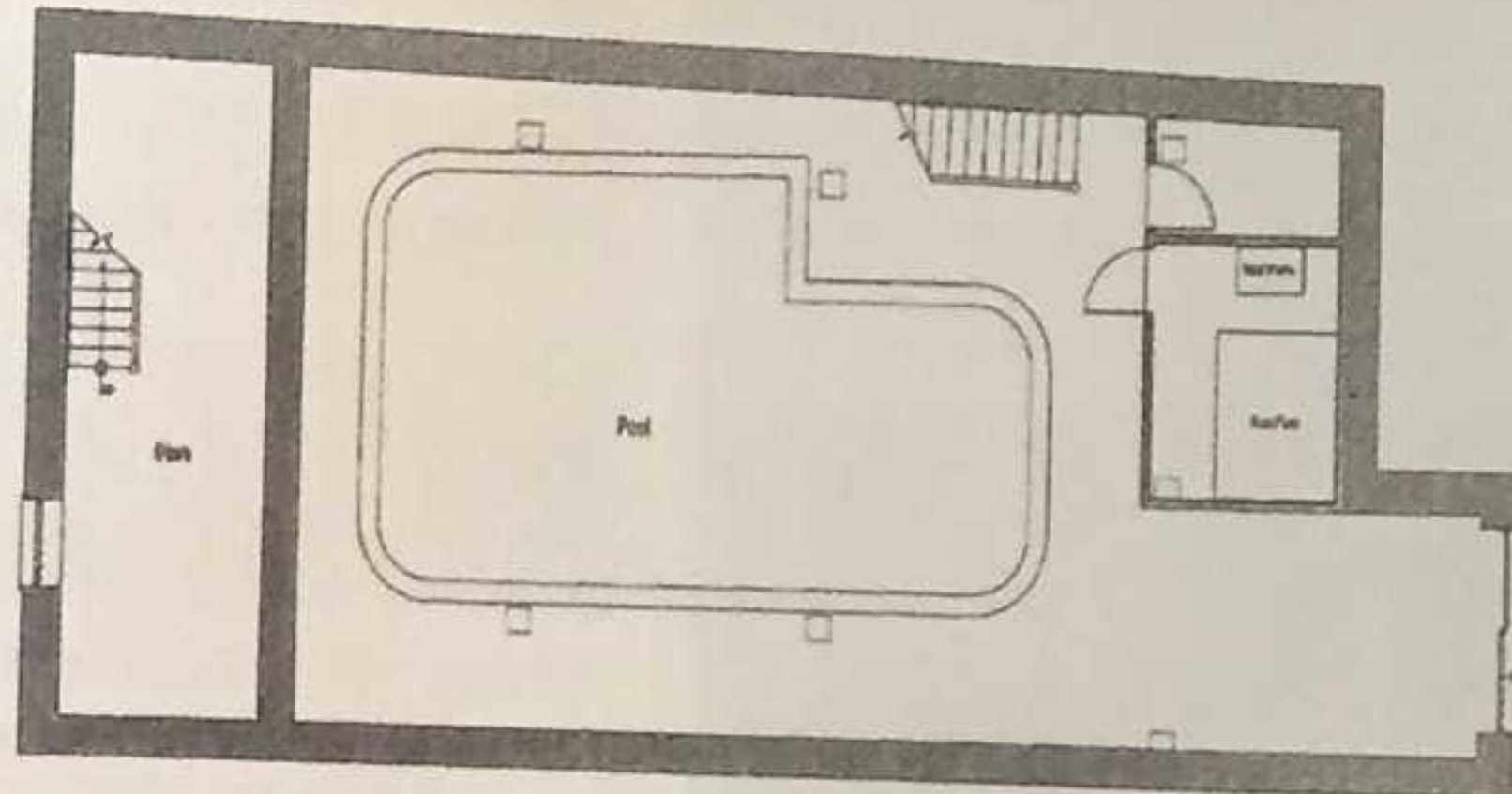
The kitchen on the first floor has an open hatch to the dining space and sea views.

MAIN BEDROOM

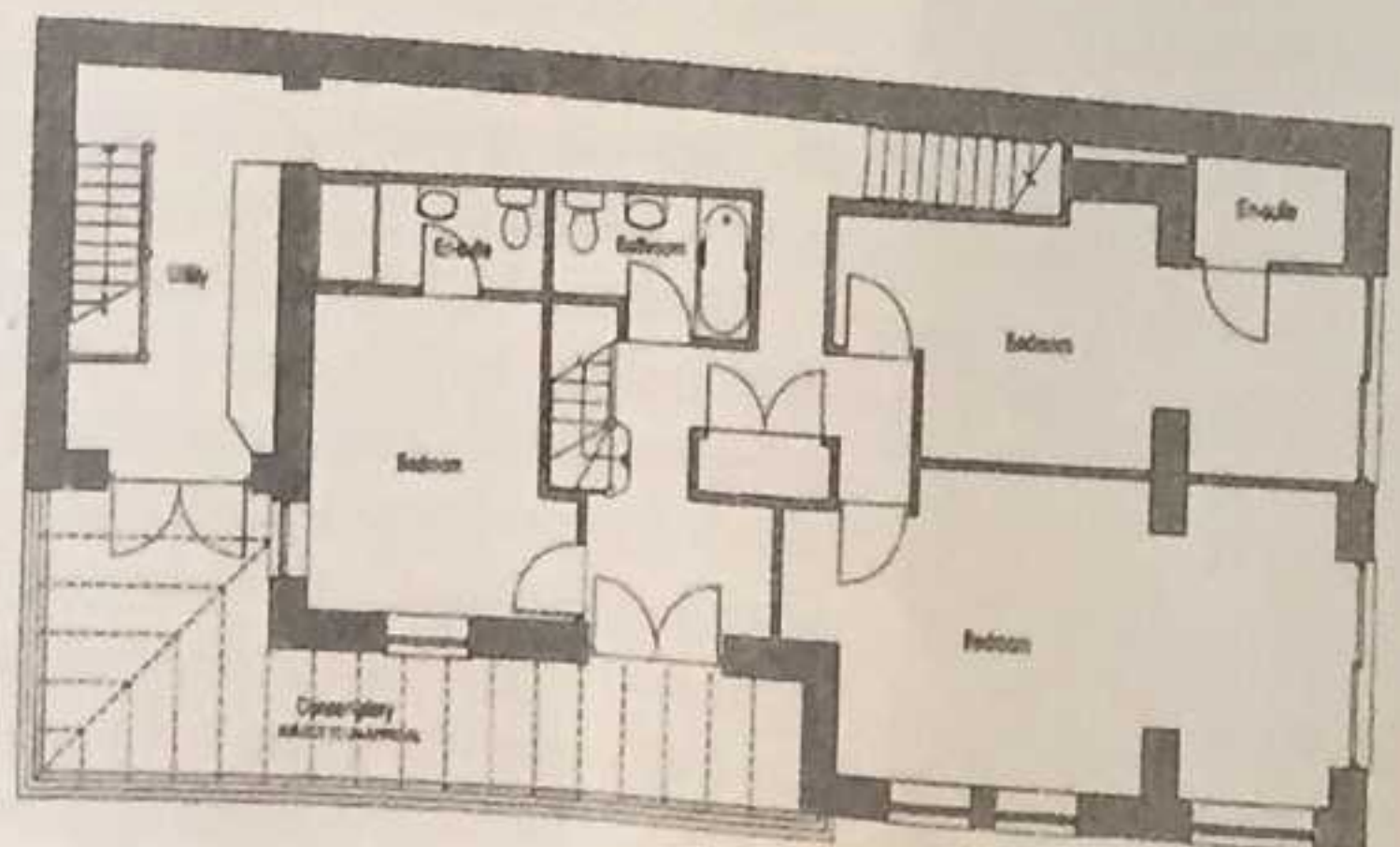
Glazed double doors open from the light and airy master bedroom onto a small patio overlooking the ocean.

THE FLOORPLAN

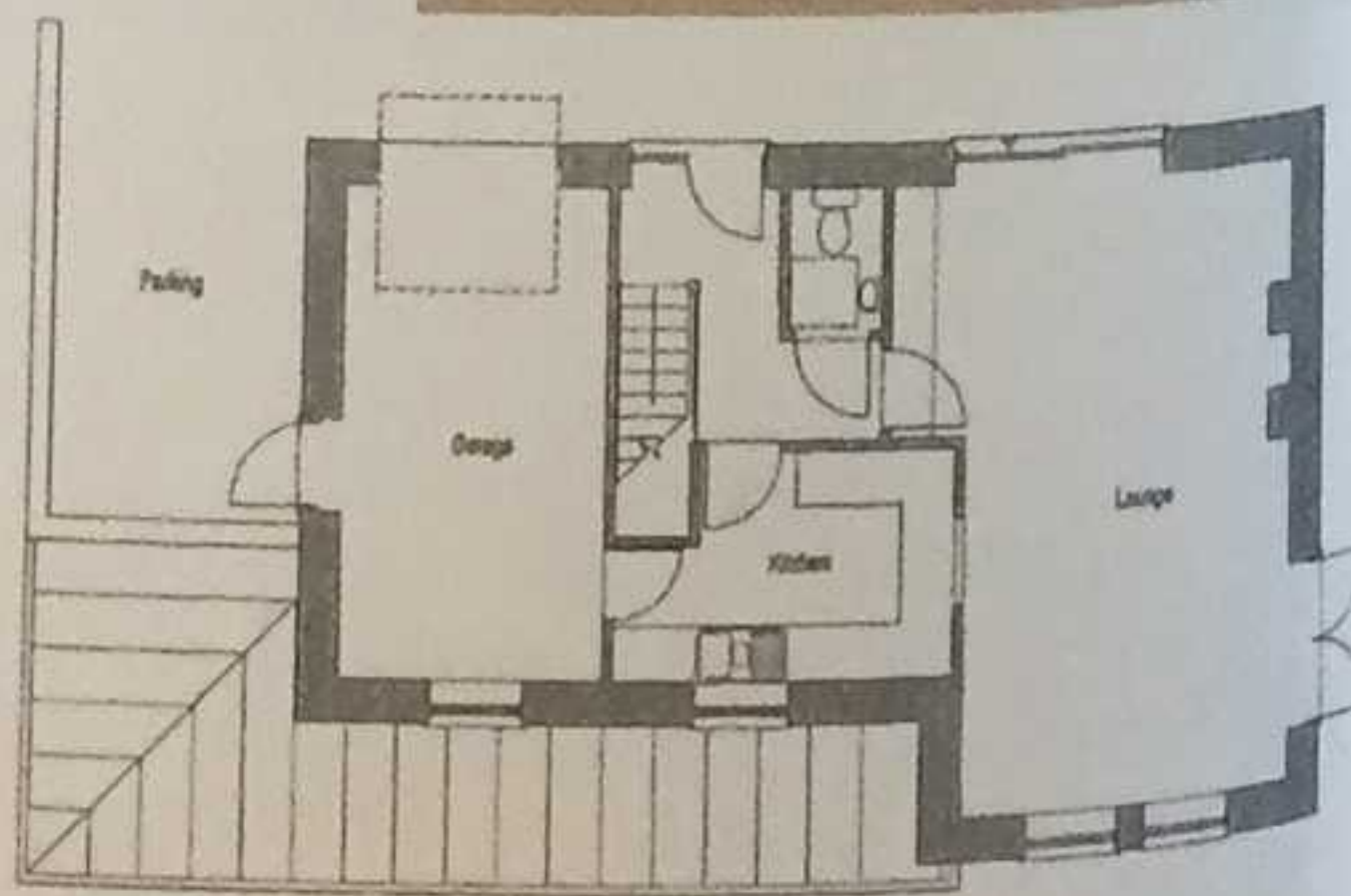
The reverse-level house has an open-plan living/dining room, a kitchen, garage, hallway and WC on the first floor, with two double bedrooms, one twin room, a bathroom, two en suites and a utility room on the ground floor. In the basement there is a swimming pool (to be completed), store and a plant room.



BASEMENT



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



Nikki's father, Roger, who built the house.



CONTACTS

Galleon is available for holiday rentals with Unique Home Stays: uniquehomestays.com.

PROJECT

Architect James Morford
Architectural Services: jmorford.co.uk

STRUCTURE

Granite Truro Granite: trurogranite.co.uk
uPVC windows Windmill Windows: windmill-windows.com

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Geothermal heating Geothermal International Ltd: geoheat.co.uk
Kitchen and sanitaryware Jewson: jewson.co.uk
Living room pendant lights John Lewis: johnlewis.com
Galvanised outdoor lighting Lyco Direct: lyco.co.uk



DINING/LIVING

Large windows offer sea views over Portreath beach. The living area is furnished with re-upholstered mid-

century pieces, family treasures such as the Ercol sideboard, and hand-painted seascapes for a pared-back, Scandinavian feel.



NIKKI'S TOP TIP

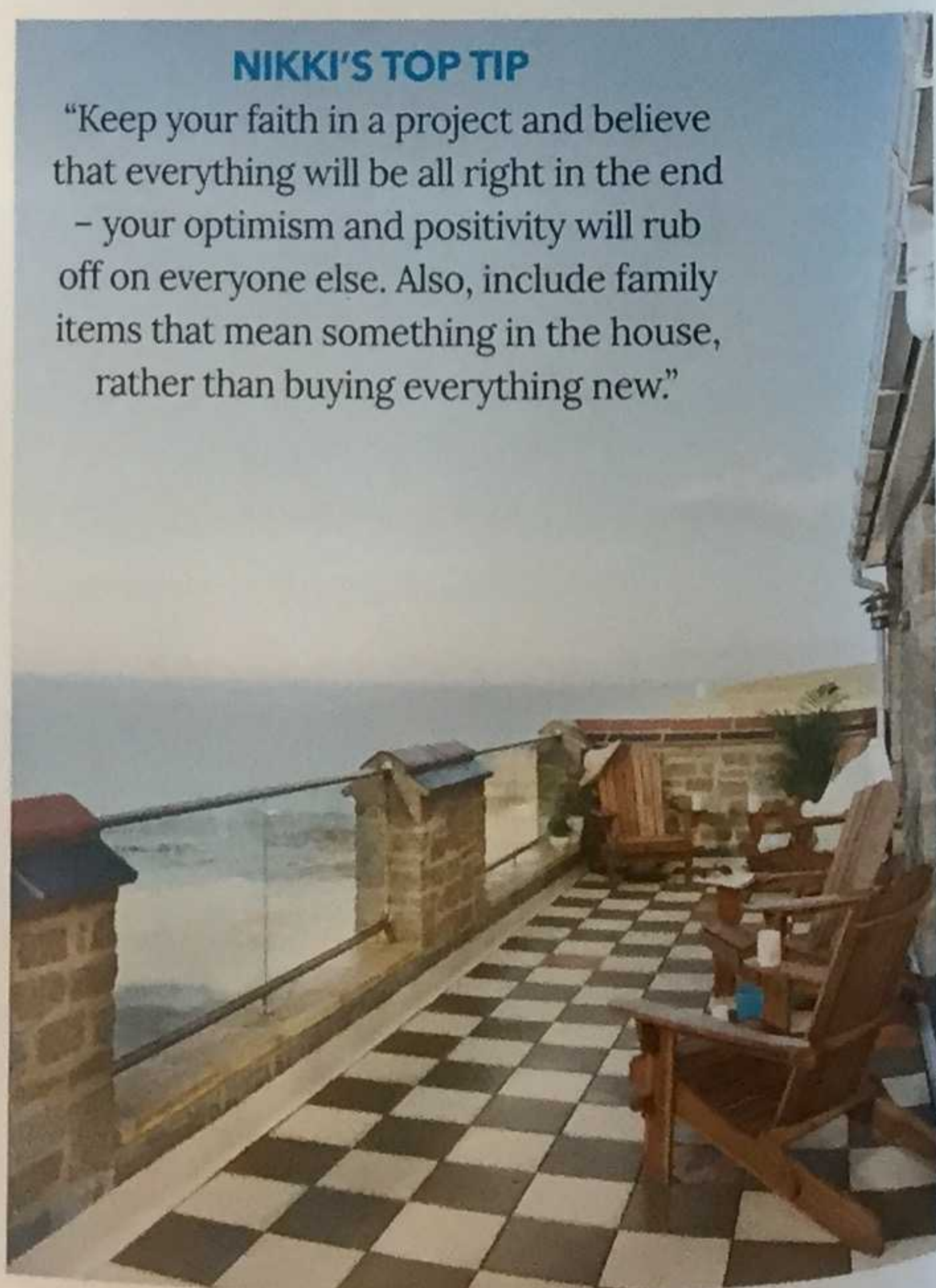
"Keep your faith in a project and believe that everything will be all right in the end – your optimism and positivity will rub off on everyone else. Also, include family items that mean something in the house, rather than buying everything new."

"Mum and Dad had lived in their previous home for over 30 years, but he gradually convinced her that building themselves a new house on the plot was a good idea," Nikki recalls. "Dad built wooden boats, loved sailing, and enjoyed everything about being by the sea, so a beach house really was his dream home."

No planning permission existed for the plot, and Roger worked closely with an architect to draw up plans for a reverse-level house. Bedrooms and bathrooms were located downstairs, with the open-plan living/dining space and kitchen on the upper floor to make the most of the views.

"The plans kept being tweaked and resubmitted," says Nikki. "Someone jokingly suggested building a swimming pool in what was going to be the basement, so Dad included one beneath the house – although this has yet to be tiled and filled."

Eventually planning permission was granted for the house, and work could begin to demolish the old chalet. "The location made the build very tricky, and several trades refused to even consider working here because the plot is so high and awkward,"



says Nikki, who grew up learning various trades, and helped out during the project when she could – from moving blocks to tiling.

"I used to hate it when I was young because all the other girls at school had perfect nails, while mine were always worn and torn, but looking back now it gave me such a good insight into building and what's involved," she says.

Roger was very environmentally conscious, and refused to fell trees on site if they could instead be relocated. He wanted to install a geothermal heat pump, and the deep vertical drilling for the system needed to be completed before the house could be built above.

"The location made the build very tricky and several trades refused to even consider working here."

After several days on site the specialist company eventually broke through the rock. "It was unbelievable to see warm water coming up from the ground, although we had to wait until the house was finished and the underfloor heating installed to know whether it actually worked," says Nikki. "There's a plant room in the basement which contains the pumps and equipment, and the system will heat the swimming pool as well."

A significant amount of excavation was required for the basement level, and steelwork was also needed to reinforce the structure and anchor the house into the cliff. An unmade, single-track lane is the sole access to the site, which only small lorries could navigate, and therefore huge quantities of concrete needed to be pumped down from the road above, which both delayed progress and increased costs.

There are high drops, terraces and many steep steps on the site, and the family dog would regularly inspect the build's progress, balancing across scaffolding – apparently unconcerned about the perilous height. Erecting this scaffolding safely was itself a major task and, as on-site storage was almost non-existent, Roger asked the scaffolders to create a platform out on the cliff, onto which he built a secure shed for materials and tools.

External walls for the house were constructed from an inner leaf of blockwork and an outer leaf of stone, designed to



appear as if they are growing out of the cliff. Margaret pointed out some granite she particularly liked on one of the family's regular Sunday afternoon drives to look at local houses, and Roger then managed to track down the same stone for their own project. He hired a stonemason, whose work he had admired, and employed local people whenever possible on site.

"The old chalet was damp because it was built right up against the side of the cliff, so Dad made sure that the new house was moved forward slightly, creating what he called a cave to the rear, which he planned to make into a wine cellar," says Nikki. "He was always coming up with new ideas, and his optimism was infectious – it inspired everyone who worked with him."

Roger's love of wildlife meant that the build was immediately put on hold when he discovered swallows had nested in the roof trusses, and he refused to disturb them until the babies were fully fledged, which meant that the house remained open to the elements for weeks.

The roof was then covered in 400mm x 200mm natural slates with red concrete ridge and hip tiles, which were double-fixed to endure strong coastal winds. Durable uPVC windows were installed, which needed to be inward-opening so that they could be safely cleaned.

"I remember Mum walking into the part-built living area one day and saying that another set of patio doors was needed to make the most of the view. Dad agreed, and the plans were once again changed," says Nikki. "This room feels rather like being in a lighthouse out at sea, with views all around, and there's nothing better than sitting there during a storm and watching the waves."

Roger's talents as a woodworker meant that many of the finishes were painstakingly crafted from timber, including the floor, stairs and skirtings, which were all made to Roger's own design in his workshop. Funding the project privately and building the house at weekends meant that the house took some time to complete, and was eventually finished in 2013.

"Sadly Mum and Dad only lived in the house for a couple of years before he died," says Nikki. "Mum

became heartbroken and very ill from losing him, and was unable to continue living here on her own."

Nikki, who was working in internet marketing at the time, needed to step into her father's shoes to continue running his businesses, and complete the projects he had started. "I also had to come up with a plan to save the empty house, which we couldn't bear to sell, and in 2015 it was changed into a holiday let," she explains.

"I brought in some of my own furniture, but the majority of things were already here. Dad handmade so much himself, and the house really showcases his talents. There's beautiful oak throughout, as well as artwork and wooden lamps made by his father. For me, this house holds many happy memories, and I think Dad would be really pleased that people are still enjoying his handiwork and the amazing views."

BEDROOMS

Wooden sleigh beds were hand-crafted by Roger specifically for the three bedrooms. The twin room has its own balcony while the third bedroom displays woodwork which Roger completed at school, including a carving of fish.

Final word

WHAT WAS THE HIGH POINT OF YOUR PROJECT?

My father's excitement at seeing his vision realised. He had never previously built his own house, and really put his heart and soul into the project.

...AND THE LOW POINT?

One of the hardest things was getting people to come and work on such an awkward cliff site, and only smaller vehicles were able to make it down the narrow access lane, which meant pumping concrete from the top of the hill.

THE BEST BUY?

Dad made so many things himself, and virtually anything wooden was crafted by him in his workshop – from the stairs and skirting boards to the beds.

...AND THE BIGGEST EXTRAVAGANCE?

The geothermal heating system was expensive, but was something Dad was determined to include because he was passionate about the environment.

