



Private Property, Churchill Barn

Architect: David Nossiter
Client: Private Client

Architect David Nossiter's sensitive conversion of a derelict, yet heritage-listed farm barn building on the Suffolk/Essex border into an exceptional family home has recently won 'Restoration of the Year' at Sunday Times British Homes Awards 2017, as well as being named as a finalist in the AJ's Retrofit Awards 2017.

A sympathetic synergy of the historical and the contemporary, Church Hill Barn offers spacious living in a beautiful rural setting. Glazing Vision's Flushglaze fixed rooflights were instrumental in flooding the grand central atrium of the barn with natural daylight.

Renovating this derelict old barn presented a number of unique challenges for David Nossiter and his clients. The farm buildings, located around a courtyard, had been part of the Assington Hall Estate, but had continued to fall into a dreadful state of decay since the 1950's when the Hall had been destroyed by fire. The large barn at the heart of the farm complex, which was to be the client's new home, needed a major roof refurbishment as well as insulation to meet modern day thermal standards. The barn had an unusual and unorthodox layout, cruciform in plan and surrounded by a collection of smaller spaces, which had been originally used for the shelter of livestock and different farming activities under one roof. The vast central space with almost cathedral-like proportions, necessitated an innovative architectural approach in order to transform the barn into a modern family home.

Private Property, Churchill Barn

At the same time the architect had to be sensitive both to the strong sense of personal attachment that the local community felt for this barn, which had served their families in the past, as well as to the heritage listing that the building enjoyed. Only after the conclusion of lengthy agreements with the local planning authorities could work begin on the barn, which would take 2 years to complete.

Refurbishing the roof constituted the major part of the renovation of the barn. In seeking to honour the barn's historical character, David Nossiter salvaged the old roofing slates and timber from other derelict farm buildings on the site to resurface the roof. He then devised a "warm roof construction" by adding insulation over the roof above a new deck. Sheep's wool was used to insulate the outside walls, which are clad with larch timber.



The original fenestration around the barn was retained ensuring every window provided stunning views out to the countryside. Two oversized glazed sliding doors fill the hipped gable porches, which look out towards the fields. As a result the barn remains "integrated" into its' surrounding rural landscape.

Of key importance to the clients, however, was the need to keep the barn open-plan and the space undivided. "Space is the luxury" was how the client described what the barn offered them. Although there are no real formal rooms, in order to help organise the space and also provide the necessary privacy for the bathrooms and bedrooms, David Nossiter devised innovative partitions and screens, made from birch plywood sheets, intended as over-scaled furniture. The polished concrete flooring throughout enhances the feeling of "continuous flow" around the barn and crucially reflects the light coming in from the windows and doorways.

Private Property, Churchill Barn

The lofty 8 metre high ceiling and the exposed wooden gable structure, whilst visually impressive, raised another issue for the architect – that of ensuring that there was adequate light falling into the central core of the barn. Here the minimalist, functional kitchen was located with space left deliberately empty allowing for future flexibility. With the exposed brickwork and the use of timber panelling on the barn walls and kitchen area, the light was fairly compromised and would have resulted in a dependence on artificial light. There were existing openings in the roof, which had been glazed with corrugated plastic, and despite the original request by the local planning authority for heritage rooflights to be used here, David Nossiter looked for a better solution, believing that adding glazing mullions would be inappropriate.



Inspired by James Turrell's exquisite Skyspaces, David Nossiter specified two Flushglaze fixed rooflights from Glazing Vision, which were to be installed into the existing roof apertures. Needing to be made to bespoke sizes – almost 3m square – these rooflights were precision-engineered at the company's factory in Norfolk. Their lack of an internal frame ensured that they did not detract from the impactful wooden roof/ceiling structure, which the clients loved, or the lofty airy feel of the atrium below. Their clean and contemporary external appearance raised no concerns for the local planning authority. The lack of bulky capping systems meant that these Flushglaze fixed rooflights would not trap dirt, of critical importance bearing in mind the practicalities of actually getting up onto the extraordinarily high roof to clean them.

Private Property, Churchill Barn

Additionally, it was critical that these glazed elements did not reduce the level of insulation provided by Nossiter's "warm roof" construction. The Glazing Vision Flushglaze fixed rooflights, tested and certified by the British Board of Agreement, satisfied the architect as providing excellent thermal performance, but also structural integrity and unparalleled weather resistance.

Most importantly for Nossiter's clients, these generously-sized Flushglaze rooflights allow vast amounts of daylight to stream down from the roof deep into the centre of this enormous house, whilst at the same time the clients have unfettered views up towards the sky, complementing the panoramic views out towards the stunning Suffolk landscape provided at ground level.

In preserving the distinctive historical character of the barn, which was fundamental to the client's brief, David Nossiter has also managed to successfully integrate the contemporary aesthetic.



His clients, who recalled the barn being "black and falling apart", are delighted with their new light-filled family home, which offers "a panoramic view of the country that changes with the weather!"

To find out more design considerations for your next project, contact us on 01379 658 300 or request a CPD.