

Method
Timber & stone
Project cost
£242,760
Location
Fife



A cart shed for a castle

With a great deal of insight and a lot of hard work, Mike and Heather Lewis have turned a ruined cart shed into a bright, modern family home

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Nestled in amongst the rolling hills of North East Fife sits a converted listed Victorian cart shed. Sheep graze in the fields at the front and the copse in the distance hides a lake that's perfect for trout. This is the rural idyll for Heather and Mike Lewis and their son, Rory. But it is a fairly new one.

Three years ago the cart shed was a ruin and Heather and Mike were living in a small, two bedroom cottage in a nearby village. Planning a family, they thought they should find a bigger house to suit their growing needs.

Mike, a joiner and MD of Bspoke Joinery, was keen to self build and Heather, as the daughter of a local farmer, had her eye on several of the farm's outhouses. However, nothing was quite right – they were either too close to a road, too near other buildings or had no view.

After much consideration, Heather's parents offered them a cart shed that had been earmarked for their own retirement. Situated up a long driveway, near a tenanted farm house, it had the most fantastic views over to the Lomond Hills. "Luckily and very kindly, they thought our needs were greater than theirs and we bought the shed and half an acre around it," says Heather. As an added bonus, the building had already received planning permission for conversion 10 years ago when the family had thought about converting it in to a four bedroom house. Although the consent had lapsed, the original drawings were still there, so all Mike and Heather had to do was alter them to suit their needs.

"The original drawings were for a simple conversion, but we wanted somewhere where I could have an office and Heather – who is a personal trainer and sports massage therapist – could have a treatment room. We also needed it to be big enough to accommodate us as our family grew," says Mike.

Contemporary changes

Mike and Heather's plans added an extension to the front of the house. This is half the size of the original building and allows for a new kitchen that looks out over the fields to the east, west and south. Above is a large master bedroom and ensuite bathroom.

The original building houses a spacious living room, Heather's treatment room, utility room, WC and entrance hall. Upstairs is Rory's bedroom, a guest room, family bathroom and Mike's office. The space is flexible enough to accommodate a growing family but with both Mike and Heather working from home, every room is full for now. However, the project didn't come without it's challenges. The grade C Listed building (Scottish Listings are A, B and C) was a complete ruin and nothing except for the outside walls and the original roof slates were salvageable. This meant the work involved was not dissimilar to building from scratch.

However, unlike a new build, there were numerous restrictions that the couple had to deal with, for example all the original doors and windows had to stay the same size and be echoed throughout the extension. Also, any stone used had to be whinstone or sandstone. Old slates from the roof had to be cleaned and re-used on the original part of the house, and resized





“We love living here and can’t believe how our lives have changed so dramatically in the past couple of years”

A mixture of slates from the original house and recycled tiles, made of the same local material, were used on the roof



The kitchen is in the new part of the home, and boasts views out across the fields to the south, east and west





What we learned

- ✚ Don't be afraid to make changes during the project. Once the house begins to take shape it is much easier to see what it is going to be like to live in – and also what you don't like. It's better to make the changes when the build is still in process rather than at the end when it is all finished
- ✚ Challenge your architect. If your designer has not included everything you require then insist they amend the plans. You are going to be living in the house so need to be content
- ✚ Be on site as much as possible to keep an eye on the progress of the work, and to make sure things are actually being done to the quality you expect. Be firm but fair with tradesmen

and re-dressed recycled Scots slate was used on the new section to match the rest of the roof.

“The irony is that no one cared about this building when it was a ruined cart shed – in five more years it would have been a pile of rubble, but the minute someone wanted to convert it and live in it, Historic Scotland suddenly became interested,” says Mike. “We were obviously very happy to comply with things that we knew would maintain the charm and character of the original building. However some elements were completely impractical – such as putting a corrugated roof on the new porch. If we had gone ahead and done that, it would have looked like an old lean-to shed. We eventually won the battle and it's slated like the rest of the house.”

Another element the couple found tough was when SEPA (Scottish Environment Protection Agency) insisted that the couple must dig across two fields to find a natural soakaway for the septic tank. Having forgotten to budget for the septic tank, Mike and Heather were horrified with the quote for £25,000. Luckily their structural engineer described their land layout to the planning office and they were able to find a natural soakaway just 50m away from the house, saving them over two thirds of the cost.

“The planning office was much more helpful than I imagined,” says Mike. “We made a lot of changes along the way, which I knew were not going to compromise the design of the building but which we really only had a vision of when the building was taking shape. Downstairs we moved the chimney from the south wall to the west wall and turned one of the windows in the living room into a door to open out onto the patio. Also, the upstairs was very dark with the original windows set at knee height, so we put in several Velux windows that transformed the place. The planning office were great about all the changes and they all went straight through.”

Quality and comfort

The initial budget for the conversion and extension was £192,000. However there were a few extras that were not accounted for, such as the landscaping, fencing and the



Natural materials, such as stone and wood were used inside to link the contemporary interior with the traditional exterior

blacksmith's costs to restore the iron banister up the stone steps on the outside of the house. "With the exception of the Everhot range cooker, everything that we fitted inside the house was middle of the range. We were not extravagant and if I am honest, I wish we had gone for some things, such as bathrooms, of a slightly higher quality," says Heather.

There were, however, certain things that Mike and Heather saw as a long term investment. To supply the underfloor heating and the hot water, the couple chose a ground source heat pump. "We thought that as we were effectively building from scratch, we should look at some alternative energy sources that would save us money in the long run," says Mike. "With a large, flat space in front of the house, the most obvious choice was a ground source heat pump. It is very cheap to run, you only pay a nominal sum for the energy used to power the pump and it provides you with all your central heating and hot water needs.

"The house is always warm and although the pump took a large chunk of our budget, we reckon if we had installed a new oil tank, boiler and new radiators, it would have been probably about the same price. The difference is it is very cheap to run."

With costs at the forefront of their minds, it is an added bonus that Mike and Heather were able to claim back the VAT on their renovation. "Like new builds, listed building renovations in Scotland are VAT exempt and we were able to claim back money on the majority of the work, and with some contractors we didn't have to pay the VAT at source. All we had to do was show a certificate provided by our architect. It saved us a lot of money," says Mike.

The project took just nine months to complete from start to finish, with Mike working up to 18 hour days to complete it on time. "It was really hard work but obviously worth it in the end," he says. "I thoroughly enjoyed the challenge and learnt a great deal. As a joiner, I get brought in to do specific jobs on a build and I have also been a manager on several sites, but I have never built my own house.

"The biggest lesson I learnt from the whole project was how it feels to be the customer and just how frustrating it is when certain tradesmen don't turn up for weeks on end. In our case the building was open to the elements in the middle of winter and nothing could progress. We were on a tight timescale so the loss of precious time was annoying. I think we have learnt that the trick is to employ people we can trust to do the job well within the time and budget agreed. It has all been a huge learning curve but I am so glad we have done it."

The end results are stunning. Once a crumbling building, the cart shed is now a lovely home with fabulous views, large, light airy rooms and enough space to adapt and change with the demands of a modern family. "We love living here and can't believe how our lives have changed so dramatically in the past couple of years. From deciding on the project, Rory being born, Mike building the house and all three of us moving in, it has been a busy and stressful time. Now we are all settled, we couldn't think of a better place to bring up a family," says Heather. ●




Originally, the couple had only planned to replace the small knee-high windows upstairs. However, once the build was underway they specified Velux units to let in extra natural light





Build timetable

 Mike and Heather acquired the plot in June 2010 from their family – and planning permission was granted soon after. Work on the preliminaries started in December 2010 and the project was completed in autumn 2011.

Schedule of the build	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Preliminaries												10
Foundations	11											
External walls & windows	11		11									
Roof structure & covering		11	11	11	11	11						
Internal walls & doors			11		11	11	11					
Floors, walls & ceiling finishes				11		11	11		11			
Joinery & fittings							11	11				
Plumbing & heating				11	11	11		11				
Electrics				11		11		11				
Decorating						11	11	11				

11 Work in progress by year and month

The Lewis file

Owners Mike & Heather Lewis	House size 350m ² (3,767ft ²)
Occupations MD of Bspoke Joinery and personal trainer/sports massage therapist	Plot size 0.5 acre
Location St Andrews, Fife	Original cost £50,000 in June 2010
Type of build Conversion	Project cost £242,760
Style 1850s cart shed	Total cost £292,760
Method of construction Traditional sandstone and block with timber frame	Cost per m² £694 (£64 per ft ²)
	VAT reclaim £6,500
	Date work commenced December 2010
	Construction time 22 weeks
	Current value £450,000

Project cost breakdown

Elements of the conversion	Cost %	Cost m ²	Total cost*
Timber Kit	6%	£43	£15,000
Builders	25%	£174	£61,000
Roofing and rough cast	15%	£106	£37,170
Joinery	21%	£143	£50,000
Plumbing	5%	£36	£12,650
Electrician	2%	£14	£5,000
Painter	2%	£14	£4,770
Fencing	1%	£7	£2,610
Blacksmith	2%	£12	£4,270
Heat pump	5%	£35	£12,280
Stove	4%	£25	£8,680
Glazing	1%	£9	£3,210
Bathrooms	2%	£10	£3,680
Digger Hire	<1%	£3	£1,150
Tiles	<1%	£4	£1,240
Carpets	1%	£8	£2,900
Blinds	<1%	£1	£350
Lighting	<1%	£1	£300
Kitchen	7%	£47	£16,500
Grand total			£242,760

Useful contacts

 **JOINERY Bspoke Joinery** 01334 650097
www.bspokejoineryltd.co.uk **BUILDERS**
Graham & Lee builders 01334 653680
www.grahamandleebuilders.co.uk **RENEWABLES**
Eco Living 0141 332 5684 www.ecolivinguk.com
ELECTRICAL Charles Anderson Electrician 01334 652102
www.chasganderson.co.uk

OUR VERDICT

The hard work and sensitivity that the Lewis family have paid to the old cart shed mean that they have saved a stunning listed building from falling into a total state of disrepair. It is sure to be enjoyed by generations to come.