



FLAGSHIP DESIGNS

New series

In the first of a new series, we look at a top name in designer homes – **Huf Haus**. This flagship brand of turnkey package properties is fast becoming an architectural icon among self builders in the UK, says **Sophie Hoyland**

Homebuyers in Europe have long praised the 99-year-old German company that specialises in designing striking homes and endorses an open-plan living philosophy. But it wasn't until 1997 that the first UK Huf Haus was constructed, and 2004 that the brand made its mark in the UK when it appeared on Channel 4's *Grand Designs*.

Keen self builders may remember the programme featured the complete process involved in creating a Huf Haus – from the conceptual stages, through to the building

process, right up until moving in. "The television show triggered an avalanche of interest, making the Huf Haus internet server crash within hours of it being aired," says Afra Bindewald, business development & marketing executive for Huf Haus. So what exactly is it that's making this type of build so popular in the UK?

Unique style

A Huf Haus is exclusive and distinctive in its characteristics. "We use a contemporary design of the traditional post and beam



Case study Wimble Hill

David and Sylvie Potts and their four children moved into their new Huf Haus in November 2010. After a consultation with a two surveyors and an architect, they were told that their old home was rotten and beyond repair. Because there were no preservation orders or restrictions, they were able to demolish it and build a new one on the same site.

Having previously been let down by English builders, the efficiency of German workmen played a big part in the couple's decision to build a Huf Haus. The house was designed in 2009 and completed in 2010, with the construction and interior design stage taking only eight months. The new build's look was jointly designed by the Potts and chief architect, Peter Huf.

The five-bedroom house, plus granny annex, has a stunning open-plan living space with panoramic views. "With all the light and glass, it's like you're living in your garden," says David. The construction along with all the interiors cost in the region of £1.5 million. The final price was slightly above budget but the family have no regrets and praise the design, efficiency and service the company provided.

Wimble Hill meets Level 6 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. It features a wood-burning fire and stove, solar panels and rainwater harvesting and recycling system. The thickness of all the exterior walls in the property measures 280mm. This standard size has recently been increased by Huf Haus from 220mm, to achieve the highest levels of heat insulation possible.



Glass

The vast amount of glass used creates an interior flooded with light. Combined with the open-plan layout of a Huf Haus, this produces a spacious feel. What's more, the structure of a Huf Haus means that you can literally bring the outdoors in – and the indoors out.



Post & beam

A distinctive feature of a Huf home is its post-and-beam construction system. It's an ancient method that has been brought up-to-date using modern production techniques. Spaces between the frame are filled with glass or solid panels that have been built over in Germany.



Bespoke designs

You'll very rarely see two of the same Huf Haus homes. Your architect will take all the surrounding elements into consideration when drawing up the plans. They'll then travel with you to Germany to visit the Huf Haus factory to help choose the interior fittings that you want in your property.



Technology

A Huf Haus is designed to incorporate advanced energy efficient systems such as photovoltaics, air and ground source heat pumps, solar and thermal, wind turbines, and grey and rain water harvesting. Other technology, such as burglar alarm systems, can also be incorporated into the project.

structure to bring a feeling of openness to the home," explains Afra. "The increased sense of space of an open-plan living area, paired with solid high-quality timber, brings a feeling of tranquillity." The other key characteristic of this type of build is the amount of glass used. The transparent material connects the house to its surrounding environment and allows an optimum amount of natural light inside.

Design and production

From initial consultation with Huf Haus experts through to completion of build and interior refit, a self build project can take up to ten months in total. Construction in the factory can take up to four months and you should expect the same amount of time for the site build and interior fittings.

Speed is one of the biggest benefits of this package system. Remarkably it only

takes about a week for the external structure to be assembled. This ensures that there is minimal exposure to any external influences.

However, gaining planning permission may disrupt your initial timetable. Generally, you would need to factor in six weeks for the planning consultation stage and schedule up to twelve weeks for planning permission. Many UK councils have design policies that require new houses to reflect local styles, character and materials. This, too, is typical of replacement house policies where the new house can be expected to reflect design elements of the original house.

"Because the exterior look is not typical of UK house designs, a Huf Haus is often best suited to either isolated sites or locations where there's a varied mix of house types," says Mike Dade, *Build It's* planning expert. "Locations such as conservation areas are generally best avoided."

Construction

Each Huf Haus is built with large, solid timber beams and posts. This method means there are no internal load-bearing walls (so predetermined partitions). The result is a building that allows customers the utmost in flexibility of the design – including floor-to-ceiling glass walls and vast, open, inside spaces.

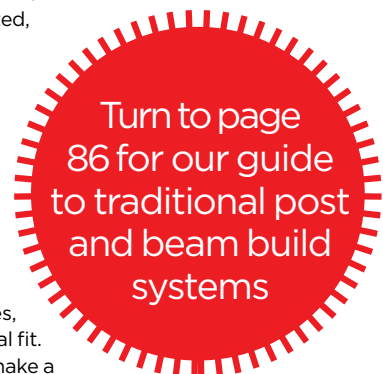
All the different structural elements, such as the wall panels, ceilings, floors and roof, are made in a German factory and then shipped over to the UK to be assembled by fully qualified workmen. Huf Haus only uses its own staff and craftsman.

Sustainability

"These days, we find more and more buyers are interested in our green credentials. They appreciate the idea of being able to generate their own energy," says Afra. Because every Huf Haus is bespoke, customers can pick and choose exactly what technology they want incorporated into their home. They can specify sustainably sourced materials, high-end insulation products and even toxin-free paints, for example. The glass used is always triple glazed, argon gas filled and measures 60mm in thickness with a U-value of 0.6 W/m²K.

Cost

Expect to pay up to £2,690 per m² (£250 per ft²), not including the price of the chosen plot. It can seem a little pricey, but remember this includes the architects fees, structural engineer and internal fit. What's more a Huf Haus can make a good investment, "Huf Haus houses have performed well on the speculative and re-sell market, fetching a premium compared to conventional building methods," says Afra. ●



HUF HAUS OWNERS GROUP

If you're thinking of buying a Huf home, or already own one, then the Huf Haus Owner's group is a good port of call. Huf property owners in the UK formed the community so it's entirely independent from the Huf Haus company. It aims to deal with specific issues relating to these houses, including anything from planning permission to maintenance and market value.

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