

Wychwood House

1. Background

Chris and Stephanie Miall had lived at The Shrubbery in Alvechurch for over 10 years, and with a large garden it had been the ideal family home. However now that their children have left, the house and grounds proved too extensive for their needs.

The brief was to build a more modest 4 bedroom house in the garden that is energy efficient and does full justice to its setting. An integral part of the design was for a green oak frame to provide a direct link between the trees on the site being 'part of' the living room.

2. Planning context

The garden plot is fringed with trees, a churchyard and the Grade II* listed St Laurence Church with its striking elliptical "Ark" extension. Although well screened from neighbours it is also within the Alvechurch Conservation Area.

Initial design work involved collaborating closely with the local planning and conservation officers to ensure that the contemporary new building sits comfortably within its garden setting, enhancing and not competing with the neighbouring Church.

By using natural materials, including green oak and cedar cladding, a distinctive curved form and contextual brick walls which extend out into the garden, the design draws references from two local high quality contemporary buildings including the Ark extension to the Church, which was built in 2005 and which won the 2007 President's Award for the best ecclesiastical architecture, and also the very elegant curved plan form of Alvechurch Middle School, designed by Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios.

3. Design Approach

If the continuous curved wall provides the backdrop to the house, welcoming you to the main entrance on arrival, the green oak frame is the spine with full height glazing allowing the house to open out onto the garden. The tree like columns in the single storey kitchen, dining, living space give a sense of drama and allow for the roof to float above clerestory windows giving views of the tree canopy to the north whilst large doors spill out onto the garden to the south ensuring easy access to a curved covered terrace with pond and pergola.

Views to the garden are ever present. Beyond the kitchen the bedrooms and backup spaces are on two storeys, 4 bedrooms with bathrooms, study, laundry, boot room and traditional larder all ensure that the house with its open plan living spaces is a relaxed and functional place to live. The green oak frame draws on traditional craft framing techniques whilst giving the impression that oak trees form part of the living space.

Bamboo brise-soleil provides summer shading whilst a 4kW PV array generates electricity.

This is a house that is sensitive to its setting and relaxing to live in, it sits gracefully within its new garden and provides a high quality addition to its heritage setting.

Oak Frame: Carpenter Oak
Structural Engineer: Wellan Structural Engineers
Main Contractor: Bickford Building Services Ltd

By George Batterham RIBA



WYCHWOOD HOUSE, ALVECHURCH

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