

building with **Soul**

BASED ON THE BANKS OF THE HELFORD RIVER,
MATT ROBINSON IS BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN
TRADITIONAL MATERIALS AND CONTEMPORARY
IDEAS OF ZERO CARBON LIVING

Words by **Lucy Cornes**

“**M**ost architects start with an idea and use industrial components – like glass and steel - to force it into being,” says Matt Robinson. “I make buildings from raw materials, like one would make a salad. The trouble is that most architectural buildings these days are like supermarket ready meals: all sugar (glass) and salt (steel), with no soul or texture.”

From his home studio in the idyllic surroundings of Helford, Matt fuses traditional materials with contemporary vision, achieving remarkable results in his characteristically understated fashion. Working on new builds, extensions to listed properties, studios and unique architectural elements within the landscape – such as bridges and follies – Matt combines imagination and sustainability in a refreshing way.

His career evolved rather unusually, studying philosophy and psychology at Oxford University before starting as a labourer and carpenter on construction sites. Craftsmanship is in his blood: “I think I’ve always had that need to shape things with my hands.” In line with his environmental ethos, Matt began to specialise in green oak carpentry, cob walling and straw bale construction. He sourced materials as locally as possible in order to anchor his buildings firmly in their surroundings, as well as reduce their environmental impact.

Along with a profound understanding of these natural materials, Matt has a flair for creative design, introducing novel elements and witty touches which mark his work out as original contributions to the architectural vernacular.

Past projects include the event barn at Nancarrow Farm

which hosts weddings and feasts; the Marconi Museum at Poldhu for the National Trust; the historically important Tregenna Steps Studio in St Ives, and Rossmerryn House – a zero-carbon eco-house in a peaceful valley setting. “I have a natural affinity with materials like cob, slate and timber and have taken the time to get to know their capabilities and limitations,” Matt explains. “I believe these

natural materials offer the best solutions for building sustainable homes which sit well within the landscape, especially in Cornwall’s maritime climate.”

Matt’s latest design project uses familiar materials - earth bricks, local slate and a timber frame – but on a greater scale than anything he has previously worked on. The Dor Kemmyn Interfaith Centre planned for the outskirts of Truro will be an impressive elliptical space allowing up to 170 people to worship or come together for community events. The building has planning permission and the Cornwall Faith Forum is currently seeking funding to secure the building phase of the project. Under Matt’s guidance, the local community helped to mould the mud bricks (using clay from the site itself) that will make up the building’s inner skin.

The ambitious building also features a pitched roof with a Cornish scantle slate design, a ‘lantern’ at the top created from two overlapping circles, and an oak frame

which will provide a structure for the complex geometry of the building. This project is a showcase for Matt’s skills and experience - as he puts it: “I’ve put everything I’ve learnt in my life into this design.”



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