



PRESS ENQUIRIES
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KnoxBhavan

PRESS RELEASE

THE LITTLE BIG HOUSE MAKES ITS DEBUT

HERTFORDSHIRE, UK

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Knox Bhavan has completed a new energy-efficient house on a lane in Hertfordshire for a client with very specific physical needs.

The client, Henry Fraser, is an artist, author and motivational speaker and the inspiration for the new West End musical 'The Little Big Things'. Henry grew up on the same lane, five doors down from his new house. In 2009 a life-changing accident left the sport-obsessed teenager and blossoming rugby player paralysed from the shoulders down, completely upturning his life.

After the accident Knox Bhavan adapted his parents' house pro-bono, and when a plot came up for sale on the lane it presented an opportunity to develop a new purpose-built home designed specifically to his needs, which would allow him to live independently from his parents with the support of two full-time carers.

The house harnesses the prefabricated cassette system developed by Knox Bhavan, in partnership with modular manufacturer BlokBuild and engineers Price & Myers. The system has been tried and tested on Manser Medal winning March House, and can be tailored to a client's brief and site context, resulting in a high-quality, energy-efficient product which meets the specific needs of the house owner.

Since the accident, Henry developed a newfound passion for painting with his mouth, a skill he has finessed over the years, gaining international acclaim. His brief for the house included an adjoining studio to practice his art and meet with commissioning clients.

Henry's commitment to environmental responsibility led him to seek an energy-efficient home, but he also required a controlled internal environment to stabilise his body's temperature. These criteria presented an interesting challenge for the design. The cassette system ensures minimal wastage, fast erection, good insulation and thermal performance, and the building's orientation maximises solar gain in the winter with photovoltaic panels (PVs) for energy collection. Durable, weathering, self-finished materials are used, including SiOO:X larch timber for the elevations.

The house is located on a no-through road that transitions into a public footpath, nestled in the outskirts of a Hertfordshire village. It replaces a poorly built 1950s chalet bungalow and sets a new benchmark for the lane, which is well regarded for its collection of two-storey detached houses with unique architectural styles and generous gardens.

Retrofitting the original property presented significant obstacles in fulfilling the client's brief, particularly concerning space and circulation. Despite the challenges of building anew in a greenbelt area, the team presented a strong case for redeveloping the site with

an uncompromised design which would bring lifelong value. The new house is equivalent in size to the original property (accounting for permitted development rights) and is carefully orientated to maximise daylight on the tree-lined site.

The house has a large sweeping roof with a soffit clad in reflective aluminium to accentuate the dramatic floating nature of the roof. The upper floor is stepped back, peeping out of the roof to ensure an elegant, low profile from the front drive.

With a T-shaped plan arranged around two courtyards, the house is lateral in its design, with expansive open plan rooms to accommodate wheelchair use. The ground floor is designed around the turning circle of Henry's wheelchair, allowing him to move about the entire space with ease, given that he requires assistance to navigate. It features sliding internal pocket doors, which can be opened up to give long views (an essential for Henry's wellbeing), and expansive glazing offering a seamless transition inside and out.

Henry's customised bedroom, bathroom, kitchen and living spaces, and adjoining studio are all located on the ground floor, arranged around the two courts. Open and intimate social spaces were a key part of the brief. For nighttime attention, a carer's bedroom is also located at ground floor level. A lift gives access to the upper floor, which comprises two bedrooms for the second carer and guests, with a separate carers' kitchenette.

The building's massing and form were influenced by the seasonal movement of the sun around the site, ensuring ample natural light reaches into the rooms and amenity spaces. A consistent 12° roof pitch sweeps down from the first floor, creating an airy volume over the main living space with integrated PVs on the south-west facing roof, maximising solar energy collection. As well as providing shade, the overhang provides a covered route from a taxi or car directly to the front door, ensuring easy accessibility for Henry under cover.

You arrive at the house via a protected front courtyard into a hall which directs you into the house or the studio. Henry's clients turn right into the studio area, while friends and family turn left into the main living space of the house. Carers discreetly come and go using a staircase adjacent to a small guest shower and WC.

The studio features a lofty sky-lit space, providing Henry with a suitable environment for painting and hosting meetings, and features integrated storage to organise his artworks. It's a far cry from Henry's humble studio space at his parents' dining table. It looks out to the front courtyard, a tranquil and private garden which Henry can enjoy during art practise, benefiting from ample sun exposure that nourishes lush vegetation and reflects dappled light into the space.

In the living quarters the open plan design provides Henry with freedom, enabling easy communication with guests, carers, and family from anywhere in the space. The large kitchen and breakfast bar encourage social interaction during food preparation. The dining space, characterised by a double-height ceiling and wide sliding doors, opens to both the front courtyard and rear garden, creating an indoor-outdoor feel during the summer months. At the end of the living space, a lowered ceiling defines an intimate TV snug adorned with Henry's memorabilia, offering a space where he can watch TV and relax with friends while remaining connected to the main house and within earshot of his carers, who have their living area upstairs.

Special attention was given to the placement of Henry's bedroom and bathroom, as he spends a significant amount of time in these spaces. Both rooms receive abundant daylight and offer a calm and pleasant outlook onto the garden.



The bedroom is positioned at the rear of the house and features a large floor-to-ceiling glass door that can be easily opened for ventilation and garden access, while his bathroom, designed as a wet room, boasts a large corner window providing an expansive view of the garden, with morning light coming over the low-slung pitched roof and evening light illuminating the rear garden and patio.

Fergus Knox, Project Architect, Knox Bhavan, said:

"Henry's specific needs and preferences were taken into careful consideration in designing this new house. Accessibility, natural light, and a seamless connection to the outdoors were prioritised, and a commitment to sustainability was never compromised, resulting in a thoughtfully designed space that meets Henry's requirements for a comfortable and accommodating home."

Press enquiries:

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Notes to editors:

Location:	Hertfordshire
Site area:	721.6m ²
Gross internal area:	225.5m ²
Value:	Confidential
Client:	Henry Fraser
Architect:	KnoxBhavan
Design team:	Fergus Knox, Sasha Bhavan
Structural engineer:	Structure Workshop
Landscape designer:	AJG Design
Services engineer:	Paul Bastick Associates
Quantity surveyor:	Ian Thomson & Company Ltd
Contractor:	Philiam Construction
Timber frame engineer:	Price & Myers
Timber frame contractor:	BlokBuild
Photographs:	Edmund Sumner

KnoxBhavan is an award-winning practice established in 1995 by Simon Knox and Sasha Bhavan. Collaboration is a central driver, and all projects, including one-off houses, public buildings and conservation projects, demonstrate a fascination with materials and sensitivity to the environment as well as a commitment to craftsmanship and simplicity of form.

Knox Bhavan has won numerous awards; most recently, March House (2020) was winner of a RIBA South Award and RIBA South Sustainability Award 2023, and the Manser Medal 2022. Threefold House in London won a RIBA London Award 2023 and is longlisted for the RIBA House of the Year 2023. Pembury Pool is shortlisted for an AJ Architecture Award 2023.

The practice has developed an expertise in designing future-proofed homes which are custom-built for clients facing physical challenges. Earlier examples include Crowbrook, Hertfordshire (2013), and Holly Barn Norfolk (2006), both designed to accommodate wheelchair use. Projects in development include: The Pond, a 'Warhol-esque' studio for a Grammy-winning music producer in Peckham; a new home for the arts organisation Peckham Platform on Peckham Square; and a circular design case study, dismantling and relocating their former studio at Bushey Hill Road, Peckham, to be re-erected as a carers' space on a residential site in Kent.

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Photograph © Edmund Sumner