



Dream pad

Sarah Pitt talks to Plymouth businessman Jonathan Abdilla about the dream house he has created overlooking the sea at Sennen Cove

Jonathan Abdilla describes his house overlooking the dramatic turquoise sea at Cornwall's most westerly point as "my take on a beach house". Even a brief glance at its splendour, though, shows this to be something of an understatement.

It has sleek furniture and a spiral staircase, a bathroom featuring hand-hewn basalt tiles imported from America and massive coffee table made from fallen wood from a friend's farm in Costa Rica. It is fair to say that no expense or effort has been spared at Gwel an Treth, the holiday home the businessman has been planning for ten years.

Maltese-born Jonathan, 44, first fell in love with Sennen Cove – which has the distinction of being Cornwall's most westerly beach – when he visited as a teenager with friends to go surfing.

"I grew up in Plymouth, and as soon as I had learned to drive, my friends and I would come down to Cornwall and go to various spots on the

coast. Sennen was always the most unspoilt, and I just fell in love with it," he says. "I said to myself 'One day I'm going to build a house here'."

And this dream moved a little closer ten years ago when, having set up a successful Plymouth-based business called Eco Environmental, he was able to buy a plot of land overlooking Sennen Cove.

At that time, the plot was home to a house beside the road, in line with its neighbours. But Jonathan had more ambitious plans: to demolish this property, and move closer to the cliff edge at the bottom of the garden to get the best views of the sea.

It took him four years to obtain planning permission, then the major excavation works started as the builders dug down into solid granite to establish the foundations.

"It was an incredibly complicated build," he

says. "Everything had to be manhandled down the slope. On a completely flat site it would have taken a year, on this site it took two and a half years to build."

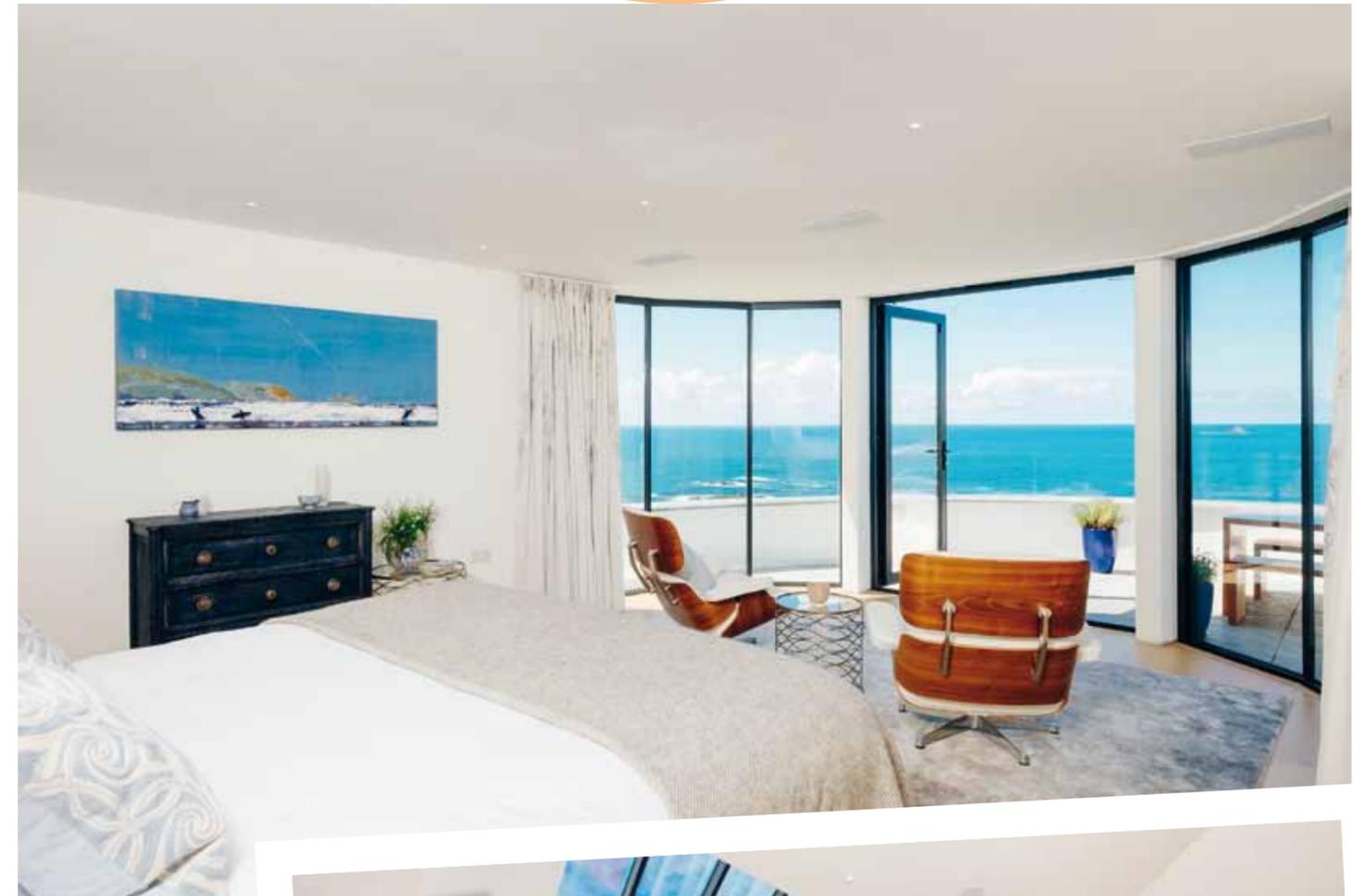
Things were further complicated because for the past four years Jonathan has been based in Costa Rica, building a property business, returning to Gwel an Treth for just a few months of the year.

"Managing this project from overseas was a huge challenge," he says. "I couldn't just pop around and see how things were going."

Fortunately, he had a capable team,

including builder Dan Fell from Newlyn, who oversaw the construction. The joinery was undertaken by Touchwood of Exeter, who crafted the beautiful fitted walnut wardrobes in the bed-

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STYLE TIP: pair a neutral background with bespoke fine wood furniture and splashes of colour in soft furnishings



room and American oak curved staircase.

While the shell of the building was designed by a Truro-based architect Laurence Associates, the interior layout was overseen by a Costa Rican architect, Jaime Rouillon.

The soft furnishings and fittings, meanwhile, were overseen by Jonathan's girlfriend Ashley Laux, who hails from Connecticut in the US. Her finds include hand-crafted beds with rattan headboards from India, sourced via California, wardrobes made from reclaimed wood, colourful cushions, and Moroccan influenced lamps and rugs.

"Ashley has done an amazing job," says Jonathan. "I think she's a natural. She has done a few houses before, but she's actually an astrologer and a life coach! She has been a huge inspiration, because a job this size is a challenge."

There are many show-stopping elements in this house. First up has to be the glossy dark wood coffee table and dining table, made from a massive fallen Guanacaste tree trunk from a friend's farm in Costa Rica.

"It is the tree named after the region I live in in Costa Rica, and it is protected – so the only time you can use its wood is if a tree falls down," says Jonathan. "This is one which fell down

three or four years ago on my friend's farm, so effectively it is reclaimed timber. I wanted to bring a little bit of the place I love over there to the place I love over here."

Another talking point in the open plan living room/kitchen is the fire, encased in insulated glass in a sleek wooden unit, which – amazingly – has a widescreen TV above it. The whole unit weighs half a tonne, and had to be winched into place through the window by "eight strong blokes", says Jonathan.

Despite what you might expect, the heat from the fire does not melt the TV, such is the cleverness of the design. "It works amazingly well," says Jonathan. "The TV is twin-sided too, so you effectively have a cinema which you can watch from the kitchen,

too, if you're cooking."

There are lots of little touches which contribute to the understated luxury of this remarkable house. Above the dining room table made from Costa Rican wood, for instance, hang pendant lights which are black but lined with gold, created by the lighting designer Tom Dixon. "They give a lovely golden light in the evening," says Jonathan.

The curved staircase, too, is a real work of art, designed and made by Touchwood, who also made the walnut cabinets in the bedroom and

the TV unit in the sitting room.

"The staircase is a unique design," says Jonathan. "It was so good that when I saw it I thought 'crikey'. We had been going for a steel angled staircase, but Touchwood's design was so good we threw the other plans out."

All the tiling in the bathrooms is created with natural stone, including black basalt tiles from Miami and hand-coloured tiles from San Francisco. "With the green tiles in the main bathroom every tile is different and we had to get each one to match. All the workmen were on a day rate, and because it was so unusual no one would give me a fixed price. It ended up costing me more, but the end result is just gorgeous."

"The finish of the house is very high – all the wood is perfectly matched and every single piece of furniture is custom-made. It just shows what excellent quality there is here – this is a London finish and I have got it in Cornwall."

The sunsets from the house are spectacular, he says, and he and Ashley can enjoy them sitting in the designer Eames chairs in one of the bedrooms, looking west.

"I have always wanted a beach house, and this was about taking that beach hut feel and putting it into a grander scale," he says. "It really has been a bit of a journey, but it has definitely been worth all the effort: it really is stunning."

Gwel an Treth is available to rent for holidays, under the name of Seacalm, from www.perfectstays.co.uk

GET THE LOOK

Go for understated luxury with dark wood and ethnic designs

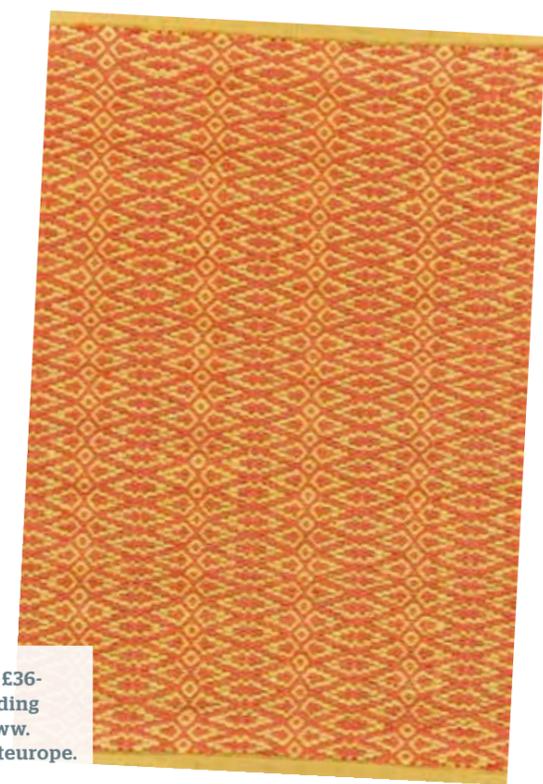
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