

Words **Fiona Reid** Photographs **Ian MacNicol**



Lou and Bill Oppenheim may not have been able to build their Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired guest house on Loch Tay had they not found such a 'heavenly' builder

Tay dreaming

THERE ARE two words that Lou Oppenheim can recall hearing most from builder Janusz Jolkowicz, so much so that they became his catchphrase: "No problem."

Indeed Janusz used this phrase at the most unexpected times, such as when he first turned up at this hillside site in Aberfeldy, Perthshire, to view the spot where Lou and her husband Bill intended to build this two-bedroom guest house overlooking Loch Tay, just metres from their own house. The couple had been looking for a builder for about a year, but of those who had turned up to give a quote, not one had taken on the job. Quite apart from the steep slope, there was about a 20ft drop between the driveway to the Oppenheims' house and the site itself. Getting materials to the site would be problematic, while builders were wondering how they would get a digger in place.

Yet this presented "no problem" for Janusz. The first thing he did was demolish part of the existing ramshackle barn and build a wooden chute to transport materials from the driveway to the site, from the concrete blocks and stone to the wet cement. And Janusz didn't use a digger: he built by hand.

Then there was the weather. The Oppenheims' timing could not have been worse. Work started on site in September 2006, with the major work carried out over the winter months. "We had the most dreadful wet and windy weather," Lou recalls. "There was rain driving in at an angle from the west; it was vicious." Janusz simply put up tarpaulins with buckets to catch the drips, and worked through it all.

"I looked on with awe," says Lou, who runs an acupuncture clinic from home. "There were these guys building a house up the road and whenever it rained they'd be sitting in their van. I really respected Janusz's work ethic."

So much so, in fact, that the Oppenheims nominated Janusz in the Heavenly Builder category in the



'I loved the way Janusz included me in the process - his attention to detail was phenomenal'

Master Builder of the Year Awards 2008, which he has just won, beating other builders from across the UK

But let's backtrack slightly to understand how this all came about. The Oppenheims bought their house 15 years ago after Lou spotted it advertised in an estate agent's window. "I looked at the photo, with these views of Loch Tay, and thought, that's got my name on it," she says. Bill, a pedigree consultant in the horse racing business, often has colleagues and family visiting from the United States and further afield. Initially guests stayed in the barn, but over the years, a this building became more decrepit, an idea emerged why not build a new guest house, which could double as a holiday let in years to come?

The couple approached architect Andrew Khoury, of Khoury Architects in Birmingham, who is married to Lou's niece. "We got talking at a family gathering and he was interested that I liked the work of the American architect Frank Lloyd Wright," says Lou. She admired Lloyd Wright's use of glass and his cantilevered designs, as displayed in Fallingwater, the iconic house he designed in Pennsylvania in the 1930s.

"I wanted this house to be energy efficient and modern, yet tying in with our house, which dates from 1840," says Lou. "I didn't want a wooden chalet as our house is stone, and I wanted it to look as if it was emerging out of the ground, into the surroundings."

Andrew responded with this sympathetic yet striking design, with its extensive glazing orientated towards the loch, soaking up the vista from the open plan living and dining space, which leads into a kitchenette, with two bedrooms and a bathroom and sauna. Lou chose high-quality materials, such as the stone-like ceramic floor tiles, which are combined with underfloor heating. She sourced the furniture from Tangram in Edinburgh, including the Tufty-Tim modular sofa, designed by Patricia Urquiola for B&F Italia, and the Spira dining chairs by Swedisch



manufacturer Lammhults, clearly relishing the chance to explore this minimal aesthetic.

The Oppenheims met Janusz after Andrew suggested approaching a Polish building firm in Birmingham which worked with self-employed builders. Little could Janusz have imagined when he turned up here that he would soon be moving to Aberfeldy and setting up his own building company, John Building Services & Joinery. Janusz and his team lived on site in a caravan, and in the evenings he would go fishing, or they would all have English lessons with Lou at her kitchen table. "They felt like guests," says Lou. Having heard him singing on site, Lou even suggested that he join the local Gaelic choir, which he did. Clearly, this project was not only a fascinating experience for Lou but also a turning point for

Janusz, which the award will surely build on. "I loved the way Janusz included me in the process," Lou reflects. "His attention to detail was phenomenal." He suggested extending the overhang on the roof, for example, having experienced first-hand the way the rain blew into the site, and slightly reconfigured the bathroom enabling the sauna (from local company Enerfoil Magnum) to be installed.

"Our friends love it," Lou says of the house. "Imagine coming here from the Australian outback and looking out to Loch Tay."

Regardless of where you came from, you couldn't fail to be impressed. *
For further information on the winners at the Master Builder of the Year Awards 2008 (www.fmb.org.uk)
John Building Services & Joinery (07721 266 174)



Clockwise from above: the living area with its spectacular views to Loch Tay; Lou and Bill on the Tufty-Time modular sofa; quality fittings were used in the bathroom; the exterior of the new building; the kitchen leads to the living space; the bedroom; the sauna



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