



Architect Andrew Brown has created a string of striking, eco-friendly buildings. He tells **Adam Civico** how they came about



Cool looks: Andrew Brown with his father and mother, Roger and Linda, left, in the house he designed for them at Thurlstone. Below, computer drawing of a modernist extension to a second house he has designed for the village

## From Cuba to cubism

Cuba may be best known for its rum, revolutionaries and cigars. But it was its architecture that inspired Andrew Brown.

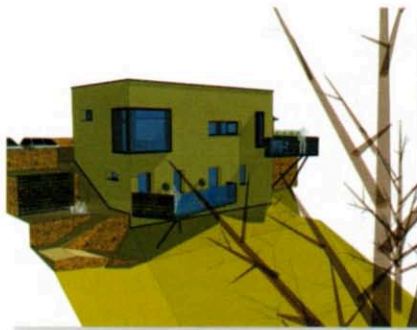
Educated at Penistone Grammar School and Huddersfield University, he went to study in Cuba in 1999, two years after completing an assignment in Jordan.

He says: "It was part of the university course, there was the option of doing international courses, studying with a local university for six weeks."

Andrew jumped at the chance and the visits to other cultures left their mark. "It was quite influential, especially on the sustainable side of things because you can learn from how people build in different climates, for example using 'stacking insulation'.

"That is an ancient technology which is being used again in a modern way. I was learning the basics really. Working in a different climate you start questioning everything.

"The impact was quite fundamental. I wouldn't say from a visual aspect it has influenced me, more from a basic sustainability point of view, and learning how people build to avoid



excessive heat and rain. It is the fundamentals of design it instills in you."

Those fundamentals helped Andrew graduate as one of Huddersfield's top students. He received a commendation for his diploma in architecture and was awarded a prize

for his major project. And then London called.

While there he worked on major projects including the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, a £5m refurbishment and extension of Hounslow Civic Centre, a £200m mixed-use scheme in Tower Hamlets, a £50m residential scheme in Camden and the Imax cinema at Waterloo.

He's now moved back to Yorkshire and set up his own practice, designSpace Architecture, based in North Yorkshire but is 7in the process of relocating to Chapel Allerton, Leeds.

There may not be the same call to avoid 'excessive heat' as there is in Jordan but the design fundamentals he picked up on his travels have stood him in good stead.

"I am specialising in unique one-off houses and extensions which are sustainable and low energy. They're very modern, very different but also quite contextual."

By that he means they fit their surroundings and he has already won a national award for a home he designed in Thurlstone, near Penistone, for his parents Roger and Linda. ▶



Filling in: A radical design by Andrew Brown, below right, for a detached house in Leeds

It features heavily-insulated walls, a circulatory system to regulate the temperature, cedar cladding, and a fantastic curved roof. That is covered in sedum plants, which help insulate the home, attract wildlife and prevent excessive water run-off.

While it could be dubbed an 'eco-house' it also has a striking contemporary design. It is a world away from the old mills and stone cottages you'd expect to find in the old part of Thurlstone. But while it is conspicuous, the £170,000 home is also congruous.

Andrew says: "A lot of 'eco-houses' have wind turbines and they look like they are eco-buildings. I never wanted my buildings to look like that. It is as much about appearance and the form of the building as it is about sustainability.

"The sustainability should not make it look an eco-building. One does influence the other but the form should come first and the eco aspect fit into that. The most economical thing you can do in a new house is to put as much insulation in as possible. You can think about power generation

afterwards."

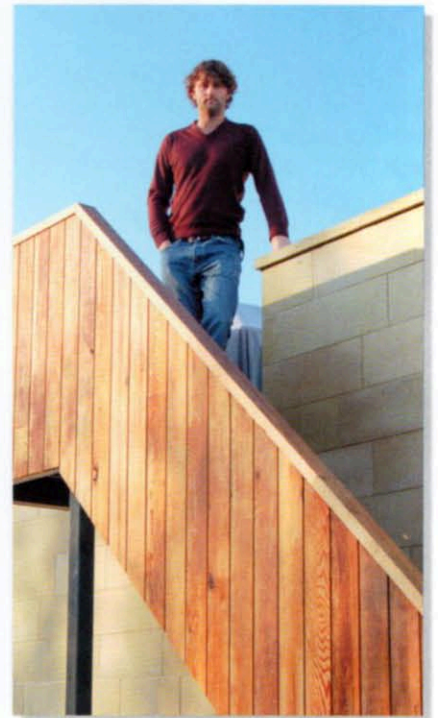
It seems the neighbours in Thurlstone were impressed with his efforts for he has been commissioned to design a contemporary two-storey extension to a bungalow across the road from his parents' home.

It overhangs the Don Valley and is in a conservation area but that did not stop Andrew drawing up a modernist rendered frontage which he hopes will blend into the hillside.

"It's very modern and got a lot of praise from the planners for a contemporary design in the conservation area," he says.

Another project to impress the planners was a three-bedroom bungalow in the green belt at Broad Close Farm, Silkstone, near the farm shop. It's another ecological building with lots of insulation and a ground source heat pump.

"Over the last few years as architects we have been led that way. It interested me and I have done a lot of research. It starts right at the design stages. What is the orientation of the building? Is it south-facing? Is the roof overhang the right angle so you're



not getting too much heat gain in the summer but enough in winter?

"It's about design and then you can start looking at technology but that is very much dependent on budget."