



Roger Brown's plans to convert a bungalow were thwarted when he discovered it had no foundations. Instead, he is putting the finishing touches to a modern house with a 'living roof'. Adam Civico took a look



Grand designs: Roger and Linda Brown and their son, Andrew.

Heavy plant crossing

Like a sail bracing itself against the Pennine winds Roger and Linda Brown's house rises from the Thurlstone hillside. Perhaps the arched roof better resembles a shark's fin cutting through the surf.

Whatever, the structure's modernity is striking and conspicuous. Yet it sits happily on Rockside alongside old cottages made, as the street name suggests, of traditional Yorkshire rock.

Those cottages have stood the test of time. Whether the Brown household does, remains to be seen. Who knows how quickly the juxtaposition of sweeping curves and razor sharp edges, or the cedar cladding and exposed metalwork, will date. One thing is sure: the Browns have created a fine living space which takes full advantage of the views offered by its lofty position.

Seven metres of windows make the most of the surroundings while fields provide the backdrop to the rear, with



a view of Thurlstone to the side. And with its living roof, clad walls and plentiful insulation the home's green credentials aren't bad either. There will be no huge carbon footprint here.

The curve of the roof is designed to fall away from the northern elevation reducing heat loss and opening out the southern elevation to make the most of the sun's heat.

The upper-level exterior is clad in cedar, which besides looking neat maintains heat. But the finishing green touch is a living roof which helps it blend into the hillside. The 'turf', made of low-growing sedum rock plants, provides extra insulation and is surprisingly low maintenance.

Roger says: "It was part of our plan to reduce the heating costs and the

roof will help do that. There's a lot of cavity wall insulation and insulation in the roof and then the sedum on top.

"The house is going to stand out but once the green roof is established, from the back and higher up Rockside you will not even notice there is a building here. Until it is established we may have to water it but once the roots take it should be fine."

The Browns' project has been a family affair. The house is built on the site of what was Roger's father's bungalow and the contemporary design is the work of his son Andrew, an architect who has just set up his own business, Design Space.

It was Andrew who suggested the sedum roof. He says: "The sedum sits on what is like a carpet underlay to



Open spaces: The living room in the Browns' house, left, and, above, the kitchen. Pictures: Scott Bairstow

'There is a place for modern architecture, as long as it is done well. You do not just have to copy what has been done before' - architect Roger Brown

retain the moisture for the plant. Then there is 40mm of rock wool insulation that is designed to retain water as well. That is what the roots go into.

"You get increased insulation and it reduces rain water run-off so you do not get your drains overflowing. It is also a habitat for wildlife. And it looks nice, which is the main thing."

Most of the construction has been done by Roger, including laying about 42 tonnes of masonry. But making the house 'look nice' was Andrew's area of expertise. Roger, 61, says: "We wanted to build something a bit different. We told Andrew we wanted a three-bedroom place with upstairs living space to take advantage of the views. He came up with the design and it looked really good. It looks even better now it's built."

Linda, 57, adds: "When Andrew came up with the design and shape it was, 'wow!'. I had to stop and think a few minutes it was so different but

we're glad we have gone for it."

While the home is modern in appearance the couple, who previously lived in a farmhouse near Castle Dam, Oxspring, have also looked to tradition. An old dining table and cupboards from the farmhouse sit comfortably alongside the modern kitchen, with its locally-sourced, solid oak work surfaces.

The walls are white and a 'floating' oak and sycamore staircase, supported by steel cantilevers, engineered by Roger, gives the house a minimalist feel. Andrew says: "It was never meant to be just a minimalist block, it was supposed to feel lived in."

And it does, thanks largely to the exposed beams, which as well as showing off the curve of the roof, provide a rustic feel to the interior as do the oak floors on the second level.

But for a twist of fate the house would never have happened. Had Roger's dad's bungalow met building

regulations the couple would not have 'gone for it'.

Roger explains: "We had planned to extend the bungalow but when it was built they had not bothered with such things as foundations but it was built on rock. In the years it had been there it had never moved so they weren't that far wrong. But we couldn't put a second floor on it so we had to knock it down and start again. It was probably the best move. It would have cost us as much to underpin, plus the fact we now have a modern building with modern insulation."

The building has stirred villagers' curiosity, says Roger. "It has caused quite a lot of interest and folk slow down or come up to have a look."

What they think, nobody can be quite sure, but Andrew is satisfied. "There is a place for modern architecture, as long as it is done well. You do not just have to copy what has been done before."