

The rise of the bungalow

Architect **Julian Owen** investigates why bungalows are a popular house style choice for self builders and unveils the numerous advantages of single-storey living

In the UK, bungalows are one of the most sought-after, but least available, types of house – in fact, a third of all homeowners claim that this type of property is the ideal place to live. However, this pent-up demand for living on one level is not being satisfied by commercial developers. With this being unlikely to change in the near future, frustrated buyers are finding that the best way to get one is to create it themselves. Experience has shown that whatever self builders are doing now is likely to influence the professional construction industry in due course. So, how can we help to bring about a renaissance?

Why the gap in the market?

In recent years, the cold hard economics of volume house development means it's become preferable to create larger dwellings on smaller plots by building upwards. For instance, imagine there are two homes being built, each with the same floor space, but one is a two-storey and the other a bungalow – the latter will need twice the length of foundations and double the size of roof for the same floor area. The problem is that this requires more expense. The government's building targets haven't helped, either, because demand for the density of new housing has effectively worked to push bungalows out of the picture.

The planners can take a slightly more positive view of single-storey homes, especially where they are being built on one-off sites infilling between houses or in a back garden. In some cases they might impose a low ridge height. This makes the property less visible and the resulting absence of first floor windows means the privacy



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of neighbours is protected. These benefits suggest that increasing community involvement in the planning approval process could lead to more bungalows, simply because they have less impact on their surroundings.

The steady increase in land prices doesn't help to boost the popularity of single-storey properties, either. In areas where land is scarce it is quite profitable to demolish an existing bungalow and replace it with a large two- or three-floor house or even a pair of semis or a terrace. Plus, older bungalows built before certain planning policies took effect offer the perfect opportunity for replacement builds that would otherwise never get permission. All these different factors place the bungalow at threat of extinction, which would be a shame considering the fact that living across a single storey has numerous benefits.

Above: This renovation project by Mole Architects has certainly set the 1960s house apart from the brick bungalows on the same road. A new saw-tooth elevation clad in vertical Siberian larch boarding has transformed the exterior into a contemporary masterpiece

Above & right: The owners of this modern abode had initially planned to extend the 1960s bungalow that stood here. However, the project turned into a demolish and rebuild. The result is a curvaceous house created by The Manser Practice. It proves that bungalows can be architecturally impressive and contemporary



CLOSER LOOK: TIMBER FRAME BUNGALOW



ALISTAIR NICHOLLS

As with many self builds, Jeffrey and Lorraine King's started out as a renovation and extension of an existing 100m² bungalow, which had been let as a holiday home. However, after realising that reworking the structure to create an energy efficient property would be incredibly costly, they decided that starting from scratch was the best route to a more suitable lifestyle. "We'd not considered creating a new house,

but once we realised it was an option and that we could design something tailored to us, we were both very excited," says Jeffrey. They opted for a New England design by Potton. "We borrowed elements from some of their other styles, too, and were able to adjust the plan to pretty much exactly what we wanted," he says. The result is a 204m² home built for £316,000.

The advantages

Single-storey living is no longer viewed as only suitable for older generations, as self builders of all ages recognise the benefits. While it's true that those with limited or declining mobility are likely to find life on one level highly desirable, younger families may also discover bungalows a peaceful comparison to multi-storey living – particularly as there is no risk of noise filtering down from above. With many of us living longer, life without stairs offers real convenience; some estimates suggest that there are about half a million over 55s desperate to downsize from large family homes into a single-storey building. Another boon is that, as an endangered species, good bungalows tend to fetch a premium on the property market.

In terms of the construction itself, DIY self builders usually find a bungalow easier to create. There's less work at height and reduced need for major structural labour,

such as inserting steel beams – particularly if the roof trusses can span the entire depth of the building without requiring internal walls to support them.

As they aren't often produced by mass developers, modern, one-off bungalow designs tend to be tailored towards their owners' needs and constructed to a good standard. This is largely the case when it comes to those who self build to downsize. In my experience, these homeowners tend to be used to a high quality of design and spec, so see no reason to compromise.

Designing a bungalow

Creating a light-filled home is a priority for the majority of people creating tailor-made houses. Bungalows are often wide, so you need to make sure daylight can penetrate the middle of the dwelling. There is a tendency for the layout to be made very deep, with the living spaces pushed to the

Below: Many conversion projects result in single-storey houses, such as Clare and Neil Crossley's reworking of an 18th-century forge. The couple had initially planned to transform the building into a two-storey home, but the planners felt that the extra windows would detract from the appearance of the listed building



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Above: Sometimes a bungalow is the best solution to a tricky site, as demonstrated by this project by The Manser Practice. The new dwelling is positioned in a flood risk area, so the solution was to raise the house on a steel frame, which also creates a sheltered parking area below. The total project cost came in at just over £200,000

edges. This means that the centre (which usually hosts a corridor) ends up being very dark. A better alternative is to create open-plan spaces that allow light to reach the middle, with access to subsidiary rooms via the main areas rather than through narrow passages. Another way of getting light into the depths of the plan (and in turn reducing the roof height) is to create an internal courtyard, which will provide a private outdoor space as well as brightening up any corridors or rooms that surround it. Also, with a large footprint and low eaves, be careful that the roof doesn't over-dominate the external appearance.

Being on one level provides the opportunity to remove ceilings and open rooms up to the roof space with tall vaulted rooms and by adding numerous rooflights. The result will be surprisingly light-filled, voluminous living areas. You may also want to include an open gable, with glazing running from ground level right up to the ridge. This creates dramatic interiors and will give the external design a distinctive character.

It's worth considering how the space in your finished bungalow could be adapted in the long term. If your family is likely to expand or you want to boost the value further down the line, include an attic that could be converted at a later date. Choosing the right roof trusses is key to achieving this. The cheapest standard designs have lengths of timber that zigzag across the space, making any loft area suitable only for storage and creating a skeleton that is hard to remove without major structural

BUNGALOWS: A BRIEF HISTORY

The term, bungalow, has its origins in India – a hangover from the days of the Raj, when single storey houses were popular with colonial settlers.

The first UK examples appeared in south London in the mid-19th century and were a particular favourite of the Arts and Crafts movement, which adopted them as an emblem of the good life found in the countryside. In the interwar period they were seen as the perfect holiday retreat, with thousands built along the coast offering easy access to fresh air and the sea.

However, as these properties became simpler and cheaper to construct, an element of snobbery crept in, with a national newspaper dismissing them as 'repulsive bungaloids'. This reputation was not enhanced by the poorly built prefab housing thrown up in the '50s and '60s. Although these were originally meant to be temporary, some are still with us even now.

Bungalows have long been associated with retirement villages and the elderly, but there are plenty of contemporary designs that prove single-storey living to be suitable for households of all ages and abilities.

work. Attic trusses, which come with a large gap in the middle, cost only a little bit more, but are able to provide an instant storage opportunity that only needs a simple fitting out to become a usable extra room.

As the popularity of single-storey-living grows within the self build industry, perhaps we will see the rehabilitation of the bungalow as the quintessential British home.



Above & below: From the street, Fi and Phil Groves' abode appears to be a modest-looking brick bungalow, but inside it's a colourful, modern home that aims to wow



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Julian Owen is an East Midlands-based chartered architect and author of several books on self build and house alterations. His publications include *Self Build, Home Extension Design and Kit and Modern Timber Frame homes*. He's also the founder of the ASBA Architects network. To find out more visit www.asba-architects.org.