



Issue 3

HUF HAUS – a growing presence in the UK

As anyone visiting this website already knows HUF HAUS has taken the UK by storm. Since the delightful Greta and David Iredale appeared on the popular programme Grand Designs in January 2004 accompanied by the frankly incredulous Kevin McCloud, the company has fielded a staggering 35,000 calls! So we thought we'd take a closer look at this model of German efficiency and spoke to the company's UK development manager, Nick Esser about what lies behind its growing popularity, the company's position in Europe and future plans for the UK.

Although established by Johann Huf in 1912 in Germany, it wasn't until 1997 that the first HUF house was built in the UK, in Shropshire. To British eyes a HUF HAUS looks very contemporary, but they are in fact based on a 1,000 year old construction system, post and beam, the main advantage of which is to allow big open spaces inside as no load-bearing walls are needed. Modern advances in glass production have meant that the outside walls can be made predominantly of glass. They are particularly suited to northern European climates as they allow a feeling of maximum light and space even on the dullest of days.

In Europe HUF have built around 8,000 houses. Most of them are in Germany, but Switzerland boasts over 1,000 and there are two in southern Spain. HUF is slowly reaching other areas, with two in Russia, one in Moscow and one in St. Petersburg and the possibility of entering China is now being explored!

There are currently 76 completed HUF houses in the UK with nearly 100 others at various stages in the process. "One of the biggest problems in UK is finding a site," explains Nick "Of the 35,000 enquires we've had in the past 17 months or so only 85 people actually had sites! I would encourage people to look at buying an existing property and knocking it down. This is often a much more realistic option with services etc. already available and it can be less problematic in terms of planning."

Outside of London HUF recommends engaging the services of a local planning consultant who knows the local area and its current issues. "UK planning departments vary widely," comments Nick, "And many are totally unfamiliar with HUF houses. We

have to educate them about the benefits and style of HUF and reassure them about their appropriateness in the UK.”

Since Nick moved here in 2002 he has seen the UK office expand from just himself and Peter Huf with an assistant, to a team of 11 - himself, Axel Augspurger and Afra Bindewald with two assistants on the sales side and Peter Huf, another architect and three assistants on the architectural side. Although he understands the UK market very well he is still surprised about how different it is from Germany. “In Germany the average person lives in just three houses during their lives,” he explains. “The first is their family home; from there they’ll move into a temporary home, often rented, before finally building their own house which they will probably stay in for the rest of their lives. In Germany the post and beam design is quite normal, and there are around 200 other companies who build similar houses, although HUF are of course recognized as the leading company! In the UK however, the average person moves around 14 times in their life.”

HUF is proud of its exclusive status and the feeling that comes from dealing with a privately owned and family-run company. The HUF factory and village in Hartenfels, which employs 380 staff across the 20 or so companies that make up the HUF Group, produces just 120 houses a year. Currently around 40 or so of those houses are ending up in the UK. The company has just signed the first building in Ireland, a 53,000sq ft nursing home and a house in Jersey; the HUF appeal is gradually expanding.

The appeal to the UK market is clear. HUF represents a growing desire for light and open spaces and with an increasing number of intrepid people wanting to build their own houses HUF HAUS offers the ideal solution. Who else can you go to for an energy efficient and environmentally friendly bespoke house built with German efficiency and all within 12-14 months?