

Wish you lived here? In a Huf Haus

These homes bring the outside in, but owners gripe about window cleaning, says Carol Lewis

The Huf Haus is the architectural equivalent of Marmite. Lovers rave about its modernist look and eco-credentials while haters deride the angular shape and plentiful windows.

For many in Britain a Channel 4 *Grand Designs* show 16 years ago charting David and Greta Iredale's installation of one of these high-end German kit houses was their introduction to Huf.

Tim Thackeray, 58, was one such viewer: "I watched that programme and thought, 'Wow'. I couldn't afford one then, but I had the itch. From then on I wanted to live in a Huf Haus."

Thackeray fulfilled his dream in 2018 when he and his wife, Jackie, 57, bought Purbeck House, the only Huf Haus on the Isle of Wight, for £650,000. The four-bedroom property, which was built in 2007, is in Branstone near Sandown. It had been empty for some time when the Thackerays bought it. The renovation is complete and the house is on the market for £795,000 with Fine & Country.

"We bought it as an investment, but it has exceeded every expectation I had. There is nothing to touch this in terms of the quality of build and finish. It is very, very, special," Thackeray says. The company was set up by Johann Huf,

a carpenter, more than 100 years ago. The distinctive Huf Haus design was first commissioned by his son, Franz, in the early 1970s. The basic components of every Huf Haus are still made in a factory close to where Johann worked, 43 miles southeast of Bonn.

The first one built in Britain was in Leamington Spa in 1997; there are about 280 in the country today. They are a contemporary take on traditional "post and beam" German houses, with glass in place of walls. As well as state-of-the-art insulation, most have geo-thermal or air-source heat pumps and generate energy from photovoltaic tiles on the roof.

However, the bespoke design and energy efficiency comes at a price. Most pre-owned Huf Houses cost at least £1 million. There is a large, five-bedroom Huf Haus in the gated estate of St George's Hill, near Weybridge in Surrey, on the market for £3.4 million (with 99Home) and a four-bedroom detached house in Corley near Coventry for £1.5 million (Fine & Country).

Afra Bindewald, the UK business development manager at the company, says ideally its buildings need to be a minimum of 1,800-2,000 sq ft to make them financially viable. This equates to a minimum build cost of £540,000 (£300 per sq ft) plus the price of the land (usually about 10 per cent more) giving an average entry price of £600,000. It is estimated that the Thackerays' home would cost £1.2 million to build today, including land and associated costs.

It is not just the price that makes the homes exclusive — only 150 Huf homes are made worldwide each year, with 20 to 30 of these coming to the UK. "There is a limited number that can be manufactured each year; we are not a mass producer," Bindewald says.

Those who want to build a Huf need a plot of land with planning permission in

principle, and from there Huf's planning and design consultants can begin. Once the foundations are set, the flat-pack house is erected in about ten days.

Most of those who build their own Huf home visit the show village in Germany (open with social-distancing measures) or the 4,600 sq ft show home in Weybridge, Surrey (closed at present) for inspiration. "We start with a blank piece of paper and as long as the client stays within the language of Huf's post and beam architecture they can have as much glass as they like and we can be flexible on layout," Bindewald says.

It is the large amount of glass that is both the advantage and disadvantage of a Huf Haus. Huf advocates talk about how the design "brings the outside in", but grumble about window cleaning. Sara Scott-Rivers, who runs the independent Huf Haus owners' group, which has 120 members, says another frequently raised gripe is the spiders that are attracted to the lofty homes.

Although new-build, off-the-peg Huf houses are rare, work will soon begin on eight, priced from £1.8 million to £2.7 million at Cookham Heights near Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. Because multiple units are being built it should bring the cost down to a more affordable level. The development is a partnership between Huf and Simco Homes. It's the first time the company has partnered a housebuilder since 2002, when Wates Homes built nine Huf homes in Dulwich, southeast London.

Geoff Simm, a director of Simco, believes it could be the beginning of a continuing partnership. He says: "We hope to bring these to market in late August and then hopefully to roll out the concept to more sites. Huf is very keen to work with us to bring more of these homes to the open market over the next two to three years."



Above: the Huf Haus is characterised by post and beam construction and lots of glass. Right: a four-bedroom Huf Haus in Chorley, West Midlands, is on sale for £1.5 million with Fine & Country. Centre right: the Cookham Heights development in Buckinghamshire. Far right: a four-bedroom Huf Haus in Branstone on the Isle of Wight is on sale for £795,000 with Fine & Country



Ask an expert Do I still have to pay the rent?

I signed a tenancy for a flat in February before being furloughed. I had to move in with my parents, but the landlord says I must still pay rent. Is the tenancy invalidated by the Covid-19 emergency?

The Coronavirus Act 2020 has not cancelled existing lettings, although it does limit ways of ending them. The best option for tenants unable to live in rental properties is to rely on the ancient legal principle of frustration.

A contract is frustrated when an unforeseen event makes it physically or commercially impossible to comply. The best-known frustration cases are the "coronation cases", involving agreements for spectators to watch the 1902 coronation celebrations of King Edward VII. The festivities were postponed after the king fell ill, but the courts honoured the agreements as it was still possible to use the facilities — even though there were no royal events for the spectators to watch.

Frustration featured in Brexit-related litigation in the 2019 High Court case of *European Medicines Agency (EMA) v Canary Wharf*. The EMA gave notice ending the 25-year lease of its London headquarters after the UK voted to leave the European Union. It argued that Brexit and the relocation of its offices frustrated the purposes of the lease. However, the court decided that Brexit did not "come close" to frustrating the purpose of the lease.

Whether you can argue that the emergency has frustrated the letting depends on the terms of the agreement and the circumstances involved. However, it is unlikely the pandemic has invalidated the tenancy and that you can avoid paying rent. Mark Loveday is a barrister with Tanfield Chambers. Email questions to brief.encounter@thetimes.co.uk

What £3 million buys you in...

Buckinghamshire

Built in 1760, the year of George III's coronation, Oxford Cottage is one of Marlow's more historic homes. The grade II listed house is a short walk from the town centre, with its chichi shops and Tom Kerridge's Michelin-starred pub, the Hand and Flowers, but has a secluded feel thanks to mature gardens flanked by a brick-and-flint wall. There's a kitchen/breakfast room, five reception rooms and four bedrooms — the master has a walk-in wardrobe and en suite. The Chilterns are on your doorstep and it's an hour's drive to London. **Air pollution** 10.5mcg/m³ particulate pollution annual average, 0.5mcg/m³ over the WHO guideline of 10mcg/m³. **Upside** The L-shaped study would be perfect for WFH. **Downside** You would get more for your money farther out of town. **Contact** savills.co.uk



£2.995 million

Dorset

The Manor House is an attractive grade I listed property in the village of West Stafford. With façades from three eras — Georgian, Elizabethan and late-18th century — the six-bedroom house is wonderfully unique. There are five reception rooms, including two studies and a billiard room, plus a sleek kitchen with a wine cooler. The gardens were designed by the Chelsea Flower Show multi-gold medal-winner George Carter. There is a two-bedroom cottage, stabling, garages, a pool and a tennis court. It's three miles east of Dorchester, from where trains to London take two and a half hours. Bournemouth airport is 30 miles away. **Air pollution** 7.9mcg/m³, 2.1mcg/m³ below the WHO guideline. **Upside** You'll never need to leave. **Downside** There's a lot of upkeep. **Contact** knightfrank.co.uk



£2.95 million

Gloucestershire

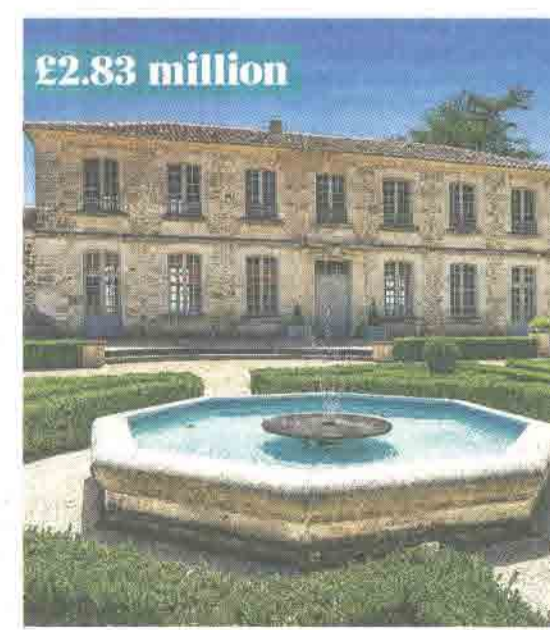
It's hard to find a home with better eco credentials than the Outhouse. Built on a plot in the Forest of Dean, the 5,000 sq ft house has a green roof with solar panels, a ground-source heat pump and underfloor heating. It was designed by Loyn & Co for a pair of artists and was shortlisted for the Stirling prize in 2016. There are three studios, three bedrooms and an open-plan living/kitchen area; rooms are organised around external courtyards. Brockweir's community-staffed village shop is a 15-minute walk and Chepstow and Monmouth are within a 20-minute drive. **Air pollution** 7.2mcg/m³, 2.8mcg/m³ below the WHO guideline. **Upside** Unspoilt views over the River Severn and Wye Valley. **Downside** This is a living/working space, which won't be suitable for everyone. **Contact** themodernhouse.com



£2.895 million

Dordogne, France

Domaine de Bagatelle is as chic as it gets. The 165-acre estate comprises two self-contained, four-bedroom homes, an 18th-century main château and a 19th-century hunting lodge, which recently underwent a three-year renovation, plus a three-bedroom, two-bathroom guardian's cottage. While away the balmy afternoons beside the pool or lose yourself in the grounds — landscaped gardens, an arboretum laid out by a designer from Kew Gardens, butterfly-filled wildflower meadow and woodland. It's a 15-minute drive from Brantôme, a town filled with medieval and Renaissance architecture, known as Venice of the Périgord. Bergerac and Limoges airports are 90 minutes by car, or it's two hours from Bordeaux airport. **Upside** Rental potential. **Downside** You will need a car. **Contact** knightfrank.co.uk



£2.83 million

Compiled by Victoria Brzezinski @vbrzezini