

Burgage House is a modern house on an ancient piece of land

Where

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ANCIENT

meets

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MODERN

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*The past meets the present head-on at Burgage House in Totnes. **CHRISSEY HARRIS** went to see a home fit for the modern age*

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Mike and Yve says their open-plan ground floor copes well with visitors and is perfect for family get-togethers



This is a comfortable, modern home in the heart of Totnes



Burgage House is a real family home

HERE we are, stood on an ancient site in England's second oldest borough, staring in wonder at a high-tech glass cellar door that opens with the touch of a button.

There are many parallels to be drawn between the old and new, of history and of progress but for the moment, all I can say is: "Aaaarrggh! That's so cool!"

"It is, isn't it?" says Mike Cast, owner of Burgage House in Totnes.

"This is quite extravagant but it's great, such a clever design. I can store 2,000 bottles of wine down here and it's all kept at 12 or 13 degrees. Perfect."

The wine cellar is just one of the many ultra-modern features that make up this smart new-build in the heart of town.

Mike, 61, and his wife Yve, 58, really have thought of everything, from the incredible lighting system to the surround

sound audio network, well-positioned works of art, steel and American walnut staircase and electronic gazebo.

This is as high-tech as a house gets and to think that it has all been built on a narrow strip of land that dates back to medieval times.

Burgage House takes its name from the fact it has been built on a 'burgage plot' an Anglo-Saxon term used to describe thin strips of land behind a townhouse.

In Totnes, these plots are the width of the merchants' houses in Fore Street and used to be smallholdings.

This site was one of the last of its kind, a fact Mike and Yve quickly became aware of when they first started looking at building their dream home here.

"It took us a long time to get planning permission," says Mike, with a slightly weary look. ▶

PHOTOGRAPHY: MATT AUSTIN

“The conservation people wanted it to stay as it was because it was one of the only ones left,” adds Yve. “But it was in such a state.”

The land had been neglected for years and was massively overgrown by the time Mike stumbled across it just over three years ago.

He had bought a former solicitors’ office on Totnes’ Fore Street as an investment and converted the premises into a shop and two flats.

Once that project was complete, Mike turned his attention to the ‘jungle’ out the back and wondered if he could build a house on the site.

“It was so overgrown. Even if you were in the SAS, you wouldn’t have got in here,” says Mike. “Anyway, we started clearing it and we found this little pedestrian gate that we didn’t even know existed.”

The discovery marked the start of a long and complex planning process that eventually led to a fairly long and complex building process.

A few local residents weren’t happy about the development and made their feelings known, something Mike says he “totally understands”.

Then there was the logistics of trying to build a new house with very limited access for lorries etc.

“I think if we’d known then what we know now, we would never have done it,” says Mike. “That’s a typical *Grand Designs*-type saying, isn’t it?”

“We had an archaeologist standing outside with his arms folded every day between 10am and 4pm for six weeks.”

The couple were certainly up against it so it’s all credit to their determination and commitment that Burgage House is here at all, let alone one of the most striking homes in the area.

The whole family has been involved in making this place look great, with evidence of each of their skills dotted all over the house.

Mike’s daughter Lucie, who runs a successful contemporary handbag business, stitched the leather bannister running up the steel and wooden staircase, created by her architect designer boyfriend Simon Hampshire.

Simon also came up with the design for the table and his father, David, worked on the handrails. ▶

*‘It was so overgrown. Even if you were in the SAS, you wouldn’t have got in here. We started clearing it and we found this little pedestrian gate that we didn’t even know existed’*



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Works of art at Burgage House



The leather covered stair rail



### HIS AND HERS

As well as his state-of-the-art wine cellar, Mike designed the perfect place for him and a pal to enjoy a glass, while listening to music.

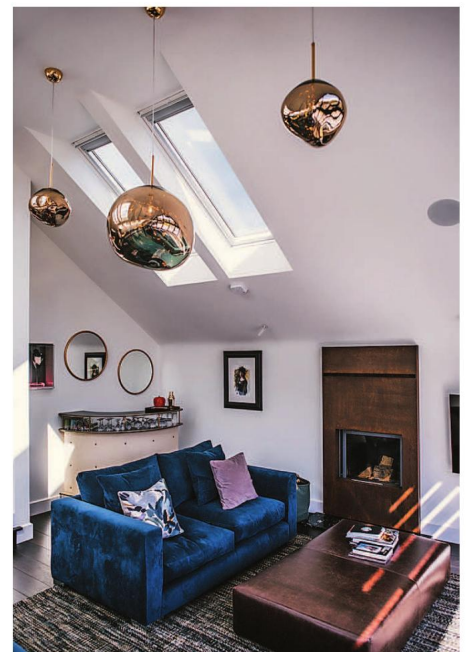
Two bench seats have been placed opposite each other towards the back of the house, complete with (down-lit) recesses in the wall to rest a beverage.

Upstairs, Yve has her dressing room, a beautiful area, which even has a cabinet for her bags.

The state of the art wine cellar is certainly a crowd pleaser:

### *A well lit home*

*“The lighting is fantastic in this house,” says Mike. As well as some special looking lamps, uplights and downlights, there are even spotlights on the balcony that change colour. “When we moved in, there was a bit of a fault with the wiring,” says Mike. “It meant that the lights were flashing, going from green to red and back again.” One onlooker apparently told the couple “It looks like a strip club up there!” Thankfully, the problem was soon corrected.*





Mike and Yve Cast have created a home fit for the 21st Century



Attention to detail is key

“We pushed the boat out here and did a marble bathroom,” says Mike



“It’s a real family house. We’re so lucky,” says Mike, gazing out into the back garden where his mum’s ashes lie under a tree.

“So I’ve got my mum under the left tree, my dog under the right and the kids are living in the flats.”

Lucie, 24, and her brother Henry, 26, currently live in the flats Mike owns on Fore Street.

What’s that like?

“To be fair, we moved into their space because they were living here first but we hardly see them,” he says. “They were here yesterday for Lucie’s birthday though. That was great.”

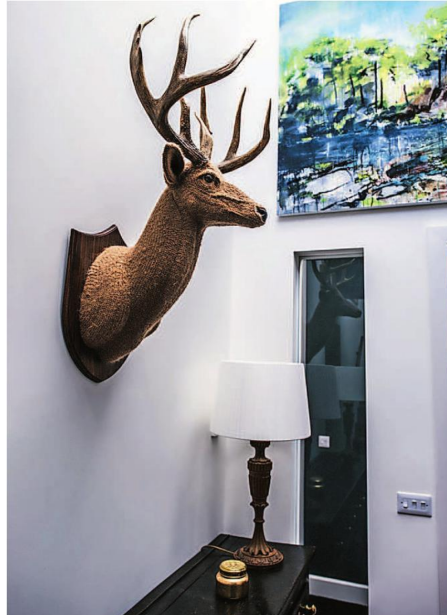
Mike and Yve say they’re delighted with how well their new home copes with lots of visitors – something they’re used to.

For ten years, the couple ran Gitcombe House in Cornworthy, a huge Georgian mansion guesthouse, which they sold in October 2013.

“It was beautiful but every window rattled,” says Mike. “It was so drafty. In the winter it was bloody freezing. You had fires there because you had to have fires. We have fires here because they look nice.”

There are lots of aesthetically pleasing things in Burgage House put there, well, just because: from the wonderfully ornate 1970s Italian chandelier in the landing to the crochet deer head in the entrance hall.

“We’re really pleased with how it looks,”



A crochet deer head in the entrance hall

says Mike, agreeing that his home functions pretty well, too. “It was all tested out last Christmas when there was about 10 of us here. We were all laughing, dancing and bouncing around. It really did work.”

See [castmade.co.uk](http://castmade.co.uk)

The architect for the Burgage House was Jon Capel of Harrison Sutton Partnership and the project manager was Richard Goulden of Goulden and Sons. ♦

## THE ITALIAN CHANDELIER

“The whole house was designed around this,” says Mike, pointing to the ornate 1970s Italian chandelier the couple discovered in a shop in Ashburton. We had it all completely renovated. We just knew it was amazing. My wife made a cardboard mock-up of it to make sure we knew how it hung while we were building the house.”

