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From £425,000: each home at Rocky Lane (above) is built to order and has views over St Agnes and Cornwall's Atlantic north coast (right). Call 08448 805709



When Londoner and former Opera House set designer Simon Blackburn married an American from New England, he also fell in love with wooden houses, says **David Spittles**

WOOD IS WHERE HIS HEART IS

'You get the feeling of being in a hideaway in the woods – like living in a tree house'

THIS has been a long journey for Simon Blackburn. It took him from Clapham to the Cotswolds and to Cape Cod. But it ended, with the right location and the right plot for his dream home (light-filled, eco-friendly, open and spacious with decked verandas and a view of the sea) in Cornwall.

Now Blackburn, a former Royal Opera House set designer turned property developer, is building not one but 10 such houses above Trevaunance Cove, at St Agnes, on Cornwall's dramatic north coast.

Exasperated by the unimaginative suburban house designs offered by volume builders, Blackburn set up his own company five years ago – Living Structures – offering a bespoke service to people who wanted what he wanted out of a

home. Inspired by the American architecture of New England, where his wife hails from, Blackburn formed an alliance with a Massachusetts-based manufacturer of timber-framed houses, at first building one-off homes for those who had found their own plots.

Then he won a contract to build 50 holiday homes overlooking lakes in the Cotswolds.

This was the breakthrough, giving Blackburn financial firepower to assemble his own landbank at St Agnes. The plot, sitting in the middle of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, had its own challenges. It was a steep hillside plot of 3.5 acres, with a sprinkling of 1950s holiday chalets.

Each of the 10 new houses in Rocky Lane will be a bespoke build, sitting in its own private ground but integrating with the un-manicured whole. "My wife says the setting has a fairy-like quality. You get the feeling of it being a hideaway in the woods, like living in a tree house."

Each home is being built to order, with buyers required to make staged payments. Prices range from £425,000 to £525,000.

"We thought we would be selling to trendy thirtysomethings but in fact most interest has come from middle-aged metropolitans – not old, not young – who like contemporary, tasteful design, love the location and want to be part of it."

A planning stipulation means the homes cannot be a primary residence, though oddly there are no restrictions on the amount of time owners can spend there. A rental management service will be put in place for owners who want to let out their property.

Call 08448 805709, or visit www.rockylanecornwall.com.

■ Cloud Nine, based in Redruth, Cornwall, claims to produce some of the world's most advanced eco homes. Designed in Scandinavia and built as kits in Poland, they can have fuel bills of only £26 a year. Prices start at £98,000 and rise to £179,000 but you have to have found your own plot.

For more information, call 0870 803 4640, or visit www.cloudnine-living.com.

SUNSET: CORNISH SPECTACLE



A hard day on the beach: Trevaunance Cove (top) isn't the only draw at Rocky Lane. Its new homes (above) often appeal to middle-aged metropolitans looking for good design

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