

# Week here, tweek there and we're nearing end game

The Moore family's cedar-shingled home at ecovillage Cloughjordan is coming to fruition, writes **Oliver Moore**

Pictures: **Denis Scannell/ Oliver Moore**

**B**uilding our house in Cloughjordan ecovillage has been both a fast and a slow process. On the one hand, we joined the initiative in 2007. On the other, we only started to build last summer, and are very close to completion now.

This third phase, from foundations to second fit of the electrics, has been the main bulk of the build.

Our builder Fergus Collins was already half way through a three house unit next to us when he started building for us. This was very handy and efficient, with labour and kit such as scaffolding and cherry picker always available.

In the previous column, the notion of 'foreground vision' was introduced – a shrinking and growing of the apparent size of the house, based on various perspective and subjective elements. This has really intensified.

With the shape of the house laid out, it looked very small to us. But once the scaffolding and then timber frame arrived it really did seem as if the house would be bigger again, all in the space of a week. It was very exciting to go down every evening and see a dramatic change each time. This was the fastest and most satisfying phase – a floor a day seemed to go up. The builders worked at an impressive pace.

We'd chosen the windows from 'leftovers' in Rational Windows, Edenderry, the town I grew up in. This was because they were far more affordable than any other option we'd encountered: they tend to be the windows of choice in the ecovillage for this reason.

Happily, they all fitted perfectly. Two were frosted – an oversight on our part, as we'd confused a general greyish glass wrapping with the frosting underneath. This has turned out to be a bit of a blessing as they are located at

the ground floor kitchen-dining, adding a little privacy in a community that gets a lot of well-intentioned but nevertheless slightly invasive gawking from time to time.

We were a bit nervous about the wood shingle going on the outside of the house, which we'd only seen images of in some of the many meetings we had with our architect Miles Sampson and his colleague Colin McDonnell.

We were delighted when it went up. It looked quite unique and striking, with each shingle a slightly different hue. We opted for a Canadian cedarwood, we'd been advised this was the best adapted wood for the Irish climate.

Seeing this exterior of considerable beauty, we made a rash decision to oil it and thus preserve its look.

Wood tends to fade to a serviceable shade of silver-grey unless treated. This wasn't part of the arrangement with the builder, so we managed this aspect ourselves. We sourced an Osmo oil from Machine Timber Specialists, based in Wicklow, and we used a local painter.

The significance of us, rather than the builder, managing this phase was brought home to me one day when driving to work. The painter and the paint company had something of a difference of opinion on the quantities to use, and neither in a way that would be personally profitable. He wanted to use more oil, but had a set fee, whereas they suggested he'd need less – also not in their economic interest. And it was my decision to make, in the space of a couple of short hours. In quick consultation with our architect, I worked out a compromise, with a longer gap between coats to allow for architect inspection. So far so good, but nerve racking nonetheless: if it went wrong, it could have

started to peel, or not seal correctly. We may in the end let it fade to that serviceable silver, but for now we're very happy with the colour.

External plaster and then a soft brown paint went on the outside of the ground floor, and complimented the upper external shingle floors quite well. This was planned, but a prompt decision was needed as something broke down in the communications, and we had one day, in essence, to choose a colour from a palate board. My partner Vicki has a great eye for colour, and chose a very well-matched 'Texas' (it is, as may see from the pictures, a dusty, sandy colour with a touch of brown and orange).

The first fit of the electrics were woven into the house, and then the cellulose insulation (including old copies of the *Irish Examiner*) went in. This caused quite a flurry of activity. After that the plaster boards went up, and more foreground vision as the rooms seemed to shrink again.

All were plastered, and so the internal woody look disappeared. On our architect's advice, we left a wooden beam exposed between the kitchen-dining and living room. This feature warms up the area and creates a natural divide.

The builders were moving along very well and were very easy to talk to and discuss changes if needed.

Technically, being three story, and having a particular type of stairs-to-door layout, we needed fire doors to be compliant with the regulations. These are more expensive, a bit 'officey' and quite plain. But they do self-close, which I'm looking forward to! The most recent developments have been the installation of the district heating system, the second fitting of the internal electrics, the stairs and the connection to the outside electrical grid.

We have our own heating

system in Cloughjordan ecovillage, so require a heating tank in each housing unit.

This is an exceptionally large boiler. Our stairs wraps itself around a central column in segments of five and sometimes fewer steps.

The stairs has really opened up access to the house, and made it seem like we are at the beginning of the end of the build.

However connecting up to the electricity has ended up taking longer than we expected. The ESB people have been great, but we informed them later than we should have, so drying the plaster is delayed too.

The builder has finished the three house unit beside us, and started on a new build elsewhere in the ecovillage.

It's great for him to have the work ongoing, and its great for us and indeed our neighbours to have him to hand too.

Once we're finished with this builder phase, we'll start kitting out the internals. This we will do either ourselves or with us overseeing carpenters, tilers and whoever else we need to bring in on the homeward journey. ■■

