

# ROCK STAR

*Emerging from a former quarry face as if sculpted from it, Tom and Maggie Nicol's contemporary home plays on its extremely sloping site to make the most of spectacular views over the Solway Firth* *Words* Caroline Ednie *Photography* Nigel Rigden

*this picture* The only flat part of the site is used as the entrance and garage. It made sense to build the living space on top of the bedrooms as the site slopes steeply in two directions, giving a breathtaking outlook from the upper floor





*left Tom and Maggie wanted natural wood inside, but chose birch rather than mimicking the red cedar of the exterior cladding for the door frames and furnishings*  
*right Keen cook Maggie wanted an open-plan kitchen, and chose white gloss units to keep the space looking streamlined and light. With floor-to-ceiling windows running the length of the first floor, there's a danger of too much glare in this bright space, so they opted for a worktop with a leathery matt finish*  
*below right Although it's one big space, the kitchen and dining area is separated from the living room by a low partition wall, keeping it open but also self-contained*



**T**he emergence of Deepstone, a remarkable new-build family home that appears to be partly hewn from the former quarry face into which it nestles, has succeeded – in homebuilding terms at least – in putting the kibosh on the age-old adage that over-preparation is the foe of inspiration. Indeed, the meticulous preparation that Tom and Maggie Nicol instigated, even before the deal was sealed on securing the site, was largely responsible for allowing the inspirational three-storey, multi-layered design, which promised preternaturally lovely views over the Solway Firth, eventually to prevail.

The challenging site, a former whinstone quarry in a designated national scenic area was clearly the cause of this approach. 'We started looking for plots around this area as it's a relatively unexplored part of the country,' explains Tom, a retired Ford executive, who along with wife Maggie is originally from the Galloway area of south-west Scotland, although the family have lived in Essex for more than 25 years. 'The main motivating factor was to be near our family, and it was Maggie's dad who found this plot, learning about it from a neighbour who played in the same local fiddle band.'

It's a difficult and demanding site, and although →





*left and above*  
The Nicols considered concrete screed for the floor but were concerned about future cracking, so chose ceramic tiles. The insulated floor and surround of the stove are solar thermal stores

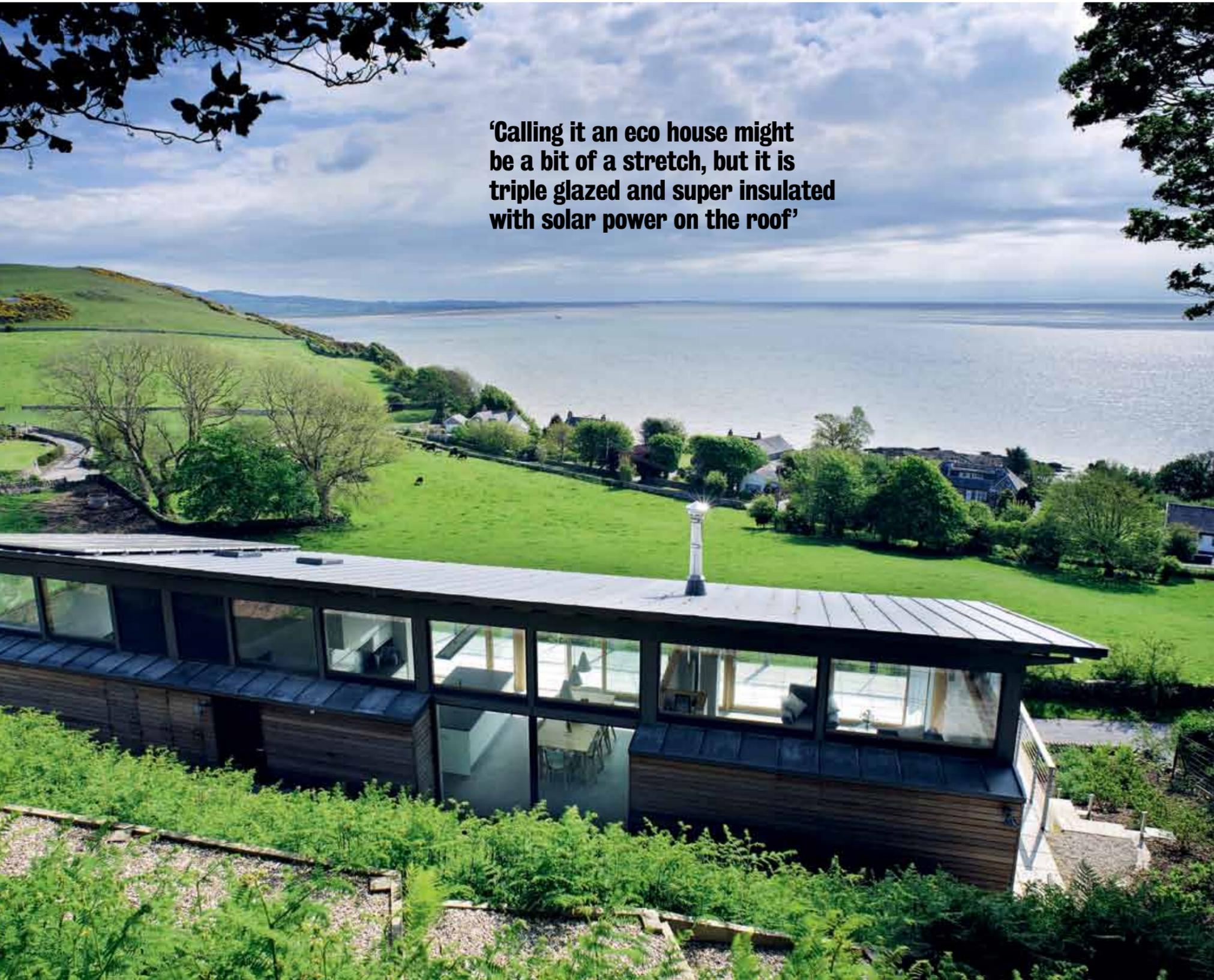
it did have outline planning permission and potential, we had to be sure we could actually build on it,' Tom continues. 'So we asked a civil engineer friend to look at it and advise us, and he suggested some ground testing.' He also put the couple in touch with local architect Simon Winstanley Architects, who suggested getting a 3D survey. At the same time, due to the fact that they wanted to make better use of limited space on the site, Tom and Maggie discussed with the neighbouring farmer if he would agree to a septic tank in his field, and he said yes. Only after receiving a favourable survey did the pair then decide to take the plunge and buy the plot.

Tom and Maggie's initial request for their long-term family home was an insistence that they didn't want a 'Galloway cottage'. Further fine-tuning of their wish list revealed, as Tom explains, 'not a long list of wants – just big ones. In terms of concept, we wanted an open-plan, energy-efficient and comfortable home. And in light of the wonderful views, we imagined it would be an upside-down house. We were keen to have cool bedrooms at a lower level, and we requested three decent-sized bedrooms rather than four smaller ones.' Given the contours of the site, the couple also thought a garage on ground level made good sense. This is essentially what the Nicols got, with a lot more besides.

Responding to the brief and addressing the steep site that slopes in two directions, architect John Murray did an initial sketch featuring an ambitious yet nevertheless site-sympathetic, site-specific design, which delighted the Nicols and the local planners. And it's pretty much this sketch that's emerged from the Galloway rock face.

Deepstone effectively pulls off a clever design coup, in that it combines two distinct and contrasting elements seamlessly. A monumental plinth, finished in stone from recycled quarry waste, houses the garage and entrance at the level of the quarry base, with three sea-facing en-suite bedrooms above. Contrastingly, the open-plan living, kitchen and dining area – and →

**'Calling it an eco house might be a bit of a stretch, but it is triple glazed and super insulated with solar power on the roof'**



an additional study-cum-TV room – has been designed as a glazed pavilion, which sits, seemingly floating, above the solid plinth. This pavilion, constructed via a steel frame and triple-glazed windows (as well as highly insulated timber infill panels clad in cedar) is set back to accommodate an external terrace facing the spectacular sea views. This site-sensitive lightness of touch is continued in the zinc roof, which follows the slope of the setting, and is cantilevered on all sides with projecting Douglas fir rafters to give a crisp, elegant edge. The roof also features photovoltaic panels, which are instrumental in delivering the canny energy-efficient credentials of the new contemporary villa.

'Both Maggie and I are a bit eco,' explains Tom. 'We were keen to have a building that was sustainable with low running costs, high insulation, and a good quality of build. But I think we recognised at an early stage that we would need a lot of concrete to separate the house from the hillside. Calling it an eco house might be a bit of a stretch, but it is triple glazed and super insulated. In addition, the solar power on the roof complements the ground source heat pump for the underfloor heating and hot-water system. That involved drilling a 140-metre borehole, which was interesting!'

Site preparation and construction took 18 months, during which time Tom and Maggie were based off-site in Essex. 'Time constraints weren't an issue – we wanted a quality, rather than a fast, build,' explains Tom. 'The builder – 3B Construction – was fantastic. The guys set about the task with enthusiasm, knowledge and determination to do it right and deliver real quality. Our neighbours (thanks for their patience!) also told us how impressed they were with their work ethic and standard.'

In terms of the interior finishes, the couple is similarly effusive about the contribution of architect →



*above Mirrored wardrobes in the bedroom reflect maximum natural light around the room far left The front of the house faces south and has spectacular views across the sea left and below Designed with integrated sanitaryware, the all-white bathrooms have built-in storage that keeps clutter at bay. The en-suite bathroom for the master bedroom has the added luxury of its own sauna*





*left The all-round glazing on the pavilion lets in plenty of natural light so that the interior is bright and airy, despite facing the imposing hillside right Both Maggie and I are a bit eco,' says Tom. 'We were keen to have a building that was sustainable, but recognised we would need a lot of concrete to separate the house from the hillside'*



John Murray. 'Neither Maggie nor I consider ourselves style gurus, so we asked John to make some suggestions to narrow down our choice of fittings and detailing, and he gave us great guidance.' Chiming with the spare-yet-sumptuous palette of timber, stone, zinc and glass exterior materials, the interiors have been defined simply by means of ceramic floors, a neutral colour palette and birch rather than cedar finishes.

'My contribution to the build was to hire a van and take a trip to Ikea,' laughs Tom. The pair also prevailed with the odd little indulgence, such as a remote-controlled shower in the main bathroom; a basement wine cellar; and runway-effect lights on the main staircase.

But it's the fundamentals rather than fripperies that define Deepstone, not only in terms of its canny credentials as an exemplary low-energy family home (with some of the best views in southern Scotland to boot), but in its elegant response to a complex site, appearing as it does almost sculpted out of its surroundings. It's a vital, contemporary (and seamlessly integrated) addition to the spectacular, and largely undiscovered Galloway coast. **GD**



Looking for advice on how to build on a tricky plot? See page 62 for all you need to know



### Suppliers

- Project team** Architect Simon Winstanley Architects (01556 503 826; candwarch.co.uk)  
**Structural engineer** Asher Associates (01387 250 644) **Landscape architect** Paterson Landscape (01556 611 108; paterson-landscape.co.uk)  
**Main contractor** 3B Construction (01988 700 000; 3bconstruction.co.uk)  
**Structure** Glazing NorDan (01698 376 922; nordan.co.uk) **Zinc roofing** VM Zinc (01992 822 288; vmzinc.co.uk) **Stone cladding** Denfind Stone (01382 370 220; denfindstone.co.uk)  
**Ground source heat pump** Nibe (0845 095 1200; nibe.co.uk) **Heat-recovery ventilation system** Genvex (0845 260 0123; genvex.co.uk)  
**Fixtures and fittings** Kitchen Magnet (01325 744 093; magnet.co.uk) **Worktop** Silestone (01256 761 229; silestone.co.uk)  
**Bathroom sanitaryware** Roca (01530 830 080; uk.roca.com) **Brassware** Hansgrohe (01372 472 001; hansgrohe.co.uk); Vitra (020 7608 6200; vitra.com) **Floor tiles** Porcelanosa (0800 915 4000; porcelanosa.com)  
**Wood-burning stove with hearth and surround** Saey (saeyheating.com)  
**Furniture** Kitchen table and chairs Ikea (0845 358 3363; ikea.com)

