

WEST COAST

...that's Wales, not California. Pennard House borrows from the past to make something new, and takes a multi-textured approach in its use of local materials

Words Emily Brooks Photography Kristian Hyde

You might be forgiven for thinking that the deep eaves and canopies that run all the way around Pennard House might have been put there for guarding against a fierce sun. But this is the Gower peninsula, just a few miles west of Swansea, where showers are a safer bet than sunshine: those eaves and canopies are vast umbrellas, protecting its outdoor-loving owners from the rain when they fancy a barbecue or an al fresco drink.

The house's three interconnecting volumes – a cantilevered master bedroom over a kitchen/dining area, a living room, and a long 'guest wing' with three further bedrooms – make an L-shape. Together with a long crenellated wall that faces the guest wing, they form a private courtyard that fulfils the homeowners' chief wishes: somewhere peaceful from which to enjoy the amazing Gower sunsets; and somewhere to have a damn good party. ▶





With floor-to-ceiling windows on two sides, this bedroom makes the most of the dramatic Gower sunsets



"We really pushed the engineer to cantilever this roof as much as possible," says architect Kristian Hyde: the result provides another sheltered area for entertaining



Bar-shaped slate cladding emphasises the building's horizontality, 'reaching out' to the sunset

“Even we couldn’t have predicted just how much of a light-box the house would become”

“Even we couldn’t have predicted just how much of a light-box the house would become,” says architect Kay Hyde, who with husband Kristian set up their Swansea practice Hyde & Hyde five years ago. “We get excited e-mails from the owners saying ‘you wouldn’t believe the light in here last night.’”

In its horizontality and orientation, the house reaches out to embrace the sunset, as do its individual components, such as the bar-shaped Welsh slate used all along the external facade of the guest wing. This is a fiercely modern building that in fact speaks some of the same language as the ancient farm buildings that surround it. “We hate it when a building feels

like it’s just ‘landed’ on site, with no regard for context. So we start off by saying ‘what does the site want?’,” says Kristian. Accordingly, they spent two weeks photographing Gower longhouses – with their low profiles and exposed beams peeking out under the eaves – and came up with something that approximated this form, but with a firmly 21st-century stamp. The guest wing faces the road, so from the outside it’s the most low-key part of the build – a modern longhouse.

Hyde & Hyde’s thorough research and sensitivity to the wider landscape won the hearts and minds of local planners, who had previously turned down two applications to

build here, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. For Kay and Kristian, though, it’s all about the dovetailing of a sense of place with the lifestyle of the owners. “Everybody’s got their idiosyncracies and rituals they don’t want to tell you about at first,” says Kristian. “And eventually, our clients told us that they go outside, whatever the weather, holding an umbrella if it’s raining, and cook a barbecue – sometimes even for breakfast.” After that, it clicked into place: a cantilevered upper floor that offers protection from the elements, and eaves all the way around to create an even greater sense of safety and shelter. ►




An air-source heat pump heats the pool: the plant room is hidden in an underground chamber in the garden

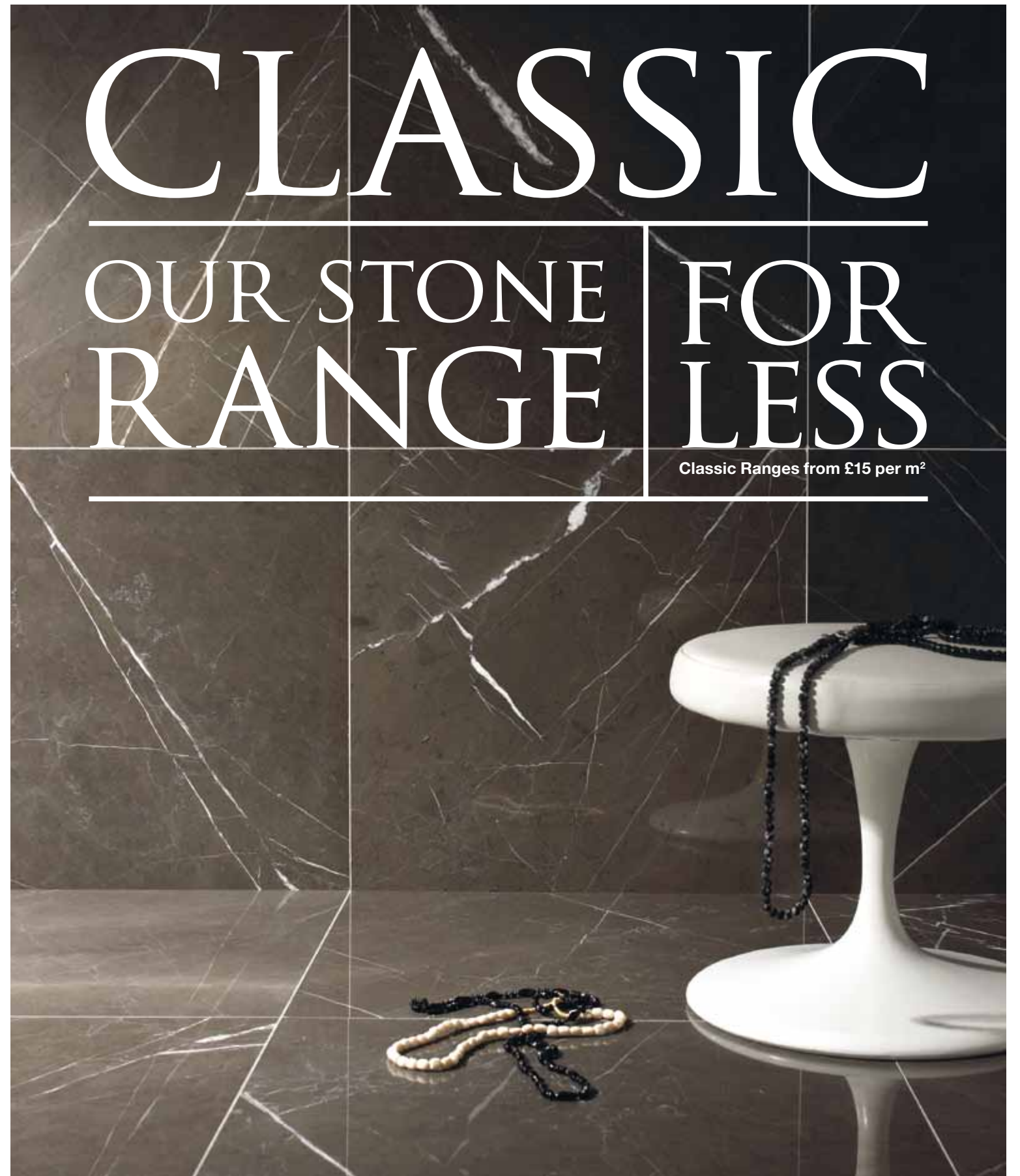


Pennard House at dusk, looking every inch the glamorous party pad that its owners wanted



Hyde & Hyde were also gifted with clients with an aversion to interior clutter – so there are no radiators, no skirting boards, and central pendant lights are abandoned in favour of up-lighting that washes over the walls, or simple task lighting. The kitchen/dining area, and the master bedroom above it, enjoy views across a long swimming pool that casts rippling shadows onto the ceilings at night: the pool is heated by an air-source heat pump, which complements the ground-source heat pump that feeds the house's underfloor heating. Kay and Kristian feel that new houses can often run away with scale – “people want square footage but they end up rattling around” – so the rooms here are on a cosy domestic scale.

This is a good summation of Hyde & Hyde's work here: they've built a glamorous party house that is, in many ways, pretty simple. “I like buildings that have a slight air of ordinariness – that don't try too hard,” says Kristian. “A deep connection with the landscape is what makes a building timeless. Rather than make it funky, glitzy, cool...make it humble.” 



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