

# GOOD WOOD

Timber is an ideal construction material for housing: warm and inexpensive as well as low in carbon emissions. **Martin Spring** looks at four homes in the frame for this year's Wood Awards

EVER SINCE OUR PREHISTORIC ANCESTORS MADE THEIR bivouacs out of it, timber has had a particular suitability for housing. These days, many new apartment and student housing buildings are inexpensively held up by softwood timber frames. Sadly, the timber structures are largely concealed behind brick walls and plasterboard linings, as if they were an embarrassment. Instead, the full potential of timber in housing is best revealed in one-off family houses and small private residential developments.

Four of the following five schemes (including Carlisle Lane Lofts, featured in *Specifier* on pages 48-49) were submitted for this year's Wood Awards, and the shingle-clad London infill is to be submitted for next year's awards. They range from a tiny artist's cabin in the Scottish Highlands to a couple of high-density infills in central London.

As Giles Downes, chairman of the award judges, says: "This year there were significantly more entries on the private home side, and standards were uniformly good. It was evident that the best in modern design came through in private homes." In these projects, timber was selected for its structural versatility and suitability for off-site prefabrication, as well as for its appealingly warm, touchable finish for interiors and exteriors. The sustainability of timber gave it special topical appeal for several projects, as it offers good thermal insulation that cuts down on energy consumption and is a renewable resource, both of which lessen rather than add to global warming.

The award winners will be announced on 21 October.



## ▲ Green oak-framed house, Wiltshire

Architect Piers Taylor has designed, built and occupied a house extension that he claims is supported on the country's first truly contemporary – as opposed to traditional – green oak frame. The scheme has been shortlisted for the private category award. Modern design and construction is evident in the large sliding windows as well as the stainless steel bolts and braces that hold the oak beams and columns together. Yet Taylor delights in the roughness of the exposed oak frame alongside the high-tech envelope and smooth plywood linings. Green oak was selected because it was just one third of the price of seasoned oak. "But you have to keep tightening the bolts and adjusting the door hinges as the oak dries out slowly," Taylor admits.

### Project team

architect and builder **Piers Taylor**

structural engineer **Structures 1**