

It's the kind of bosky English landscape that makes people move out of London: prosperous, commutable, close to the Ashdown Forest. Walk up a track and you see a slightly underfilled pond, a double garage, then a shimmering, six-bedroom vision of domestic modernity.

Groveside, near Uckfield, East Sussex, is the first house available on the market to have been designed by Conran & Partners, Sir Terence's architectural firm. For a while, you've been able to buy a Conran meal or a Conran chair, and stay in a Conran hotel. Now you can buy a Conran house — but not yet, alas, from The Conran Shop. That time will surely come.

In fact, it has been designed by Philip Thornton, of Conran & Partners, but with considerable input from Sir Terence himself. "We couldn't keep him away," Thornton says. "He likes to talk about design and he's got distinct ideas for the home. And we tend to work in the office style."

So, yes, you are spending your £2.25m on a Terence gaff, and it looks just the way you'd expect it to: modernist yet easy-going, without the astringent, spiky touch of the more extreme minimalists. A spilt drink wouldn't spoil this show.

Groveside is tucked off a leafy part of the A26 on the grounds of the old Temple Grove School, a Grade II-listed 19th-century manor on 30 acres. It was commissioned by Clive Lynton, who often works with Conran & Partners through his development company, Stonehurst Estates.

The firm bought the school in 2006 for £3.6m and converted it into 14 luxury flats. It set aside seven acres, on which a 1950s bungalow stood, and demolished it to build Groveside. Construction began in May 2008 and cost £1.8m. The house was completed at Christmas.

"I love modernist architecture and thought, why not build one in a historic area?" Lynton says. Local planners were surprisingly keen, he adds: perhaps they were swayed by the Conran name.

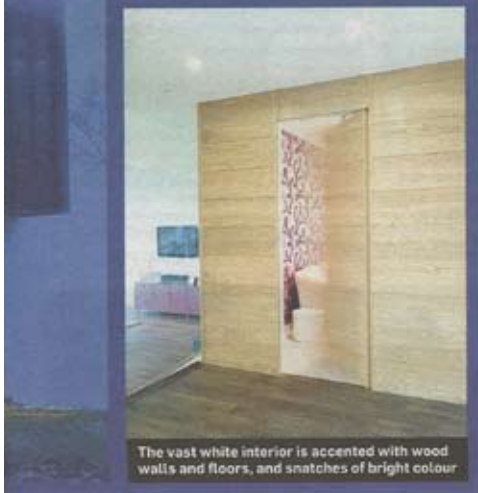
# The Terence stamp

You've sat in his chairs, eaten at his restaurants and stayed in his hotels. Now, for the first time, you can buy a Conran house, says Oliver Bennett





The kitchen looks out over rural East Sussex



The vast white interior is accented with wood walls and floors, and snatches of bright colour

Verner Panton, Charles Eames and Eileen Gray. Also providing ballast to the white vastness are wallpapered "accent" walls, plenty of wood and snatches of primary colour.

"We've had a great time here," Lynton says. You can see why. There's a big, albeit immature garden, surrounded by hedges, above which the house hovers like a spaceship. It has trendy vegetable patches, and residents have access to the grounds of the Temple Grove manor, with a swimming pool, a tennis court and a boating lake.

The aim has been to make it family-friendly. "During the design, we talked about the things a family needs," Thornton says. "We see the house as two distinct parts: an adult part and an informal family part — almost as if it's two houses."

The kitchen in the east wing, from which you can keep an eye on a large chunk of the garden, is the prime example of this approach, with a dip down into a big, friendly living hub and high-spec fittings throughout. The kitchen worktops, Cairns informs me, are "unbrushed Zambian black granite".

Behind the kitchen are a utility room, a laundry chute and a walk-in larder. The number of times I've heard people say that they want a larder, Cairns says. Curiously, there's also a lavatory with a big glass window. "Intriguing," he muses, lost for estate-agent words.

The equivalent room in the west wing is a vast, ranch-like conversation pit, with a real fireplace; behind it are a television room and study. Upstairs, a gallery landing leads to the principal bedroom suite (Cairns is allergic to the term "master bedroom"), with a dressing area and bathroom. There are five more bedrooms, two ensuite, as well as a family bathroom.

There is a select tradition of modernist country houses in Britain, many of them in the home counties. Bentley Wood, designed by Serge Chermayeff, is near Groveside in East Sussex, while the Berthold Lubetkin bungalow at Whipnade, in Bedfordshire, on the other side of London, has been influential.

Although now listed, such houses suffered from the fact that they were built in concrete and had iron windows, which don't perform well in the British climate. Groveside is built in similar style, but makes use of new technology. The white cladding, for example, is made of Becco, a polystyrene and concrete mix. "It fits together like Lego," Thornton says.

The upper parts are clad with copper, chosen to age well or, as Conran prefers to put it, "gain a patina of age". As Paul Zara, an architect at Conran's company, says: "Quality is more important than style, although we do believe a house should say something about the time in which it was built."

So who would such a house appeal to — and wouldn't buyers in East Sussex, just south of that grumpy colonel's graveyard, Tunbridge Wells, prefer a tiled-faced honeysuckle pile instead? "It's a limited market, but it's exceptional," Cairns says. "It's

the first Conran architecture I've ever had to sell."

As you might expect, Conran himself believes there is a market for the Groveside style, partly because a generation schooled on Kevin McCloud and Grand Designs has moved on from the traditional reassurance of thatch and inglenook. "Times are changing — the average home looks much better, because shops like Ikea, Habitat and The

Conran Shop offer good design to a wider audience," he says.

These days, it's all about adding to the mix, rather than "getting the look", Conran says. He cites his own house, where he has put modern furniture into a traditional environment.

Conran & Partners has designed hundreds of flats, estate regeneration projects in London and skyscrapers in Tokyo, but "very few" dedicated Conran

houses. Still, since opening a Brighton office in 2008, it has designed three private houses in Sussex — one of which is Groveside. "We don't get approached to do many private houses, but we always welcome the opportunity," Conran says.

The company is obviously pleased with Groveside — and, if the location doesn't suit, it would be happy to build you something similar elsewhere, provided you have a site and deep pockets.

Lynton himself plans to move to a luxury flat in the old Temple Grove school, once Groveside has been sold. "I hope we find someone soon," he says. "We might be living here for a while if nobody wants to buy." He doesn't seem entirely unhappy at the prospect.

† Groveside is on sale for £2.25m through Hamptons International; 01892 516611, hamptons.co.uk



Terence Conran says the house fits modern tastes

IT'S A CLASSIC COUNTRY HOUSE DONE IN MODERNIST STYLE — LIKE A SHANGRI-LA FOR THE DIPTYQUE CANDLE CROWD

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The property is flat at the front, to screen it from the road, but the back reveals a classic country house, with an east and west wing, a big deck with a built-in dining table, and a great sense of symmetry. This is a traditional mansion rendered in modernist style, a Shangri-La for the Diptyque candle crowd. There's plenty of space: 4,585 sq ft of it, spread over two floors, plus those seven acres of grounds.

With white walls, red round pillars and flat roofs, the house references the international style of the interwar period pretty heavily. There's some serious 1930s-style drama in the cantilevered concrete roofs, which Thornton says provide important shade for a house with a lot of floor-to-ceiling windows. On top of those wings are decks hemmed with tidy hedges.

The front door leads straight into a large vestibule, measuring 19ft 6in by 18ft 11in, a Habitat-style answer to the medieval hall. Lynton has imported a large painting, a chaise longue and a

huge wire chandelier: apart from that, the space is empty enough to fill it with fantasies of the perfect Conranian life.

Around the top of this double-height hall is a gallery. "It's a great effect," says James Cairns, of Hamptons estate agency, which is selling the house. "On a summer's evening, it'd be a great party place."

Lynton has been camping in the house with his family since it was finished, and has made his mark by decorating it with modern classics: a Matthew Hilton Balzac chair and pieces by