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# GRAND DESIGNS



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## RIBA House of the Year

Innovative country home for three generations of one family

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# A PERFECT PARTNERSHIP

Architects James Macdonald Wright and Niall Maxwell's innovative design, for three generations of James' family, was awarded Riba House of the Year 2017



**above** James Macdonald Wright and his family enjoy spending time at Caring Wood



**right** Niall Maxwell was inspired by the traditional oast houses in the area

**S**et in 84 acres of the Kent countryside, Caring Wood is no ordinary home. Sculptural, sustainable and inspired by traditional oast houses, it was designed by James Macdonald Wright ([macdonaldwright.com](http://macdonaldwright.com)) and Niall Maxwell ([ruralofficeforarchitecture.co.uk](http://ruralofficeforarchitecture.co.uk)). The pair had worked together on previous projects, so when Macdonald Wright embarked on an ambitious scheme to accommodate three generations of his own family, Maxwell was the obvious collaborator. The result of the eight-year-long process is a towering example of sustainability and craftsmanship.

**How did the design process begin?**

**JMW** 'The house belongs to my parents-in-law, who wanted a place they could share with

their three daughters and grandchildren. The idea was always that this was going to be a home for the whole family to use – with four apartment-style units around a central house where everyone could gather to eat, listen to music, watch films and play table tennis.'

**NM** 'James's father-in-law provided us with a sketch very early on. It was a square with four circles on it and looked a bit like a plan for a castle. That was the starting point and like all inquisitive designers we went off and tried to deviate from it as much as possible. But if you were to look at an aerial view of the property, it has stayed faithful to the original drawing.'

**Tell us about the inspiration behind your design.**

**NM** 'From the outset, the brief was for a "house of Kent", so there was a natural leaning towards the county's traditional oast houses. There are some majestic agricultural buildings in the area and in >