

Preserving the past – building the future

First and foremost, if you are the proud new owner of a period property, or about to become one then many congratulations!

Not only is your new purchase going to deliver history, heritage and wonderful original features to inspire you, you're also taking on a property that has already passed the test of time and will survive for years to come...

Constructed with traditional techniques and materials, period properties owe their success and longevity to their relationship with the elements. Eponymous builder for period properties and Listed buildings, Emmerson Critchley explains: "Delivering breathability is key – a building where water becomes trapped is one that will rot and fall victim to damp. By embracing water within the building processes, as many of the traditional techniques and materials do, the end result is a more breathable and hardy building that can cope with the elements and will offer longevity."

Emmerson's own specialist building firm provides services – including thatching, pargeting, wattle and daub – that utilise traditional techniques wherever possible

Emmerson Critchley, an expert in building and period properties, explains his craft



Left; Emmerson Critchley. Above plastering and, below, pargeting



processes can be a real challenge, but it's one that Emmerson finds deeply rewarding. "Although it all sounds tricky – and it is – I truly believe that it is worth mastering the elements through traditional techniques for the sake of creating and preserving beautiful buildings that will endure the test of time." So owners of period properties may well discover a new respect for and understanding of the elements during the journey of ownership

If the property is a project then it will be very fruitful and rewarding (possibly painstaking too at times) to restore an old place to its former glory or to breathe new life into an old space by making it fit for modern living. Nevertheless taking on such a challenge is not only creating a wonderful house in which to live now but also ensures that the property has purpose for future generations too. Suffolk's historic streets are lined with wonderful old buildings – perhaps a bakery or forge in a previous life – and while perfectly accommodating their former working activities, sometimes careful consideration needs to be given to how best to use the space to sympathetically facilitate all the modern cons and infrastructure associated with the modern world. So the owner of a period property will end up being pretty accomplished in a residential form of ergonomics too!

Sympathetically converting period properties, or adding an extension that is perfectly in keeping with the original building, are both everyday undertakings for Emmerson who has excellent working relationships with local planning departments and Conservation Officers, which is crucial, particularly for Listed buildings and those in a Conservation Area. Each and every project presents its own challenges. Emmerson enthuses: "Working with the space available, whilst delivering all that we expect from a modern house but within a period setting, and ensuring that idiosyncratic period features are showcased and conserved is no mean feat but the end result is always so rewarding. Literally every project is unique - it's a labour of love for the owner but also for me and my team too. For all these reasons, I am completely passionate about what I do."

and some of the methods employed have been in use since Anglo Saxon times. Emmerson explains: "Much of what we do relies on having a proper understanding of the processes involved and carefully managing the elements accordingly. Although these traditional processes can be more challenging than modern alternatives I firmly believe that they offer better longevity for buildings and a more low impact and sustainable way forward."

A good example of this in action is the use of lime – a traditional building material. Emmerson affirms: "For lime render, lime plaster, lime wash, limecrete flooring – basically any process involving lime plus many other traditional techniques, including wattle and daub – water is used from start to finish to carefully manage the carbonation process, which is the means by which lime naturally hardens."

Getting the carbonation process absolutely right is a fine art and a technical balancing act that relies on expertise and experience. Emmerson asserts: "For best results, it's crucial to understand the effects water and humidity have on workability plus the impact of differing weather and environmental conditions." Managing these different

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