

PATHS ARE SMALL TO ENCOURAGE INTERACTION BETWEEN RESIDENTS. 'YOU'VE GOT TO SAY HELLO TO PEOPLE COMING TOWARDS YOU,' SAYS PATRICK



This page, clockwise from right, sliding doors lead out on to the garden. The stool is by Alvar Aalto; a spread from Ideal Home magazine trumped New Ash Green; a chair designed by Patrick in the corner of the dining area; Eternit tiles have replaced original Span ceramic tiles; Patrick with a prototype for an outdoor wooden chair. Opposite page, a kitchen cupboard is full of TG Green Cornish Ware pottery



still makes the exact same seat and Patrick is now the proud owner of another. "It's a basic contract toilet seat that costs £8, but I couldn't buy it direct," he says as he begins to recount his story. "It had to be shipped to a retailer, who had to sell it to me and then send it here. They thought I was potty! It cost me £48 for a toilet seat they use in schools! That's dedication for you.

The story goes a long way to show the couple's respect for the building. They simply think that Span got it right, designing high-quality houses for everybody. "They didn't want to create an exclusive middle class place," Patrick says. "Leslie Bilsby [the developer] talked about catering for the family in depth, which meant for children through to grandparents and relatives." Houses were designed accordingly. Bungalows (of which there are many versions) were designed for the elderly and placed in a quieter area of the village. There were houses nicknamed 'newlyweds', after the 95 per cent mortgage scheme run by Span, which accepted couples if it was their first house purchase and the husband was between 21 and 30 years of age. They were able to decorate their house themselves from a palette of paints and wallpapers (Span usually did all this for you), and the usual cost was subtracted from the deposit. A whole range of different-sized houses was designed for the needs of people of different ages and their different family situations: two-beds to five-beds, various configurations, various neighbourhoods.

And Span's approach to architecture was just as rigorous. Patrick's description of Eric Lyons, Span's architect, is illuminating. "He'd always be on site. He'd redesign part of the house on site in the mud if he thought it could be improved. He had this vision. He was a very driven man, a dynamic figure. That's why I've got this appreciation for him." Small details in Patrick and Alison's house highlight this. Five doorways peel off the hall. Not one has the same dimensions. The largest leads into the living room, accentuating it as both the key social space and the place of entry. The elements in the house aren't off the peg. "It was all dictated by the need of the user," says Patrick. It was about making a better space for people to inhabit. If something needed to be changed, it was. The next house was always better. "Not a day goes by when I don't think what New Ash Green would have been like if it had been finished," Patrick tells me. Span went bust in 1969, primarily because the Greater

