

distant renovation

BOTH SIDES OF THE COIN

What is it like to have your Bulgarian home renovated when you're a thousand miles away? We talk to Jon and Anna Eccles and the team at *Bulgarian Building Services* to hear from both sides!

The Buyers...

Hello! We are Jon and Anna Eccles from North Wales. We are both in our thirties and are hoping for semi-retirement before our mid-forties!

A while back, someone at work showed me an in-depth article from one of the English broadsheets describing the benefits of living and owning property in Bulgaria. The article described how Varna was fast becoming a cosmopolitan city, thus attracting foreign investment and tourists alike whilst retaining the traditional feel that initially attracted me.

In February 2006, we decided to invest our savings and our future into property. UK housing market prices were rising at such a rate that we felt that we had to look elsewhere to invest. The Bulgarian property market and Bulgaria's entry into the EU was becoming big news in UK so we decided it was worth a visit to Bulgaria to see if purchasing a traditional property requiring renovation would be a wise investment.

Weeks followed where we looked via the internet at properties within easy reach of Varna and it's airport and inland of the Black Sea Coast, as we wanted to be close enough to the busy city and the coastal region without being smothered by it.

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Having found several properties that fitted our requirements, we arranged to come over to Bulgaria in May 2006. We didn't know what to expect, as photographs on the internet never seem to do property any justice. Unfortunately, the properties we chose proved to be a major disappointment and neither of us could visualise them in a restored state.

The estate agent offered to show us a property in the village of Neofit Rilsky before returning to Varna. We agreed, but neither of us held much hope at this time of finding what we wanted. However, when walked into the garden and along the path we were immediately drawn to it. It was charming and homely, although it was obvious that it needed so much work. Marina, the lady of the house was so very welcoming, offering home cooking and drinks. Within 15 minutes we felt that we had known our Marina forever!

We went away fairly certain in our minds that this property was what we had come to Bulgaria looking for. The next day we made an offer, which was duly accepted. Thereafter followed weeks of legalities before we finally received the deeds to our new home.



We knew that the property required a full renovation, so we set about finding reputable builders who could meet our needs. We spent much of our time searching and consistently we were drawn back *Bulgarian Building Services*, as they fitted the bill perfectly, which was; English connections with Bulgarian craftsmen and a project manager to oversee it all.

We arranged a visit to Bulgaria to meet the project manager, Georgi, to prepare a thorough inspection of the property. The quotation we received for the renovation was slightly more expensive than you would expect (if posts on some Internet forums are to be believed). However, we were happy with it, and still are. The team kept us informed every step of the way which was very reassuring. They also encouraged our desire to be completely involved in all decisions in relation to the works, and have followed our instructions in every detail to a very high standard.

We envisioned something that retained the original features whilst looking fresh, but of course there were unexpected changes that needed to be made. We had both wanted to keep the traditional concrete facade on the roof at the front of the house, but this wasn't to be, as the whole roof needed removing. However, the external staircases and traditional mosaic remained, as have the vines and the pathways and patio and the soon-to-be revitalised well.

We are now very close to the end of the renovation works and are looking forward to adding furnishings to make the house a proper home. We will be very happy to spend more time in Bulgaria whilst still having a base in the UK - enjoying the best that both Bulgaria and UK have to offer.

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The Builders...

Nedko, from *Bulgarian Building Services* gives their account of the story...

Jon and Anna contacted us with regards to some renovation work they wanted on their home. The house is on two levels, the first at 85 sq.m, and the second 50 sq.m. The size of the roof is 130 sq.m. The outside surface to be tiled was 80 sq.m, of which the veranda was 20 sq.m, and the area to be paved was 50 sq.m. We agreed on a contract at the end of November 2006, which stated what repairs and additions would be made (see right). The terms of the contract were agreed at four to five months.

After the majority of these operations were completed, the clients decided to go for additional stages, such as plasterboarding of the internal walls, fitting of doors, wooden floor boards on the 2nd floor and tiles on the 1st, painting of the whole house, fitted kitchen with all appliances, polished mosaic stairs, and the replacement of the patio slabs.

As with any old renovation, there were some problems. Whilst removing the old roof, we saw there appeared to be existing damage to the walls and the old brickwork, which were unnoticed on the initial inspection and negotiations. Also, because of the masonry with old stone, the internal rooms did not have a rectangle shape, plus the height clearance in the rooms of the first level was not sufficient. Therefore, to strengthen the stonework, and counteract these problems, there was

- Removal of old roof
- Removal of old windows and doors
- Breaking and removal of old brickwork
- New brickwork
- New concrete support for roof
- Building a new roof construction and covering with *Bramak* roof tiles
- Removal of old and insertion of new wiring
- Edging of the eaves with timber and varnishing
- Making, delivery and fitting of new wooden doors and double glazed windows with new supporting lintels on both floors
- Septic tank
- Plasterboarding ceiling
- Guttering
- Mounting an electrical external distribution box, type *TEMO*
- Main A/C supply replacement
- Plumbing replacement
- Delivery, assembling and disassembling of scaffold for the facade
- Complete rendering
- Facade painting

- Cladding on the additional buildings and reassembling the main one with granite in mosaic style
- Removal of the rubbish and garden cleaning
- Removal of the terrace to the front
- Bathroom with faience and terracotta - sink, shower and toilet
- = Approx £17,000, with the specifics entailing the roof as £6,000, replacement of the plumbing and sewerage as £500, the replacement of the wiring and a new electric meter outside as £1,000, and the bathroom as £1,300.



necessary additional reinforcement and even new brickwork to be put in place. In fact, all the rooms had different levels and shapes, so this all had to be rectified.

This is a typical risk of contracted work, especially for renovations. Not all of the potential and hidden problems are perceived and sometimes a number of additional operations occur, which is then often added to the builder's account instead of the client's when they operate contracts with a fixed price.

One chilly week in February Anna even suggested she send a parcel of warm clothes for the team!

It can sometimes be difficult to clarify small details between builder and client. Each and every client has their own dream house in their mind and all of the requirements are inspired by this vision. Our role as builders is to try and follow this dream, but using tools like simple explanations and pictures, sent by the client is pretty difficult, as we are working thousands of miles away from them.

We are also the ones who do the 'finishing' stage, where we have to be very consistent and go deep in the client's mind, to fulfil their dream, the way they want. To assist us in these stages, we often ask the client to send photos by email from the UK of colours, tiles, wooden flooring, kitchens and bathrooms so we can match what they want. We can then take photos of what is available in Bulgaria which closely matches the requirements and then they can agree or disagree.

Being from different countries and different cultures, it is sometimes very difficult for us to explain suggestions to the client in a way that guarantees us to be understood correctly. In such situations we just hope and that the client has understood and replies quickly to our questions and suggestions by email, otherwise every delay reflects in further delays to the project.

Concerning this project in particular; we were extremely happy with Jon and Anna. They showed plenty of patience and understanding with us and were great communicators. In fact, one chilly week in February Anna even suggested she send a parcel of warm clothes for the team!

More information about *Bulgarian Building Services* can be found through their web site at www.bulgarian-villa.com

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