

## B A R L E Y S P L A T T

*Cornwall*

**B**ARLEY SPLATT BEATS MOST OTHER  
MODERN HOUSES BUILT TODAY IN THE  
BRITISH ISLES INTO A COCKED HAT.

To see such richness of materials, with such originality of design, gives sheer satisfaction and complete delight.

It is still being built by the painter Graham Ovenden who moved from London to live on the edge of Bodmin Moor in 1973, having seen an advertisement in *Dalton's Weekly* for a Cornish cottage in a valley with a river and twenty-two acres. Finding it to be particularly isolated, over a tiny fifteenth-century bridge and up a long and tortuous tunnel of a lane, he bought the little house and has been adventurously transforming it ever since. Graham Ovenden is a man of many parts, with all of them working flat out, all of the time. He is an artist, a printmaker and a photographer, a musician and a poet, who has designed and built his own house, and filled it with his vast collection of books, many of which

he has written himself.

He has always had a passionate interest in the applied arts of the nineteenth century. John Betjeman was a friend. 'I got from him a particular delight in the Gothic Revival.' Frank Lloyd Wright, with his sense of geometry and artistic unity, is an architect whom Ovenden greatly admires. Both influences bristle out of Barley Splatt, along with another: the totally unexpected but excitingly apparent forms of a Second World War aeroplane engine. Graham Ovenden grew up with his father's plans for aircraft design. Homage is paid to Cornwall with the tower, to both the Cornish round stair towers and the tin mine chimneys, but with all this there is no shadow of a hotch potch in the powerful and definite design and decoration of the house. He admits that 'it borrows, as any piece of architecture does, but Barley Splatt tends to look like Barley Splatt.'



## B A R L E Y

Ovenden has built the house largely himself, cutting the granite from his own fields where he has also picked up many of the stones. For the polychromatic effects he has used marble, granite, stone and Elizabethan brick, claiming that all later bricks are riddled through with little bubbles. 'If I do have a philosophy of Architecture it is integrity to indigenous materials. This is an important part of what architecture is about. On the other hand I am very happy to use any modern construction technique.'

Underneath all its finery, Barley Splatt has a concrete core. 'The problem is how purist you want to be. You notice the tower has drip eaves, not guttering . . . aesthetically it looks much better without guttering, but as you know from the puddle on the stair carpet, such purist considerations have their drawbacks.'

Graham Ovenden is one of the inventors of 'Post Modernism'. 'It was a committee invention.' He gives

Charles Jencks all the credit for its publicisation and propaganda, although he would far rather see the style orientated towards the gothic than towards the classical. 'Gothic building is more demanding, the quality of craftsmanship must necessarily be greater. Classicism is cheaper.'

At the time of writing, Barley Splatt is half finished, but there are monumental plans afoot, with towers galore, all with either glass spires or striped 'hats' for roofs. The main body of the house will be a great hall with flying buttresses, and decorated chimney stacks will rear up at every turn. Ovenden often changes his mind as he builds, with the house evolving not unlike a sculpture, as he works away, always with the highest standards of craftsmanship. He plans to design everything eventually, including the wallpapers and all the furniture. 'If one is mad enough to begin something like Barley Splatt, you might as well go the whole hog.'

BARLEY SPLATT



*The colours and contrasts of Barley Splatt*