

Welcome to the industrial revolution

You may not feel at home in a silo but for some families, looks aren't everything, says **Ruth Bloomfield**

Almost all properties require a level of compromise — but if you fancy buying a dramatically remodelled 1970s grain silo the main issue is that it exists only in the mind of its architect.

The concrete and steel silo is real enough. It was built in 1975 to serve the Mount Wellington tin and copper mine near Truro, Cornwall, but was used only until 1978 when the mine went out of business. The site was mothballed until 2007 when it was bought by an investor who has been converting its various buildings into office space for start-up firms specialising in renewable energy.

What to do with the landmark silo was a challenge and so Simon Longworth-Riggs, principal of D3 Architects, was hired to draw up plans for its conversion. His big idea is to keep the silo intact, rendered in white to soften its profile, and then build a glass skin around it, providing space for a corridor spiralling around its six storeys. There will, for those who don't relish that amount of climbing, be a lift. A central lightwell cut into the roof will bring light into the heart of the 6,200 sq ft property, which could easily accommodate six large bedrooms.

It is on the market with Tepilo for £350,000, and Longworth-Riggs estimates that the construction costs will be about £700,000 to £800,000. A planning application for the silo will be submitted to Cornwall county council this month.

Not everyone will understand the desire to protect the silo but Longworth-Riggs sees it as an essential part of the region's history. "It is the only



This former RAF tower is now a four-bedroom home with 360-degree views, right, £450,000 (Urban.co.uk)



one of its kind left in the country and it is a very strong emblem of the area's mining past," he says. "Keeping it is showing respect to the mining community and, while it is not as pretty as traditional Cornish engine houses, it is the modern face of the mining industry."

It is undoubtedly true that while attractive industrial buildings — from

An architect has drawn up plans to convert the old grain silo in Truro, above, into a six-bedroom family home, right. It is on sale for £350,000 through Tepilo

water towers to factories — have long been converted into homes, there is less of a track record for the conversion of more utilitarian structures.

However, proof that the concept can work exists at the former Fairbourne Reservoir West in Maidstone, Kent. The decommissioned reservoir has been converted into two separate homes. One is a 7,500 sq ft house with all the lateral space you could want — including a reception room that measures more than 1,200 sq ft and leads, through glass doors, to the terrace and a swimming pool with great views across the North Downs. The property is on the market with Knight Frank for £2.25 million.

The other sits on a nearby plot and was built for the artist Dinos Chapman by the design company Brinkworth. The



five-bedroom home of 7,500 sq ft has a large glass pavilion that takes up almost the entire first floor. It is on the market at the recently reduced price of £1.95 million through The Modern House.

Military buildings can also make effective conversions. The Roseheart Tower is a 1950s control tower at a former RAF bombing range, which has been transformed into a four-bedroom house with 360-degree views of the Moray Firth coast and countryside. The property, 45 miles north of Aberdeen, is on the market with Urban.co.uk for offers of more than £450,000.

Whether this type of property makes a good investment compared with, say, a Georgian rectory, is a moot point.

Lindsay Cuthill, the head of Savills country department, says a classically lovely period property would, inevitably, appeal to more buyers.

"However, that is not to say that I think this sort of property is a bad investment," he says. "Tastes are changing.

The antiques shops along the Pimlico Road in London used to sell nothing but brown furniture. Now they only sell mid-century furniture. Tastes are changing and there are people who love the countryside but don't want to live in a low-beamed, olde worlde house.

"This sort of property certainly has a better investment potential now than it would have done even ten years ago."



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