

Rolf revels in his riverside retreat

ROLF HARRIS went for Sunday lunch with friends and ended up buying a Thames-side house — "which is our dream home now", he says.

After 16 years in a large rambling property in Sydenham, south London, Rolf and his wife Alwen thought they were set for life.

But now they have exchanged that for a beautiful split-level modern bungalow, part of which overhangs the Thames at Bray, Berkshire.

"The difference between the two houses is amazing — the moment I step inside now I get instant peace of mind, just by looking at that lovely stretch of water at the bottom of my garden," says Rolf.

And it's really all thanks to showbiz friends that he and Alwen moved — "Yes, we had a meal at Vince and Ann Hill's place near here and we knew it was nice but we were truly stunned by the house's position and magnificent view."

"They said we ought to move, too — because it's just like being on a permanent holiday living on the river. We went looking at what the estate agents had and

By **DICK MAINO**

the prices frightened us off for a while. Later, we were at some friends' and they told us this place had been empty and on the market for a long time.

"We crept into the garden by a side gate and Alwen and I just looked at each other — we'd fallen in love with the place straight away. Financially, we were stretching ourselves pretty thin. We bought this place in the autumn of 1980 and a year later we still hadn't sold our old place — which wasn't funny."

Neglected garden

"I was getting very worried, but my brother said, 'What the hell? If you really want the place — have it. You're only here once! I look his advice.'"

Another problem loomed shortly after they moved in. "The house next door had been pulled down. We got a dreadful shock when we discovered the owner planned to build a six storey block of flats. That would have been the last straw."

The garden had been neglected but Alwen — "she's magic with plants" — soon had it blooming. "We all love plants so there's quite a few indoors. There's even a sunken garden inside by the front door. We had a conservatory/greenhouse stuck on by the kitchen — so we can have breakfast in the sun, summer or winter."

"I've got my own vegetable plot by the side — so we've had plenty of peas, marrows and strawberries this year. The house has two bedrooms and what I call my workroom, but the main room is obviously the magnificent lounge."

"Because we're artistically bent — if you'll pardon the phrase — even our daughter, Bindi, who's 23, the whole place is choc-a-bloc with Alwen's lovely sculptures, Bindi's amazing portraits and my dabbings."

"If the place looks like a tip sometimes, that's mainly my fault. I'm very untidy. Also, I collect like crazy and can't throw anything away. Wherever I go, I usually take a saw with me in case I find an interesting old log in the countryside from which I can chop a lump."

"I was driving to a job recently and found the road was blocked by a fallen tree. I just had to get out and saw a bit of — God knows what they thought of me."

"I've got loads of knotty offcuts that I had shipped back from an Australian tour years ago. I've made a few into tables and bowls, but not many. I'm always too busy."

"Still, the ones outside go nicely with Alwen's fine collection of chimney pots which she has salvaged over the years from demolished houses — the pots are works of art in themselves."

Not a bad handyman

"We were worried about our cats — moving so near the river. We had seven, five Devon Rex, but one Rex was drowned. We have plastic netting trailing into the water now so that if one falls in, it'll be able to climb up. They've got the idea now, hopefully."

"I'm not a bad handyman round the home — when I'm round the home, I reckon that I have spent all of two weeks here in the last year — that's the trouble trying to keep three careers going in Britain, Canada and Down Under."

"People just think of



■ Rolf Harris — finding piece of mind at his Bray home

People just think of me as a kiddies' show guy here but my act is quite different elsewhere. I don't do a lot of guest spots on other shows because I don't feel I get anything over in just three minutes.

I'm no goody-goody but I'll never do blue material in clubs or theatres. That's the end if you've got to resort to that to get a laugh.

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material in clubs or theatres. That's the end if you've got to resort to that to get a laugh.

"Mind you, I have been desperate a few times — I did a one-nighter in Seattle at a convention of a big American lodge, like Freemasons, and it was full of very old guys who I don't think had heard of England let alone Australia."

"They just sat there in stunned amazement. They couldn't understand a word I said. I was halfway through a song when one guy stood up and said, 'Young man, I think we'd better call it a day. We don't know what you're talking about. I died a death.'"

"Still, it stops me getting bigheaded."



■ Rolf with daughter Bindi, who is following in dad's footsteps as an artist

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