

ROOM WITH A VIEW

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THIS FORMER SQUAT WITH A SHADY PAST HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A MODERN HOME WITH A NEW, LIGHT-FILLED KITCHEN-DINER LINKING SEAMLESSLY WITH THE GARDEN



A former crack den with walls painted garish shades of purple and pink and floors littered with syringes hardly sounds the most appealing lot ever to come up for auction. But when you've been gazumped on several previous property purchases and have lost thousands on solicitors' fees and surveys, the chance to snap up an unwanted, down-at-heel terrace suddenly becomes an altogether more interesting option.

Such was the case for architect Patrick Michell when he was on the hunt for a new home in east London back in 2006. 'I'd lost out on a number of properties and decided that going for something at auction was worth a try for a change,' he recalls. 'When that hammer falls, at least you know the house is definitely yours.'

Despite the less-than-salubrious state of the property, Patrick faced stiff competition at the auction from both developers and individual buyers, all on the lookout for a bargain. But Patrick's grim determination and extensively

researched budgets were enough to beat off the competition and he found himself the proud owner of this run-down terrace.

It wasn't long, however, before Patrick's ownership of the property was put in jeopardy when he discovered that a squatter had broken into the house and changed the locks. 'I contacted the police but they weren't interested and told me I had to get in touch with my solicitor,' he says. 'It was going to be such a long, drawn-out process that I was faced with months of uncertainty and yet more legal costs. Thankfully, I went back to check on the house one day and realised that the squatter wasn't inside, so I managed to get into the property and then immediately called out an emergency locksmith to change the locks again.' This time Patrick wasn't taking any chances – metal shutters were fitted to all the windows and doors to ensure that no one else could lay claim to his home while he finalised his ideas for the renovation.

Situated in a conservation area of Hackney, the property had been stripped of virtually all its period features over the years, but fortunately was still structurally sound, making it ripe for modernisation. Patrick planned to overhaul the entire property, opening up the small, boxy rooms of the ground floor and extending to the rear to allow the open-plan spaces to flow into each other. 'My whole approach to the project was to reinterpret the old house through several modern interventions,' he explains.

The biggest of these interventions is at the rear of the house, where a glazed side return extension opens up the house to the garden. It's hidden from view from the front of the property, so the local conservation officer was happy to give this modern design the go-ahead, particularly as the traditional facade of the terrace would be retained.

Inside the extension, the rebuilt party wall in London Stock brick has been left exposed, continuing out beyond the edge of the house as a garden wall, helping to enhance the indoor/outdoor feel of this new space. Overhead, a single sheet of glass measuring a massive 5.5 metres by 2.5 metres gives uninterrupted views of the sky above. Self-cleaning and silicon bonded, the glazing is completely frameless to create the clean lines Patrick was so keen to introduce. To minimise overheating and glare, he specified solar-control glass, which reflects back 40 per cent of the heat so the house doesn't get excessively hot in summer. 'We did consider fitting



blinds, but they would have ruined the whole look of the extension and the heat hasn't been a problem so far,' explains Patrick. A huge pivoting door lets in yet more light and offers enticing views of the garden beyond. 'Architecturally it appears very simple, but there's a lot of detailing required to keep it looking this simple,' says Patrick. The gutter details for the extension, for example, are hidden inside the top of the rebuilt party wall to maintain the sleek appearance.

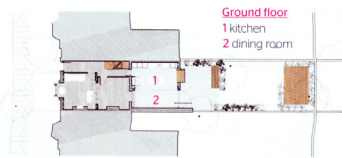
While many of these clever touches give this home an unmistakably modern look, some also help to reference the original building, such as the modern glass oriel-style window that projects into the garden, creating a link with the more traditional Victorian bay window at the front of the property. With a large, cushioned seat big enough for two, the new addition is a great spot to while away an hour or two with the weekend papers or catch up on the day's events. 'It's a favourite spot for my nieces,' says Patrick. 'They always make a beeline for it when they come to visit.'

Taking on such a run-down property also gave Patrick the chance to make vast improvements to its energy efficiency. 'It's one of the great benefits of buying a wreck as you can install insulation throughout the property as part of the renovation, without having to ruin what might otherwise have been perfectly good walls and skirting,' he says. Walls, floors, ceilings and the loft have been fitted with a range of insulation, while the original windows at the front of the house have been replaced by double-glazed sash units. And the insulated concrete floor in the kitchen-diner acts as a big thermal store, retaining heat gained from the sun and slowly releasing it during the day to keep the space warm in the evening.

The spacious kitchen-diner has developed into the room where Patrick and his girlfriend Claire spend the vast majority of their time. A large dining table created by Claire's father easily seats six, while the glossy kitchen units were made by a cabinet maker in Bedford to Patrick's design. 'They're a step up in quality from Ikea, but we found there wasn't that much difference in price,' he says. With light streaming in through the roof glazing, and the pivoting door and oriel-style window framing views of the landscaped garden, it's not hard to see why they're so happy here. And one thing's for sure, if this house were ever to go up for auction again, the property description would be a great deal more appealing next time around.★

TOP TIPS

- 'If you're planning a complicated project, hire a quantity surveyor to provide detailed costings,' says Patrick. 'It will help you to draw up a realistic budget.'
- 'Be clear about what you're prepared to compromise on. Be honest with yourself about what you want from your project and where you can make cutbacks, if necessary.'
- 'And finally - whenever you start your project, never give yourself a Christmas deadline as you'll never be in on time. Projects have a habit of taking longer than you expect.'



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clockwise from this picture The polished concrete floor in the kitchen-diner acts as thermal mass, keeping the space warm in the evenings; the sleek, minimal kitchen was specially made to Patrick's design; the huge pivoting glass door opens up the glazed extension to the landscaped garden beyond



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