

# FROM CRACK HOUSE TO A CRACKING DESIGNER HOME



A Victorian house that was once a Dalston drug den is now an airy, light-filled award-winner, thanks to the newlywed architects who reworked it for a 21st-century family, says **Ruth Bloomfield**

**A**RCHITECTS Patrick Michell and Claire McKeown began their married life in the same Dalston street where, 25 years earlier, Tony and Cherie Blair lived in the early Eighties soon after they wed. But while the Blairs' aim had been to make their mark as members of the Hadley Labour Party, Patrick and Claire were more interested in lobbying the neighbours so that they could transform a run-down local crack house into a family home. No one objected.

Today, from the streetscape, it appears to be a classical Victorian suburban house. The surprises lie beyond the façade, where this award-winning house has been remodelled and given a spacious and exciting glass kitchen extension and more. It is an inspiring example of how a traditional London home can be reworked for a 21st-century family.

Patrick, 32, a partner with Platform 5 Architects ([www.platform5architects.com](http://www.platform5architects.com)), made his bid for the house at auction in 2005 for £378,000 at about the same time he met Claire, 31, also an architect. She now works as a senior associate at Malcolm Reading Consultants, which advises on major architectural projects.

Patrick and Claire were fortunate enough to be able to plot their revamp without the need for planning permission – using just permitted development rights. The showpiece of the project, which began in 2006 and took

place to form a sloping roof – a nerve-racking process that required the support of their neighbours and the skills of a specialist crane operator.

"Unfortunately Hackney council had got the day we needed the parking restriction wrong," said Patrick. "So we had to go round knocking on doors and asking people if they would mind moving their cars."

"It was a pretty hairy project because we had a ton of glass hanging over the house, and if the wind had blown at the wrong moment it could have broken."

A projecting bay window was cut out of the back wall of the existing kitchen, providing yet more light and a generously sized window seat.

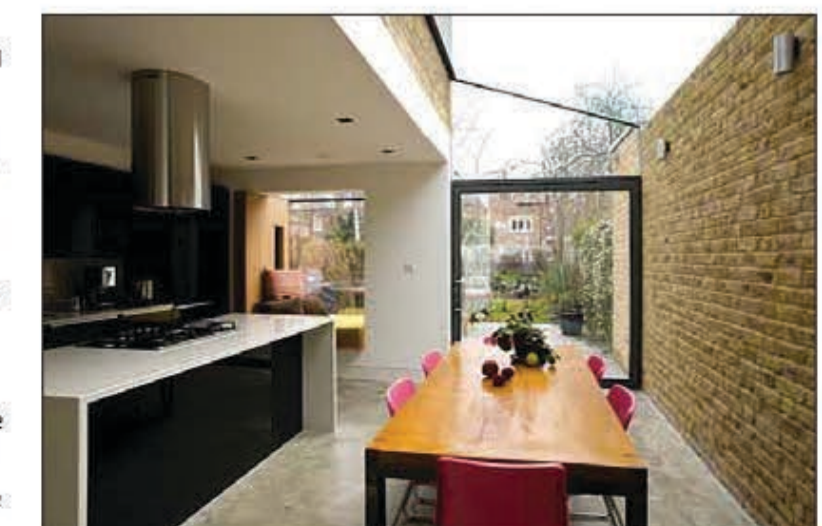
The shiny black kitchen, which looks like it cost a fortune with its highly polished concrete floor, in fact cost around £10,000 from Bedfordshire-based K2GO ([www.k2go.co.uk](http://www.k2go.co.uk)).



**Let there be light:** toughened glass and pivoting doors, far left, leading on to the garden

**Space race:** the two small reception rooms were knocked into one, left

**Kitchen cool:** the highly polished concrete floor gives an expensive look, right



Photographs by Danny Elwes

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DANNY ELWES

10 months and a total of about £230,000 to achieve, is the extension to the rear of the house which takes advantage of the side passage space.

First a 2.8-metre wall was built to divide the property from its neighbour, using salvaged London brick. Then a vast pane of toughened glass, measuring 5.5 metres by 2.3 metres, was commissioned, delivered and swung over the terrace and into

