



Quality control

John and Ann Dillon drew on previous experience when they refurbished their Victorian London terrace – without compromising on architectural design, they have created a modern family home that's already doubled in value

*Words Luke Tebbutt
Photography Jefferson Smith and Alan Williams*

this picture By adding a side-wall extension, the narrow kitchen has been transformed into a sociable and open-plan space. The concrete worktop will age naturally over time from regular use



Some projects are very time-sensitive; this was one of them,' says John Dillon of his Victorian home in north London, which he downsized to after an exhaustive search of 80 properties. He and his wife Ann had moved into a costly rented property by the time they found it, so their eagerness is understandable, but the challenge was formidable. The four-storey mid-terrace building – like many others in the area – had been converted into flats in the Seventies, and barely touched since. It needed a complete transformation to create space for them on the ground and first floor, and self-contained living space for their four grown-up children on the two floors above.

Luckily, they had previous experience – good and bad – to draw from. Their first project was a roof extension in 1987, done with little money and little professional input, which let in buckets of rain while it was being built, and was ripped off days after completion during the great storm of that year. 'It was one of the most stressful experiences of my life,' says John. 'We hired the wrong builder, who didn't have sufficient capability, so we always said if we did this again, we'd make sure it was properly supervised.' Their last project in their previous home was the opposite: a highly bespoke extension and refurbishment, done with great care and professionalism (but also significant cost).

This home had to strike a balance, delivering a great design within a carefully managed time frame and budget, so John hit the ground running when he exchanged on the property in June 2010. He hired Patrick Michell from Platform 5 Architects almost immediately, impressed by the glazed side-return extension Patrick had designed for his own home →



this picture To keep the budget on track, the roof light is a standard size, which helped to reduce costs

left Timber fins help diffuse the light and extend down the walls to create alcoves for displaying objects

this picture A pivot door and clever corner glazing allows the ground-floor space to be opened up to the garden in the summer

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(GDM, May 2009). He then hired Nick Norden to project manage – an architect and builder John has known for 30 years; ‘He can spot a problem coming down the line before most people,’ says John. Together, they hired builders with a negotiated tender, basing costs on early designs and a quantity surveyor’s report. This allowed them to think more on their feet and keep things on track and on budget as the build progressed.

The tight timeline was nearly scuppered at the beginning after soil tests suggested there were pockets of unstable ground beneath the house. The structural engineers recommended some hefty foundations, costing £20,000. John was instinctively sceptical, and ended up hiring a different structural engineer. ‘The first firm were younger and good at identifying the risks, but not so good at coming up with solutions, so I consulted a much more experienced structural engineer, who said the foundations were unnecessary, and came up with an alternative that cost about £6,000.’

The delay meant that, come January 2011, demolition was complete and builders ready to start, but construction and structural-engineering drawings were still being finalised. ‘It was not for the faint-hearted,’ says Michell. ‘The strip-out of the structure was taking place while we were still developing the scheme with the structural engineer, which is risky. But John’s understanding of tendering and construction allowed him to do this and finish the job quicker than most,’ he says.

Tweaks were made during the build to keep the budget on track: plans for a wine cellar were abandoned, a bathroom layout was reorganised and sash windows were repaired with secondary glazing (inside the existing glazing). But the one thing John didn’t compromise on was the architectural design – concentrated on the ground and first floor. At the back, a narrow kitchen has been transformed into an open-plan kitchen-diner with an extension to the side wall. And in the middle of the ground floor, the ceiling has been knocked through to create a double-height space for a library and a new stairwell, which leads up to John and Ann’s bedroom on the first floor.

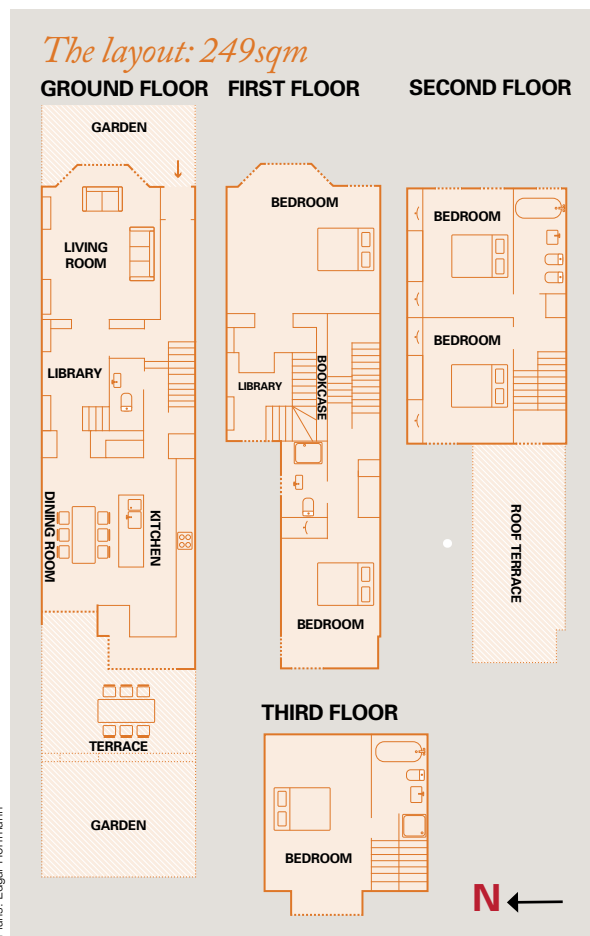
The new double-height space brings light into the middle of the house, which eased the burden on the glazing in the extension at the back. ‘We didn’t have to do a heavily glazed and engineered extension, because we were bringing light in from another area,’ says Michell.

John and Ann culled ideas from award-winning and award-shortlisted houses, found on the RIBA’s website (architecture.com). Le Corbusier’s architecture in India – all raw concrete and brick, and ambiguous indoor-outdoor spaces – was another influence. John was lucky enough to experience the architect’s buildings first-hand as a child, visiting family friends who lived in one of his designs in India. He has replicated a similar style by using concrete for the kitchen worktop and floor, which continues outside to blur the boundary between inside and out.

They also wanted to embrace the original character, which dates from 1890 when the Arts & Crafts movement was just taking off. The style champions craftsmanship, which can be seen in the building’s original features, such as the fireplaces, stained-glass windows and decorative ceilings, and this spirit has been continued in the newer additions, →



this picture
John and Ann have kept and restored original Arts & Crafts features, such as the decorative plasterwork and stained glass



‘I’m interested in good design that will transcend changes in fashion. I felt it was important to aspire to that’

this picture The impressive library and stairwell is conceived as a giant piece of furniture, which has been inserted into the new double-height space. The shelves have been built into the wall and ascend in a stepped arrangement



left and below All the bathrooms have been refurbished in the same style, providing continuity. An original fireplace adds character in one of the bedrooms

such as the library. 'When it was built, this house would have been quite trendy,' says John. It's a trend that has stood the test of time – which was key for this project. 'I'm interested in good design that will transcend changes in fashion. I felt it was important to aspire to that,' he says. Amazingly, for such a big project, he achieved this on time, moving in just a year after he commissioned his architect. The final cost (which includes the extension, library, roof terrace on the second floor, and a dormer extension in the roof on the top floor, plus internal refurbishment and restoration throughout) was approximately £445,000, excluding VAT. And while he won't say how much the house is worth now, he will say that it's nearly doubled in value, helped by a slight rise in local house prices, too.

'Good design has worth,' he says. 'If you come to sell a house like this, a number of people will not see the value in what you have done, but a small group of people will, and it's they who set the price.' **GD**

To create John and Ann's contemporary look, turn to p82 for simple and streamlined furniture and accessories



this picture The new extension is clad in zinc, and the concrete flooring, which has a polyurethane sealant to protect it from the elements, continues outside



Money matters

Preliminaries £35,000 **Demolition** £24,425 **Excavation** £13,605 **Concrete** £14,870 **Brick- and blockwork** £17,478 **Roofing** £16,331 **Carpentry** £14,059 **Joinery** £93,770 **Steel and metalworks** £7,880 **Heating and plumbing** £40,524 **Electrical** £27,861 **Wall and floor finishes** £38,226 **Decoration** £22,050 **External works** £3,500 **Architect** £31,500 **Structural engineer** £7,000 **Building control** £1,800 **Planning consultant** £1,500 **Party-wall surveyor** £2,500 **Quantity surveyor** £1,000 **Total build cost** £445,000 **Total build cost per sqm** £1,787

Suppliers

PROJECT TEAM Architect

Platform 5 Architects (020 7739 9812; platform5architects.com)

Project manager Neal & Norden Consultants (020 7485 1054)

Structural engineer Rose Associates (020 7833 0666)

Builder Clockwork Construction (020 3016 2111; clockworkconstruction.co.uk)

Joiner Roger Hynam at Rogeroger Design Solutions

(020 7254 7706; rogeroger.co.uk)

Building regulations Iain Thomson at BCA (020 7278 1543; buildingcontrolapproval.com)

STRUCTURE Roofing Sky Roofing (01992 300 997)

Glazing Cantifix (020 8203 6203; cantifix.co.uk)

Secondary glazing Clockwork Construction (as before)

Zinc cladding VM Zinc (01992 822 288; vmzinc.co.uk)

Plastering Cornices Centre (020 8962 6938; cornicescentre.co.uk)

FITTINGS & FIXTURES Concrete flooring and worktop White+Reid (02392 641 641; whiteandreid.co.uk)

Kitchen GIQ Design (020 3589 3389; giqdesign.com)

Kitchen tap Franke at John Lewis (0845 604 9049; johnlewis.com)

Wood flooring Kährs oak floorboards at 1926 Trading Co (0800 587 2027; 1926woodflooring.co.uk)

Bathroom basins Catalano Verso 55 at CP Hart (0845 873 1121; cphart.co.uk)

Bathroom lights Castor at Detail Lighting (0845 052 4442; detaillighting.co.uk)

FURNITURE Dining table Athos at B&B Italia (020 7591 8111; bebitalia.it)

Dining chairs Series 7 chairs by Arne Jacobsen for Fritz Hansen at Skandium (020 7584 2066; skandium.com)

Dining-room pendant lights Beat light by Tom Dixon (020 7400 0500; tom Dixon.net)