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HOUSE & GARDEN

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Double take



Having lived happily in their small, west-London, Victorian house for several years, instead of moving to a larger family home, the owners bought the next-door house and doubled their living space with a dramatic, open-plan glass extension

TEXT HATTA BYNG | PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD POWERS



The colourful, hand-embroidered Chinese silk wallcovering provided the starting point for the decoration of the main sitting area; the sofas, from B&B Italia, were chosen to suit the modern scheme. The entrance hall and library are to the right of this room, while a sliding door (right of picture) closes off Luke's study



NEWLY married, Luke and Miranda Taylor did as many others do and bought a pretty, two-bedroom Victorian house close to their friends. Two children later, Miranda would happily have remained there – ‘Freddie and Saffron were in local schools, and we had three good friends on our street’ – but Luke, a self-labelled ‘frustrated architect’, wanted more lateral space and drama. Miranda insisted they stay in the same area, but finding something bigger and better in Brook Green, west London, was no easy task.

Then the house next door to theirs came up for sale, and the chance to knock two into one was an exciting solution. ‘Luke had laid out the floor plans before we’d even exchanged,’ laughs Miranda. ‘I knew we could do something really dramatic at the back and loved the idea of it remaining as two very ordinary houses at the front, so that it was completely unexpected,’ says Luke. ‘We were also obsessed by finding

THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT From the front, the house appears to be a conventional Victorian terrace; the extension is just visible to the left. At raised-ground-floor level, the main sitting area overlooks the garden through the glass extension. The yellow blind and blue sofa add splashes of colour; Luke’s study can be seen to the left. On the raised and lower ground floors, the original back wall of the house was removed; the new extension, with its expanse of glass and charcoal render has a distinctly Continental feel. **OPPOSITE** Although the inside of the front door of the second house is no longer visible, its fanlight has been left intact, allowing light to pour into Luke’s study. The room is home to a vintage-style floral rug, a Fifties, Danish desk, and a group of traditional watercolours, collected by Luke since childhood





The new extension adds a whole new scale in the form of a dramatic glass box enclosing two light-filled, open-plan floors, which stretch laterally across the house



THIS PAGE The kitchen is the 'b3' design, by Bullhaug; the breakfast bar divides the space from the television area. The blinds are made from 'Dôme', by Letièvre. **OPPOSITE** Adjacent to the kitchen, the double-height glass extension is complemented by striking furnishings, including teespoke pendant lights by Beirut-based PSLAB, and an elegant Eromental wallcovering. The mismatched dining chairs – including dark and light versions of the Y-chair, designed by Hans Wegner in 1950 – were chosen for an informal feel.





THIS PAGE FROM TOP Luke designed the television area's built-in seating, as well as the ottoman, which moves for greater flexibility. Stairs, clad in luna larch, from Element7, lead up to the main sitting area on the raised ground floor; the chair and footstool are two of the pieces that Miranda and Luke kept from their last home. In the children's bathroom, the bath came from Miranda and Luke's previous home; the floor-mounted tap is the 'Axor Steel' model, from Hansgrohe. The striped fabric for the blinds came from Chase Erwin. OPPOSITE The couple used a pretty Fromental wallcovering in their bedroom. The mirror-glass dressing table is from B & T Antiques, in Ledbury Road

something wide, but which wasn't a flat,' he adds.

Luke runs an agency network, so he drew up the initial floor plans on the computer himself. This was to form part of the brief, 'a starting point, giving an idea of how we wanted to live'. An avid reader of design magazines, he also had a clear idea of the architects he liked. He and Miranda interviewed several; it was DOS Architects, a practice less than a year old, which won the pitch. Its directors, Tavis Wright and Lorenzo Grifantini, met while working at Foster + Partners, and this was to be their first residential project in London. As Miranda says, 'we went for young talent.' Their pitch idea was not only exciting, but also respectful of Luke's ideas: 'The other architects all wanted to be more independent,' says Luke. Tavis and Lorenzo were fresh and enthusiastic; as Tavis says, 'Luke and Miranda knew we'd be dedicated to the cause.'

The result is a resounding success. From the front, it looks like two conventional Brook Green houses: though only one front door can be used, both remain visually intact. But step a few paces inside and it's a different story. The new extension adds a whole new scale in the form of a dramatic glass box enclosing two light-filled, open-plan floors, which stretch laterally across the house.

Almost the whole of the back wall came off these two floors of the house, so there are now large openings between old and new, creating a playful contrast. 'It was fairly hairy,' says Tavis, who credits the builders, P & N Homes, and the structural engineers, Ramboll (020-7631 5291), for making it happen: two huge steel box frames provide the structure. At one end of the extension is a free-standing wall supporting a staircase – it allows for a striking 'ribbon' of glass to run across the roof of the house and right down to the ground, giving dramatic views out into the garden. As Luke says, 'The architects were brilliant at taking on our ideas, but they took them a lot further.' Most of their work until then had been in Europe, and Luke likes the Continental feel of their architecture and their imaginative use of materials – 'The charcoal render, to me, has a distinct European stamp, for instance,' he explains.

From a hallway on the raised ground floor, you can either continue up a staircase to three bedrooms and an attic, or turn into the library, formerly the sitting room, which now leads out into a spectacular entertaining space. Like a wide balcony, this looks down over the double-height dining area, which is part of a large room, also containing the kitchen and family television area, that stretches across the lower ground floor. Miranda and Luke felt that the 'smart sitting room' should not be a rarely used space, and that it should be connected to the family areas. Now the adults can be having drinks here while the children are 'charging about' below. Similarly, Luke can work in his study – the original sitting room of the second house, which opens off the reception area – while Miranda is in her office or

the kitchen, and everybody feels connected.

They decided against using a decorator, as 'we didn't want somebody dictating our taste,' says Miranda. Luke chose the architectural finishes such as the luna-larch floor, the Bulthaup kitchen and the poured resin on the lower ground floor. 'Name me a housewife who'd choose a white floor,' Miranda laughs. But she loves it, and as Luke says, 'its reflective quality is good for a basement.' For the lighting, they enlisted the help of Beirut-based specialists PSLAB, who also designed and manufactured the pendant lights over the dining table.

Miranda admits it took time for her to get used to such open-plan living. 'It was also an intimidating house to decorate,' she says, 'but I realised it was all about personalising the space,' which meant adding 'tons of colour'. 'I felt the kids needed to know they could have a pillow fight' – hence the colourful vintage rugs and the Indian cushions in the television area. Much of the decoration was a joint decision; 'we put together mood boards,' explains Luke. The striking, hand-embroidered chinoiserie wallcovering by Fromental provided the starting point for the decoration of the main sitting area; they loved it so much they also used Fromental wallcoverings for their bedroom and, more recently, a wall in the dining area. Their next focus is the art. But their approach is refreshingly sensible – the curtains from the house's previous incarnation remain in the library, Luke's collection of watercolours hangs in his study, and old pieces of furniture have stayed.

A highly considered architectural project this may be, but it is also a wonderful family home. And Miranda, once afraid of its modernity, now waxes lyrical about living with glass. 'Even on a grey day it is so light,' she enthuses. 'When it snowed last winter it was amazing, and when it rains it gives a wonderful dappled effect. We love it' □
DOS Architects 020-7253 8222; www.dosarchitects.com | P & N Homes: 020-7229 4344; www.pnh.com | PSLAB: www.pslab.net

