

Self Build & design

JULY 2009 | £3.99



INTERIOR DESIGN
INSIDE
Kelly Hoppen's London home

DOWNSIZING
A GUIDE TO COMPACT LIVING

WOOD STOVES
Understanding their energy efficiency

CONSERVATORIES
WHY ALL NEW HOMES SHOULD HAVE ONE

TALL STOREY

Transforming a two-storey semi into a stunning four-storey family home

+ Even more case studies
■ A LUXURY BEACH HOUSE IN CORNWALL
■ AN AMAZING MAKEOVER IN SOMERSET
■ A SPACIOUS NEW STONE HOME IN DEVON





Andy and Aurore Down (pictured right) have more than doubled the size of a rundown, two-storey semi – transforming it into an incredible four-storey family home with walls of glass.

STORY: **ELEANOR WILDE** PICTURES: **JOHN GRIFFIN**



Our best buy

"The pre-cut limestone floor tiles for the kitchen, patio, sitting room and first floor bathroom came from a quarry in Bulgaria and cost around £30/m²."

DIGGING FOR VICTORY

Adding two new storeys to a house without increasing its overall height might sound impossible, but Andy and Aurore Down achieved just such a feat when they reinvented their 1930s semi in north London.

The transformation involved digging out the cellar and surrounding garden to create a spacious lower ground floor kitchen/family room, with a loft conversion accommodating a luxurious master bedroom suite at the top of the house.

"We'd renovated homes in the past, but had never tackled anything quite so ambitious," says Andy. "Our previous house was in a typical London terrace, and we took out the rear wall and added a double height window at the back which really opened up the spaces."

Andy and Aurore are both architects who work together running their own London practice, Archplan. The couple were keen to find another property to remodel, and began searching for a wider house with a private garden which would enable them to once again introduce large expanses of glazing without compromising the family's privacy.

"We didn't fall in love with this house when we first saw it, but it was definitely the blank canvas we were looking for," explains Aurore.

"The kitchen, living room and garage were on the ground floor with a trapdoor leading down to a disused cellar, and we could immediately see the potential to convert this into additional living space."

No natural light could enter the cellar, and the rear wall was starting to subside under the weight of the garden above. These structural defects were reflected in the price of the four bedroom house, which was generally in a poor state of repair.

Andy and Aurore worked together on an innovative design, which involved remodelling the interiors and constructing a two-storey extension with a double height wall of glass. This new addition projects two metres out from the back of the house and was acceptable under permitted development rights.

The couple and their three sons – James (23), Michael (20) and Thomas (15) – remained living in their old house for a year until the majority of building work had been completed.

Accustomed to organising teams of tradesmen for their clients, the Downs decided against employing a building contractor for their own build. Instead, a series of subcontractors were engaged on a direct labour basis, which helped to keep costs down and allowed Andy and Aurore to retain full control throughout the project.

Before (below) and after pictures of the stunning extension and remodelling of the rundown London semi.



Double height glazing has transformed the rear of the house, where the two-storey extension has a planted roof which extends to form a canopy above the glazing.



The end result is totally unrecognisable from the bland 1930s brick box the Downs had originally viewed. Instead of a dark, dank cellar, the couple have created a glamorous, light-filled kitchen/dining space. Sliding glass doors lead out across the water feature to the patio beyond, whilst a double height atrium is overlooked by the sitting room on the ground floor above.

"We wanted a unique kitchen which wouldn't blow the budget," says Andy, "so we bought standard carcasses and then had MDF doors made on site and sent away to be spray-painted for a high gloss finish. The island unit was clad in stainless steel and our dining table is simply two door blanks, clad in MDF, spray painted and fixed on stainless steel legs."

Money was also saved by shopping online and importing various items from abroad, including creamy limestone floor

"We hadn't planned to dig out quite so much of the garden, but the further the builders went back the better the view became from the new kitchen on the lower ground floor."

tiles, sourced from a quarry in Bulgaria, and bathroom fittings which were ordered direct from a warehouse in Italy.

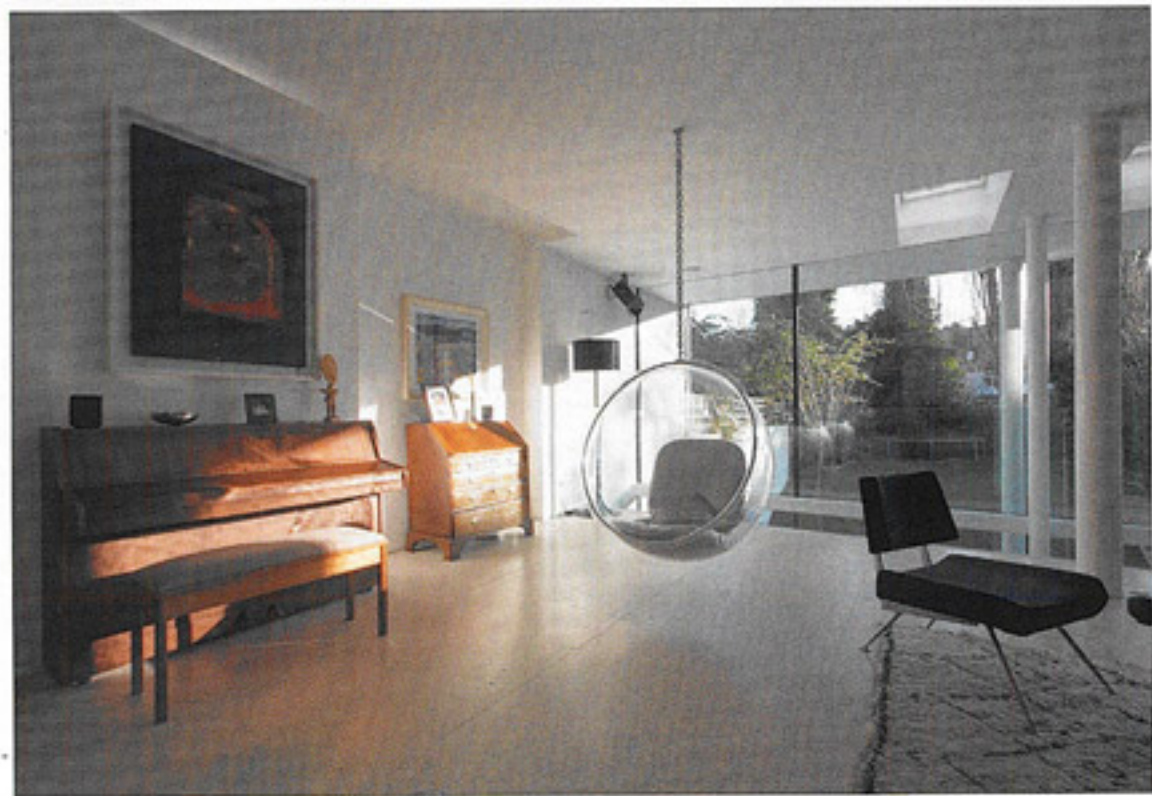
Aurore convinced Andy to wait before starting work on the loft conversion, which now contains their master bedroom, his and hers dressing rooms and a glamorous en suite bathroom. This stage of the project involved inserting three new dormer windows and cost an additional £60,000 to complete.

"Waiting three years meant that we could afford to do things properly without cutting corners," says Andy.

The ground floor living room looks out onto the rear garden through a wall of glazing.



A 'moat' water feature outside the glass doors has been stocked with Koi carp and may be crossed by two stepping stones.



The kitchen has been fitted with a glass splash-back running the length of the work surface. The stools are from Purves and Purves. The dining table and Cherner chairs were shipped from the US.

The first task involved breaking up the concrete slab of the integral garage and digging out beneath this area to connect into the existing basement. Evoking images of The Great Escape, the builders tunnelled by hand to produce a direct route from the street, under the house and out onto the newly excavated garden beyond.

"We hadn't planned to dig out quite so much of the garden, but the further the builders went back the better the view became from the new kitchen on the lower ground floor," explains Andy. "Instead of facing onto a bank of earth we now look onto a patio and a sloping lawn, with a water-feature directly outside the sliding glass doors."

Digging out the basement and rear garden generated enormous amounts of earth, which were deposited on the driveway ready to be transported away each day. "It must have

annoyed the neighbours, and there was constant building noise for well over a year," says Aurore.

"We needed to underpin the entire front of the house to achieve the extra head height to create a full basement. This part of the house is now lower than the drains, so we also had to install a two metre deep drain pump chamber to deal with waste water, including rainwater from the terrace."

The rear of the house was supported on acro props and steels on two levels, so that the entire back wall could duly be removed. Side walls for the extension were then constructed, before the huge panels of glazing were craned into position. These are shaded from the heat of the summer sun by an overhanging flat roof, planted with a blanket of sedum, which forms a protective metre wide canopy above the double height wall of glass.



"This storey was designed as a relaxing refuge, with plenty of built-in storage for books and clothes. We chose glossy white epoxy resin for the floors and installed a projector, with a screen on the wall opposite our bed."

Overall, the house has increased in size from 170m² to 370m² – a process which cost £400,000 to complete. Not only has the accommodation more than doubled in size – expanding from four bedrooms to six – it now boasts luxuries such as underfloor heating on the lower ground floor.

Every room has been furnished in a contemporary style, with some fun and colourful touches. Bright Koi carp swim outside in the moat, and a reproduction of Eero Aarnio's iconic bubble chair was purchased on the internet and hangs from the sitting room ceiling. "We like modern architecture,

but we also like colour and family mess, so this is definitely a home rather than a showcase," laughs Aurore. "Living with so much glass isn't a problem when it comes to privacy, because we're not overlooked at the rear, so curtains aren't necessary. Light streams in and we now have more than enough space. It's definitely been worth all the hard work and effort."

THE BOTTOM LINE

Andy and Aurore paid £730,000 for the four bedroom semi in 2003 and spent a further £400,000 extending and remodelling the house.

The converted loft contains the tranquil master bedroom. An enlarged photo of the couple's sons, standing in front of a wall of graffiti in Rio, is mounted behind the bed.

Extension & REMODEL



Sleek white epoxy resin flooring was chosen for the master bedroom and en suite bathroom, where a curvaceous free-standing bath stands beneath the vaulted ceiling.

FINAL THOUGHTS...

WHAT WAS THE HIGH POINT OF THE PROJECT?

Big changes, like demolishing the rear wall, were particularly gratifying because we could suddenly see spaces opening up. Watching the glass going in was also rewarding.

...AND THE LOW POINT? Eating our Christmas dinner in a dark, window-less kitchen was depressing, because the hoarding was still up ready to take the new glazing, which meant that no natural light could enter.

IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD CHANGE?

Open plan living can be great, but we would probably not have included the two storey atrium between the kitchen and the ground floor living room because sound does travel between the two levels.

WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST EXTRAVAGANCE?

Excavating the earth was the most expensive element of the build, and we seemed to spend most of our money on digging. At £16,000 the glazing was the most costly single item, but it's been worth every penny because it totally transforms the house.



Contacts

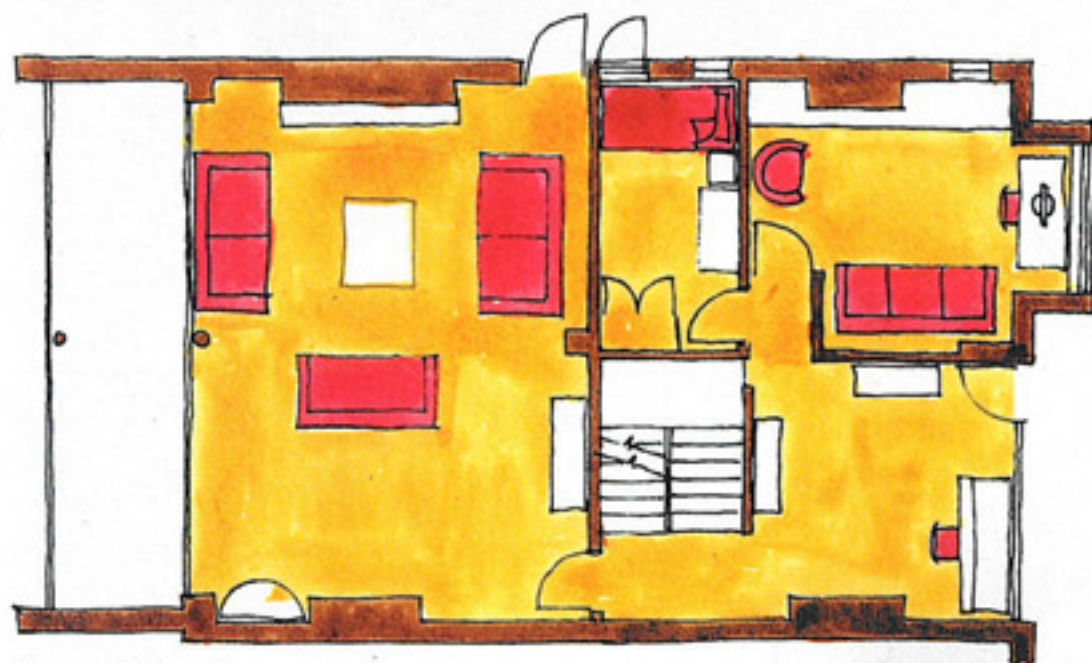
ARCHITECTS Archplan Architects & Property Managers:
020 83401747, www.archplan.co.uk

GLAZING, SLIDING PATIO DOORS Fineline Aluminium:
01934 429922, www.finelinealuminium.co.uk

WATERPROOF RENDER Sika Ltd:
01707 394444, www.sika.com

DINING CHAIRS The Cherner Chair Company:
www.chernerchair.com

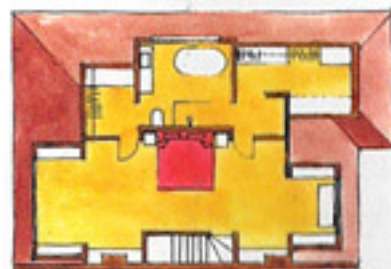
KITCHEN STOOLS Purves & Purves: www.purves.co.uk



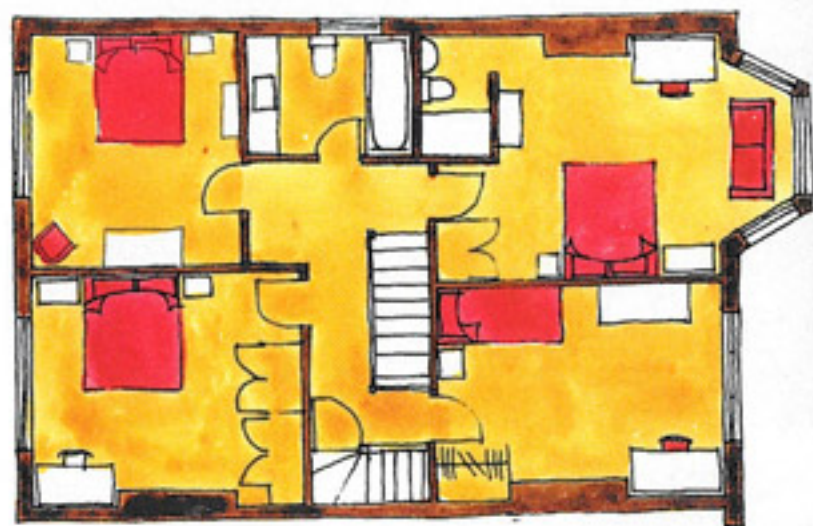
Ground floor

▲ The floor plan

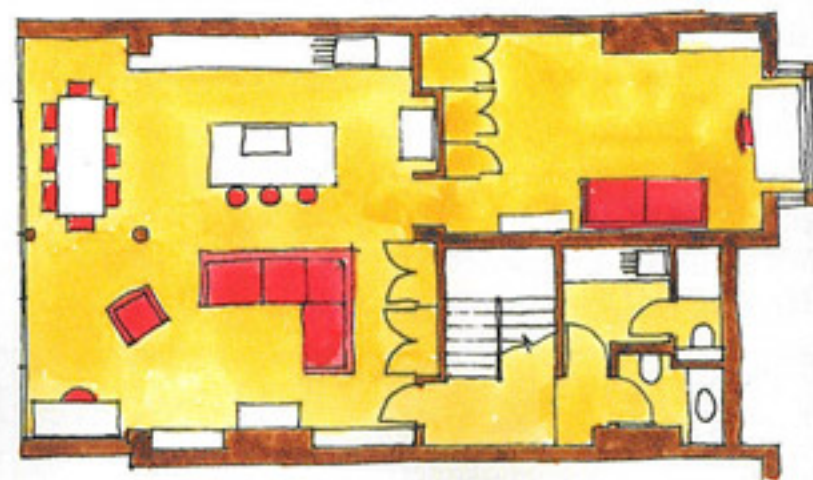
The newly created lower ground floor contains an open plan kitchen/dining/family room with a separate utility and a home office. The living room is positioned on the ground floor, where the boys share a study beside the guest bedroom. A further four bedrooms are located on the first floor, together with a family bathroom and en suite, and the converted loft contains Andy and Aurore's master suite.



Attic



First floor



Basement