

PARK LIFE

A loft conversion and side extension have transformed this Victorian terraced house, adding space and light while framing views of the neighbouring common

Words Debbie Jeffery Photography Matt Chisnall

Lying in bed and looking out across open parkland is a rare privilege – especially if you live in a modest Victorian terraced house in west London. In fact, the view was the deciding factor when Helen Arvanitakis and her husband Tom Steel purchased this unassuming two-storey property. It has a typically compact rear garden, but also backs on to Wendell Park, creating a pleasant, open outlook.

‘Living here for six years before we made any major changes gave us time to get to know the house and save up, so that we could do things properly,’ says Helen. ‘When our son Alexander was born, the desire for extra space became more pressing, particularly as the existing

kitchen was so cramped, so we began to make detailed plans.’ The couple had their second son, Theo, relatively soon after the project was completed, further proving their need for a family-friendly property.

Tom is the director of a forward-thinking structural engineering firm and Helen is head of interior design at British design company Tom Dixon, so they made a dream team when it came to reinventing their own home. ‘Tom was responsible for the structural side of the project, while I prepared mood boards and mock-up images for the interior,’ says Helen.

To complete the line-up, the couple chose architect Henri Bredenkamp of award-winning Studio 30 Architects, →



this picture Two reception rooms form the spacious living area, with flooring in engineered oak

AT A GLANCE

Names Helen Arvanitakis and Tom Steel
Ages 37 and 39
Location Shepherd’s Bush, west London
Property Victorian terraced house
Bedrooms 3 **Bathrooms** 2
Project started July 2013
Project finished December 2013
Size of house 180sqm
House cost £650,000 in 2007
Build cost £150,000
Cost per sqm £833



this picture Bespoke convex mirrors grace two chimney breasts in the living room

right The side extension has doubled the size of the kitchen, creating a light-filled, open-plan kitchen/dining room for Helen and her family





this picture A new staircase up to the loft space mimics the existing Victorian stairs



this picture Original floorboards have been exposed in the first-floor guest bedroom, which occupies the full width of the front of the house

Tom and Helen favoured a contemporary approach, while preserving original features



whose work they both admired. ‘Henri was one of the few architects who appreciated that we wanted to flex our design muscles,’ says Helen. ‘In many ways he was also a facilitator and counsellor, as well as the brains behind getting planning permission.’

The brief was to double the size of the existing kitchen by extending into the shady, under-used side return, and to convert the loft into a master suite that would savour the views of the park. Most importantly, the couple wanted to avoid creating a pastiche of the existing Victorian design, preferring a distinctly contemporary approach while preserving the building’s original features.

‘Although we don’t live in a conservation area, the fact that the house overlooks the park meant the planning application was quite sensitive,’ explains Tom. ‘In the end, however, we were granted the loft conversion under permitted development rights and only needed to apply for permission for the ground-floor extension.’

On 1 July 2013 the family moved out of the property to live in rented accommodation nearby until December. ‘We had an enormous stroke of luck when friends of ours went travelling and suggested that we could rent their house, just around the corner,’ says Helen. ‘We had one main contractor – a company called Euro Build, which was excellent – and we sourced the fixtures and fittings ourselves.’

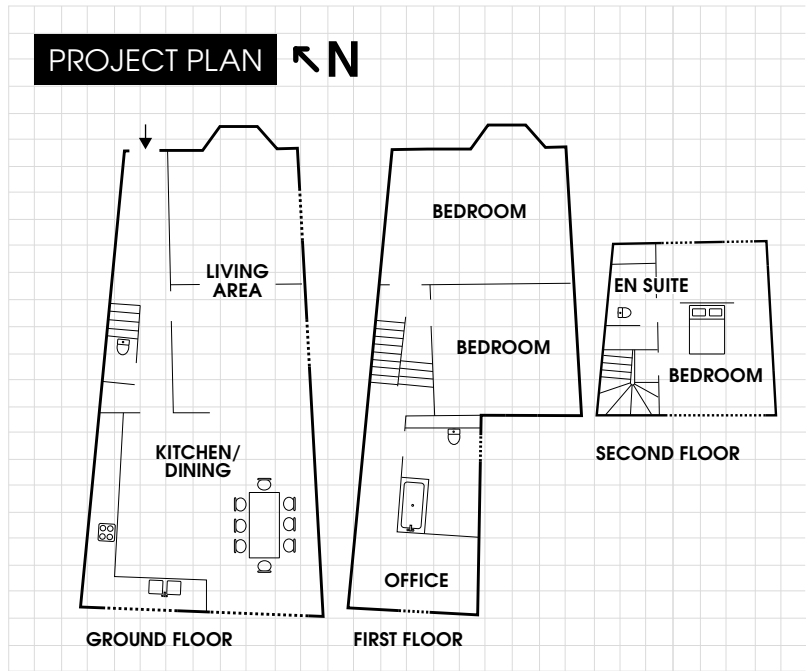
Moving out meant that the builders could gut the house and work methodically without the need to accommodate the family. It was important that neighbours were disturbed as little as possible during the process, however, so excavating the foundations and building the blockwork party wall needed to be completed quickly and neatly. ‘There’s no rear access, so the builders hand-dug the footings and brought all the materials through the house,’ says Tom.

In order to build the new kitchen-diner extension, an existing sash window in the rear wall of the sitting room needed to be sacrificed. To compensate for any potential loss of light, a large frameless roof light was designed by Tom and Henri, and this has been installed in the flat roof above the new dining area.

The roof itself is planted with native British meadow flowers and grasses, which improves the view from upper windows and creates a colourful feature in summer. ‘It’s possible to walk across the glass roof light, and the planted roof compensates for losing part of the garden,’ says Helen. ‘Wildflowers are obviously far more attractive to look at than man-made roofing materials.’

Aluminium pivoting and sliding windows installed in the two extensions are matched by the new kitchen window, and all are finished in distinctive black. ‘The glazing was a recommendation from Henri; when we visited the company’s workshop we absolutely loved the simplicity of the system,’ says Tom. ‘The fact that it’s made in the UK was very important to us, and the glazed panels were small and light enough to be positioned without the need for a crane.’

In the open-plan kitchen-diner, brick-style pamments (handmade tiles) have been laid in a herringbone pattern over underfloor heating, creating the appearance of a sun-soaked courtyard. ‘It’s wonderful in summer, of course, but, weirdly, →



this picture Since completing the project, Helen and Tom have had a second son, who shares this bedroom with his brother



left Walls in the first-floor office have been clad in cork tiles, which were discovered in a box in the attic of the house



this room really comes into its own in winter,' says Helen. 'You get to sunbathe indoors, which is glorious.'

Standard kitchen cabinetry has been teamed with worktops made from natural-coloured concrete, mixed with London gravel, while the simple matt-black doors were imported from a factory in Slovenia. The builders also made a white island unit using leftover carcasses and lava stone bathroom tiles, which is on giant castors so that it can be repositioned to meet the changing demands of the room. 'I didn't want to commit to a fixed island, but this way we can move it every week and use it as a cocktail station for dinner parties,' says Helen.

The other major structural alteration to the house involved converting the loft space (previously used only to store junk) into a spacious master bedroom and en suite. Careful stripping of part of the main roof meant tiles could be re-used once the timber-framed structure had been erected. An existing chimney breast was the starting point for the new bedroom's interior design, which makes a feature of the

V shape formed by two flues from the first-floor bedroom fireplaces. 'Rather than block this off and lose quite a lot of floor space, we decided to embrace the triangular shape,' says Helen, who also commissioned unusual charcoal artwork to echo the lines of the chimney breast.

Helen and Tom replaced the floorboards in their ground-floor sitting room with harder-wearing engineered oak (which has been laid over underfloor heating), and the Victorian pine floorboards were then recycled in the new bedroom. These boards were laid diagonally, to emphasise the angular nature of this space further, and have been stripped then finished with a white oil.

The pale floorboards and white paintwork create an understated scheme, which means all the attention is focused on the views of the park, seen through a wall of pivoting sliding glazing. 'In the summer, it's fantastic to be able to lie in bed drinking coffee with the doors pushed right back,' says Helen. 'You forget that you're actually living in west London, because it really feels like being on holiday.' **GD**

above In the converted loft, the master suite has a fully glazed dormer window, enabling views of the adjacent park to be enjoyed from the bed

Suppliers

PROJECT TEAM **Architect** Studio 30 Architects (07701 061 109; studio30architects.co.uk) **Structural engineer** Tom Steel at Heyne Tillett Steel (020 7870 8050; heynetillettsteel.com) **Building contractor** Euro Build (01276 63953; eurobuild.co.uk) **STRUCTURE** **Roof** Ithaca Roofing (01344 422 947; ithacaroofting.co.uk) **Green roof** Sky Garden (01242 620 905; sky-garden.co.uk) **Aluminium windows** Sunseeker (01582 492 730; sunseekerdoors.co.uk) **FIXTURES & FITTINGS** **Kitchen cabinet carcasses** Frontline Cabinets (0115 987 2460; frontlinecabinets.co.uk) **Concrete worktops** Concreations (020 8408 3000; concreations.co.uk) **En-suite bathroom tile system** Dtile (+31 26 702 4126; dtile.nl) **Lighting** Tom Dixon (020 3696 4950; tomdixon.net); Twentytwentyone (020 7288 1996; twentytwentyone.com); Artek (+358 10 617 3414; artek.fi) **FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES** **Dining table and chairs** Twentytwentyone (as before) **Orange bench** Tom Dixon (as before) **Lounge chairs** Nanna Ditzel (+45 3393 9480; nanna-ditzel-design.dk)



this picture A Dutch ceramic tiling system has been used in the en-suite shower room, even forming the deep basin

STYLE FINDER

Add colourful textiles and bold lighting to echo Helen and Tom's playful scheme

Compiled by *Emily Seymour*



Spot light Bilberry pendant in painted steel in white (H22xDiameter18cm), £318, Artek at Nest.co.uk (0114 243 3000; nest.co.uk)



Bright touch Spectrum throw in wool in aqua (H142xW100cm), £54, Avoca (+353 1 274 6996; avoca.com)



Hot seat Risom chair in maple and cotton in red (H77.5xW44xD54cm), £732, The Conran Shop (0844 848 4000; conranshop.co.uk)



Fisheye lens Large Dome mirror in glass (Diameter60cm), £550, Tom Dixon (020 3696 4950; tomdixon.net)



Sleek flooring Masini tiles in porcelain in grey (H20xW40cm), £110 per sqm, Fired Earth (01295 814 396; firedearth.com)



this picture Despite overlooking the park, the loft conversion was granted under permitted development rights