

New build  
**CASE STUDY**

# The polite **IMPOSTER**

The traditional Victorian-style facade of Richard and Rebecca Elliot's new home belies its stunning, highly contemporary interior.

STORY: **DEBBIE JEFFERY**

PICTURES: **SIMON KENNEDY, CHARLES HOSEA, RICHARD ELLIOT, CHRIS SNOOK**



**N**obody walking past Richard and Rebecca Elliot's new South-East London home spares it a second glance – and that's exactly the way the couple like it. Their newly-built semi-detached property stands on a former bomb site in leafy Brockley, and was designed to mimic its Victorian neighbours at the front, but step inside and the airy, contemporary interior defies expectation.

The abandoned site originally had one of a pair of 19th-century semi-detached homes on it but, after significant bomb damage, had stood bare since 2008 when the replacement 1950s house was demolished.

"Richard and I weren't even living together when he first bought the plot in 2013," says Rebecca. "We'd only been seeing each other for a few months, and had our own flats. Then Richard started looking at houses, and when nothing affordable became available he decided to buy this plot of land and build."

## IN BRIEF

### PROJECT

New build in Brockley, London

### FINANCE

**COST** £350,000 in 2013

**SPENT** £800,000

**WORTH** £1.7m

### TOP TIP

"The biggest thing we did right was hiring Gruff architects and engaging them for the full project, because they really led us through the process – from getting a design that was right for us, to pushing for early decisions so that we got a realistic price. We never had to make choices under stress, because the whole project was so carefully planned."



*"We felt that recreating a period façade would be the best way to avoid a long planning process."*

## EXTERIOR

The front façade has been designed to mirror its semi-detached neighbour, right down to the imperial-sized fair-faced London stock bricks. A local artist made the stained-glass panel in the door, and the corncicing features a horse and fern to represent Richard and Rebecca's birth places of Oxfordshire and New Zealand. The rear is more contemporary, with large expanses of glass and a smaller volume built with dark bricks. The garden has recently been landscaped, with lawn, path-ways, paving, hornbeam hedging and planting.





The overgrown piece of wasteland was choked with around 100 old tyres and other debris, and although a developer had gained planning consent to build a house there in 2008 this permission was due to expire.

The couple contacted three local architectural practices, including Gruff Limited, who they ultimately chose to work with. "We felt that they really listened carefully to our ideas and understood what we wanted," says Richard. "I love to cook, and wanted a bedroom where the morning light wouldn't wake me, and we both prefer showers to baths, so all of these details were taken on board. It was less about the look of the house and more about how we wanted to live."

Rebecca grew up in New Zealand, and Richard had recently spent several years living in Australia, so a good connection to the outdoors was a priority for them both. Some questions proved more difficult to answer than others, however.

"It was odd, because we were in the early stages of a relationship," Rebecca recalls. "We were talking about the entrance hall and someone mentioned space for parking a buggy, but we hadn't even discussed whether we wanted children at that point."

Gruff suggested various options, including some highly contemporary designs, but it soon became apparent that building a radical structure against the traditional semi-detached neighbour just wouldn't work.

#### KITCHEN FLOORING

A poured resin floor was chosen for the kitchen. Pale pink wall tiles have been used for the splashback, which complement the matt white and solid ash Scandinavian cabinets.

*"We were starting from scratch, with no furniture or artwork, so we had a completely blank canvas."*

The five-bedroom, three-storey house which Gruff ultimately designed for the Conservation Area plot aims to harmonise with the streetscape by mirroring period details on the front elevation of the adjoining semi. From the street, the new house is indistinguishable from the surrounding Victorian properties, with a large, square main volume and a smaller rectangular side volume.

Constructed from fair-faced London stock brick to match its neighbours, the traditional detailing is completed by bespoke white-painted timber sash windows, cast ornamental lintels and corbels.

"We didn't want to battle the planners, and felt that recreating a period façade would be the best way to avoid a long planning process," says Rebecca, a Local Government Association policy expert. "The council requested an imperial-sized brick for the front of the house, and these actually look really good, so we were glad we used them."

In contrast, the east-facing rear of the house features a

contemporary, smaller volume, built from dark engineering bricks, with four large windows set deep into bespoke brick frames to maximise views over the rear garden. Sliding doors in the kitchen and living areas are framed in grey aluminium to blend with the dark brickwork.

The couple discussed their ideas with the local council prior to submitting the application, and also invited neighbours and members of the Brockley Society to their site for consultations.

"In the beginning our immediate neighbours were understandably wary of the project," says Rebecca. "The side of their house had been exposed for a long time, and they'd had leaks, so we did a few things to protect their wall and developed a really good relationship with them."

Planning permission was granted in March 2014 and Richard, who works for a City bank, sold his flat to fund the build, moving into a rented flat next door to the site with Rebecca. A self-build mortgage was then secured to complete the project, which released funds in arrears, and the

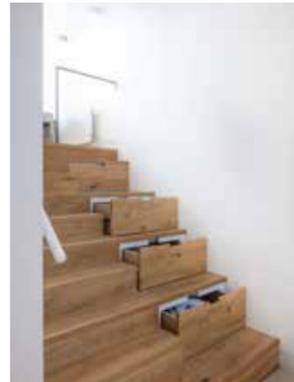
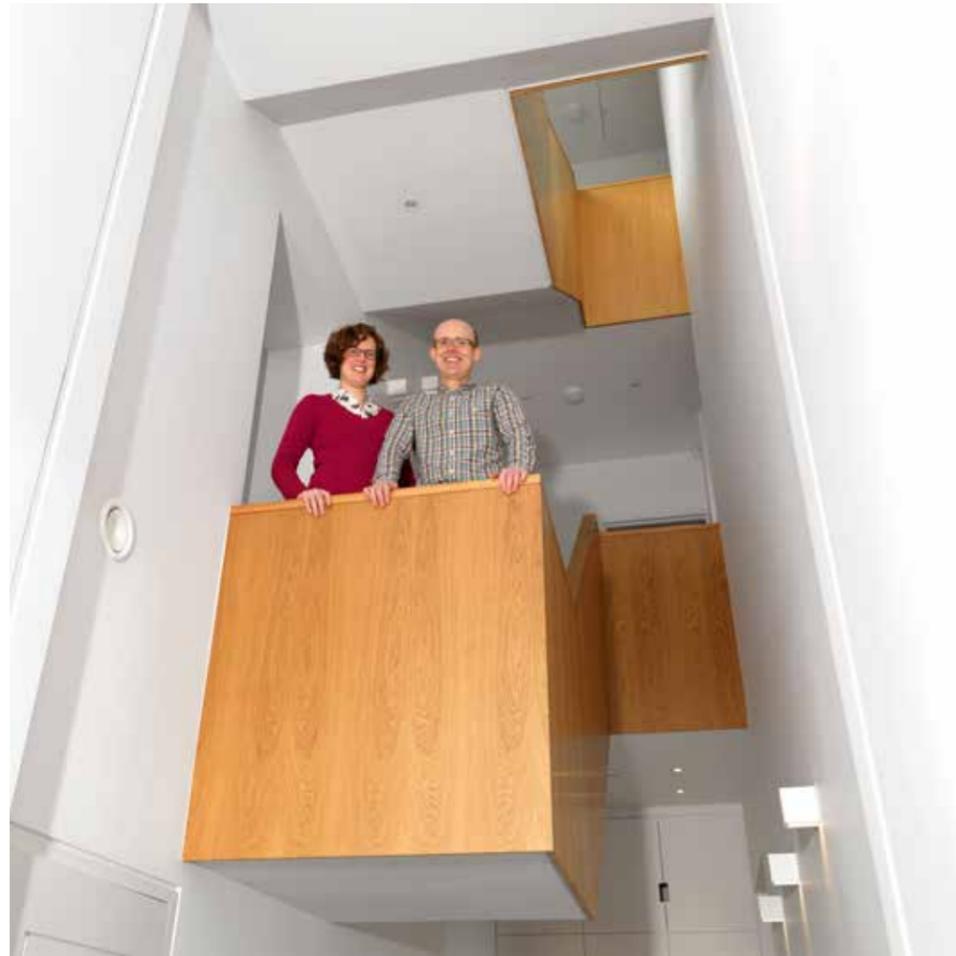
**CONTACTS**



**PROJECT**  
**Architect** Gruff Ltd:  
 grufflimited.com  
**Builder** Silverpoint Design  
 and Construction Limited:  
 silverpoint.co.uk  
**Structural engineer** Chris  
 Brown Structural Engineering  
 Ltd: cbsengineering.co.uk  
**Interior designer** Laura  
 Stephens: laurastephens.co.uk  
**Garden designer** Michael  
 Coley: michaelcoley.co.uk

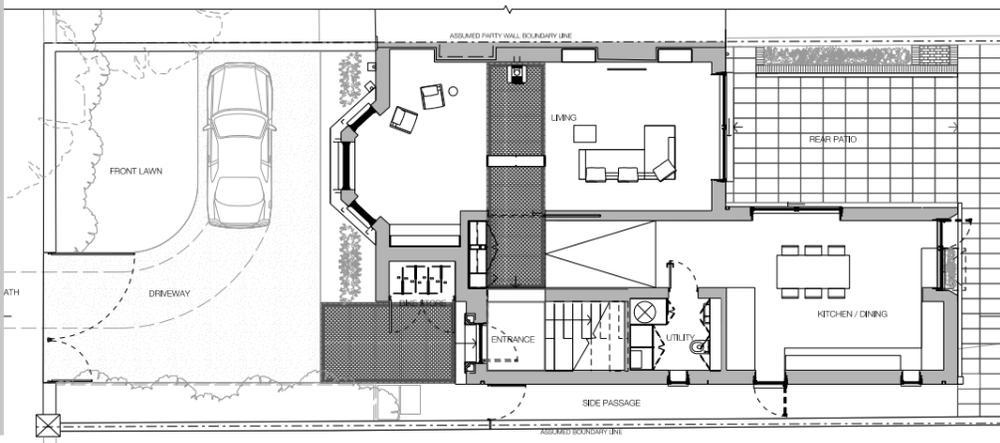
**STRUCTURE**  
**Bricks** lbstock: lbstock.com  
**Timber windows**  
 Bereco: bereco.co.uk  
**Aluminium windows**  
 Velfac: velfac.co.uk  
**Fibre cement roof slates** Marley  
 Eternit: marleyeternit.co.uk

**FIXTURES AND FITTINGS**  
**Exterior plaster mouldings**  
 Fine Art Plasterwork:  
 fineartplasterwork.com  
**External sandstone tiles** London  
 Stone: londonstone.co.uk  
**External mosaic tiles** London  
 Mosaic: londonmosaic.com  
**Resin floor** Senso:  
 sensofloors.co.uk  
**Tile floor** Mosaic Del Sur:  
 cement-tiles.com  
**Kitchen** Svane: svane.com  
**Worktop** Silestone:  
 silestone.co.uk  
**Kitchen tiles** Alhambra Tiles:  
 alhambrahome.co.uk  
**Paint** Little Greene:  
 littlegreene.com; Farrow  
 and Ball: farrow-ball.com  
**Sanitaryware** Crosswater:  
 crosswater.co.uk; Duravit:  
 duravit.co.uk  
**Bathroom tiles** Fired Earth  
 (master en suite): firedearth.  
 com; Walls and Floors:  
 wallsandfloors.co.uk  
**Wood-burner** Contura: contura.eu  
**Rainwater harvesting  
 system** Rainwater Harvesting:  
 rainwaterharvesting.co.uk  
**Solar panels** SolarWorld:  
 solarworld.de  
**PV inverter** SolarEdge:  
 solaredge.com  
**Stained glass** Apollo Stained  
 Glass: apollostainedglass.co.uk  
**Kitchen pendant** Gant Lights,  
 Berlin: gantlights.de  
**Parquet floor** Waxed Floors:  
 waxedfloors.co.uk



**STAIRCASE**

The statement staircase rises up through a triple-height void, and incorporates useful storage drawers. A parapet is included at the top of the stairwell.



couple continued to work full time throughout the build.

“Over time I became increasingly involved in the project, and we were also planning our wedding for April 2015,” Rebecca says. “In fact, because of delays with the groundworks, we ended up marrying just two months after the blockwork started going up.”

Building contractor Silverpoint Design and Construction had been recommended by Gruff Ltd. Around 2.5 metres had to be excavated for the foundations due to the basement of the previous house, and a 5,000-litre rainwater harvesting tank was also sunk into the ground, which feeds toilets and the washing machine.

The brick and blockwork structure was then constructed, with triple-glazed timber sash windows to the front elevation and more contemporary aluminium/timber windows at the rear. The roof is covered in fibre-cement slates.

“We wanted to make the house as energy efficient as possible, and the photovoltaic panels mounted on the rear roof, which generate our electricity, were hurriedly installed just before the feed-in tariffs changed in 2015,” says Richard. “Underfloor heating has been laid downstairs, with radiators upstairs, and we have a mechanical ventilation and heat recovery system.”

Internally, a triple-height staircase occupies the void, providing a visual connection to the ground floor from the upper bedrooms and landings. As you enter the house the stair is at its widest, with deep integrated drawers for storage and seating. “Gruff suggested the staircase, and it works really well,”

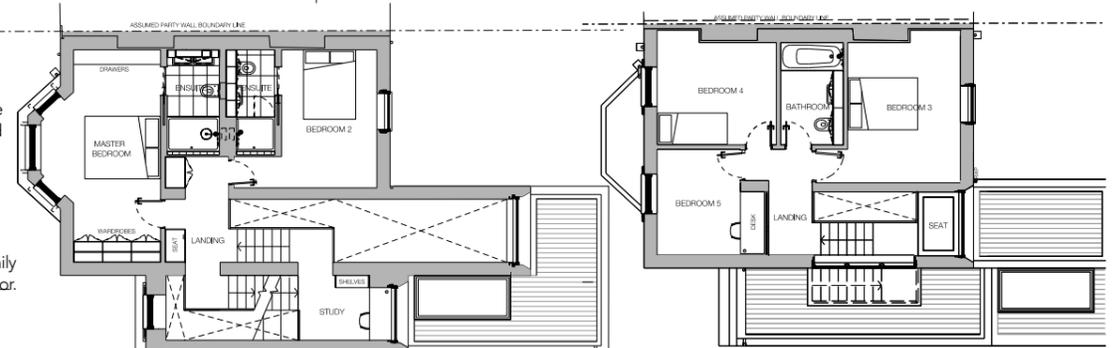
**LIVING AREA**

Parquet flooring and a strip of decorative encaustic tiles were laid in the living room, with the tiles forming a hearth for the wood-burner. A hanging bookshelf makes an unusual room divider.



**THE FLOORPLAN**

The three-storey 232 sqm house revolves around a statement staircase. There’s a living room and a separate kitchen/diner on the ground floor, together with a utility/WC. Upstairs is the master bedroom suite and an en suite bedroom, with a study area on the landing. Three further bedrooms and a family bathroom are on the top floor.





### STUDY

A simple study area has been created on the first floor landing area, beside a large window.

### BATHROOMS

Brightly coloured tiles give each bathroom individual character. The master en suite has a PIR sensor with a low-level LED for night time use.



### MASTER BEDROOM

The pale grey master bedroom, with its built-in storage, was one of the rooms designed by interior designer Laura Stephens.



says Richard. "The treads are engineered oak, and the rest is made from oak-faced birch ply."

From the ground floor entrance hall views are possible up through the void to the skylight in the roof. Fire prevention measures were required for the three-storey building, including a fire curtain and fire doors, which have been embellished with a simple routed detail.

A floor-to-ceiling bookcase and desk form an extension of the stairs, between the ground and first floors, creating a bright study looking out onto the timber deck of the flat roof beyond. Further up the building a cushioned landing, positioned in front of the largest window in the house, provides a contemporary low-level window seat.

A simple palette of oak and muted greys has been used throughout, with unifying joinery and detailing specified in every room. Splashes of vivid colour were introduced into bathrooms with bright yellow and turquoise tiles, and Richard and Rebecca worked with interior designer Laura Stephens on their master bedroom and living area.

"We were starting from scratch, with no furniture or artwork, so we had a completely blank canvas and needed someone





**DECKING**

A decked area has been built on the flat roof at the rear of the property.

to get us started," says Rebecca. "Laura produced mood boards, which really helped with other choices throughout the house because we had a strong scheme to refer back to. We also needed to take account of the large scale of the rooms, as we'd both previously lived in small flats."

The couple moved into their new home in the summer of 2016, with only one toilet installed and an outside tap for water. "The project dragged a little bit, but we drew a line in the sand and set a date to move in," Richard recalls.

"Over the next few weeks the kitchen and bathrooms were installed, so the interiors literally changed around us, and credit to Gruff with the design because everything works so beautifully that you almost take it for granted. Now we have a very contemporary home hidden behind a Victorian-style façade. The only thing that gives it away is our 2015 date brick."



**Final word**

**WHAT WAS THE HIGH POINT OF YOUR PROJECT?**

Seeing our stained-glass panel being made for the front door felt quite creative and personal. It depicts a modern scene of the neighbourhood, including the church where we were married, set against a backdrop of the City skyline.

**...AND THE LOW POINT?**

We had a burglary quite early on, when someone broke into the builders' shipping container and stole power tools.

**THE BEST BUY?** Our coloured bathroom tiles came from Walls and Floors and were really inexpensive, but have great impact.

**...AND THE BIGGEST EXTRAVAGANCE?** The Swedish wood-burner in our living room is a huge luxury, as we don't really need it for the heat output.

