



## MY GRAND IDEA

— Shahriar Nasser of Belsize Architects explains how an on-site decision changed the design of this rear extension

**Tell us about the house**

‘The owners have lived in this Arts & Crafts house, in a conservation area in north-west London, for some time. They’d had a smaller extension built about 20 years ago but since then, their children have left home and the couple now spends more time in the kitchen and garden. They are keen party-givers and wanted more space and to make better use of both areas; in particular, they wanted a larger kitchen with room for informal dining and relaxed seating. They also wanted to use the garden as an outdoor room, with a real fire.’

— **What did you propose?**

‘The existing planning permission enabled us to design a single-storey extension for an open-plan kitchen-living room. We also applied for a second, separate permission so that we could dig out a basement for a utility room, a bathroom and a large, multi-functional space.’

— **How was this achieved?**

‘The garden sloped up steeply from the back of the house, so we flattened the incline a bit and pushed it to the back, away from the house. Turfed and planted up, it is a lovely backdrop to the new L-shaped terrace, which is now laid with a polished concrete floor to match the material used inside. The brick extension has a larger footprint than the earlier structure and beneath it, we dug out a 100sqm basement that extends beneath the garden.’

— **Why use brick?**

‘We considered rendering and painting the extension white; it would have helped to increase light levels in the north-facing garden but it would have been more costly to maintain. I’m not a great fan of red brick but in this instance, the facade of the main house sets off the material and emphasises the extension’s modern design very well.’



— **How do you access the lower level?**

‘An internal staircase links the basement with the new ground floor but while we were on site, the owners decided they wanted access to the garden from the room below. The concrete stairwell and courtyard at the foot of it now acts as another point of interest and allows the basement to be flooded with natural light as it flows through the glass balustrade and the two large, glazed, sliding doors that lead from the courtyard into the basement. We also put three skylights into the terrace floor, using structural glass so they can be walked on.’

— **Did this affect any other aspects of the project?**

‘The basement courtyard not only helps to stress the pointed brick corner of the extension above, and the large frameless, picture window surrounded by brick reveals in its rear wall, it also makes the corner look as though it is floating above the courtyard. This is a popular talking point, as is the fireplace in the boundary wall of the side ground-floor terrace, and the roof garden on the extension.’ GD

*Belsize Architects (020 7482 4420; [belsizearchitects.com](http://belsizearchitects.com))*

**ABOVE** Pieces of artwork from the owners’ collection are displayed on the walls in the basement space

**LEFT** The three irregularly shaped skylights in the terrace floor illuminate the far corners of the basement room below



WORDS ARABELLA ST JOHN PARKER PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID GREEN, WILL SCOTT