

RIBA *Journal*

'Architecture's magazine' **The Scotsman**

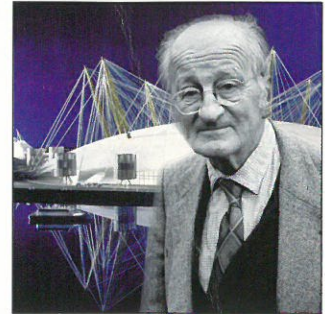
March 1998 £4

Wooden top

Hawkins Brown's extension to London's Woman's Pioneer Housing association headquarters.



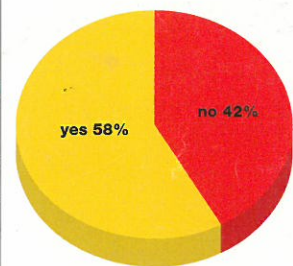
**JOBS, JOBS,
JOBS**
3 pages of
recruitment
inside



Speaking gravely

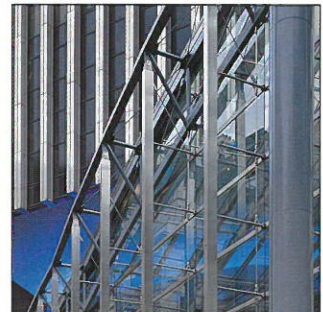
Pevsner on the Dome?

Have you ever suffered from RSI?



Terminal illness

RSI: coming to a screen near you



Shell shock

GMW reclads the NatWest tower after the bomb



Wish fulfilment

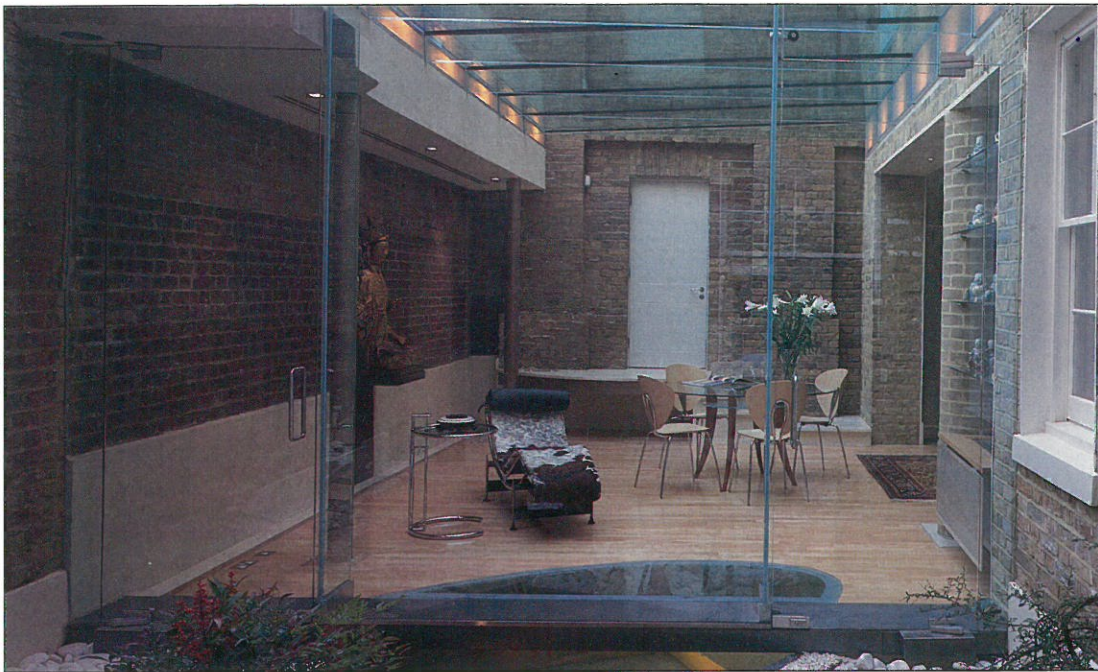
Architects dream of being given a free hand on a job, but rarely get the opportunity. Belsize Architects struck lucky with a brief to remodel the basement and courtyard of a grade-I listed Nash house. Amanda Baillieu reports

You lie awake at night dreaming of a client who is trusting enough to let you make the decisions and rich enough to make them come true. For architect Shahriar Nasser of Belsize Architects, the fantasy became reality when he was commissioned by a wealthy couple to design an extension for their home in Regent's Park, central London.

Nasser, who set up the practice three years ago, has long wanted this kind of commission. But since leaving his native Iran in 1979 and training at the Architectural Association, he has done only refurbishments, mainly to listed buildings, and remodelling.

It was while working for architect Carden & Godfrey that he met his current clients whose business empire includes

PHOTOS: NICHOLAS KAINE



A light, modern feel pervades the glass extension, as viewed from the inside (far left) and outside (near left).

the upmarket London Zen restaurants designed by Rick Mather.

The house is a grade I-listed Nash, and is vast. But the basement family room did not offer the same quality of accommodation as elsewhere in the house. And the small internal terrace leading off the room suffered from lack of light. The architect put forward two options: first, a neo-regency conservatory of the sort that can now be ordered from a catalogue; the second, a striking modern solution in glass and steel sailing over an elliptical pool.

But before the scheme could proceed, three statutory bodies had to be consulted: Camden Council, the Crown Estate and English Heritage. Camden was sympathetic while the Crown Estate, which

had been concerned with loss of amenity, acquiesced after English Heritage granted listed building consent. On the money side, a standard conservatory would have cost between £50,000 and £60,000, but Nasser's preferred option, the glass extension, came out at £86,000, with another £10,000 for new furniture.

Costly but worth it

It is not difficult to see why Nasser won his argument. Even on a grey winter's day, the new extension is suffused with light. True, the new roof needs a clean – not the easiest of jobs – and one can imagine when the rain beats down relentlessly on the glass that the attractions of a transparent roof are diminished. But, as Nasser points out,

this is a special room – almost a showroom where Cassina and Eileen Grey furniture has banished the old.

Technically, it is self-assured, although it is so bespoke that little of it can be borrowed. The roof 'fins' are made of three 10mm-thick lengths of glass laminated together to form a structural beam and held into the brickwork by steel angles (see drawing, overleaf).

Six glass roofing panels sit on the fins, which are supported on one side by a steel channel and on the other by a steel angle – which is in turn supported by two slender columns. A third column has been clad in brick to reflect the massive scale of the house.

A pair of matching glazed doors lead

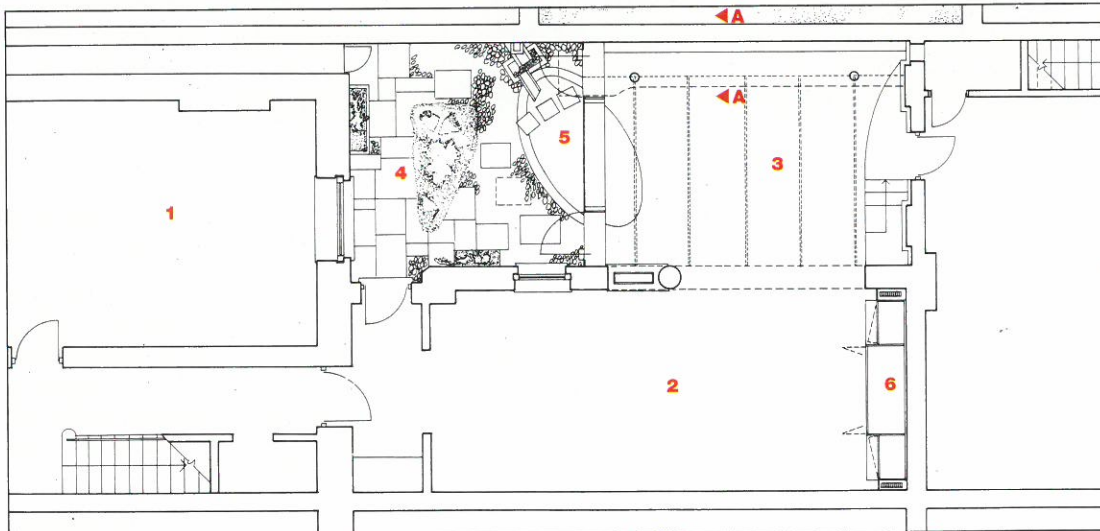
Pond construction

The pond is made of 200mm thick concrete cast over a waterproof membrane. It is rendered internally and is coated with a clear polyurethane, G4. A 450x700mm waterproof chamber has been constructed next to the pond to house the submersible pump and its valves in deep water and out of sight. There is an access panel over the chamber.





The new glass canopy draws the basement family room out into the courtyard area (left, and plan, below left).



KEY TO PLAN
 1 Main house
 2 Family room
 3 Glass extension
 4 Courtyard
 5 Pond
 6 Hi-fi unit

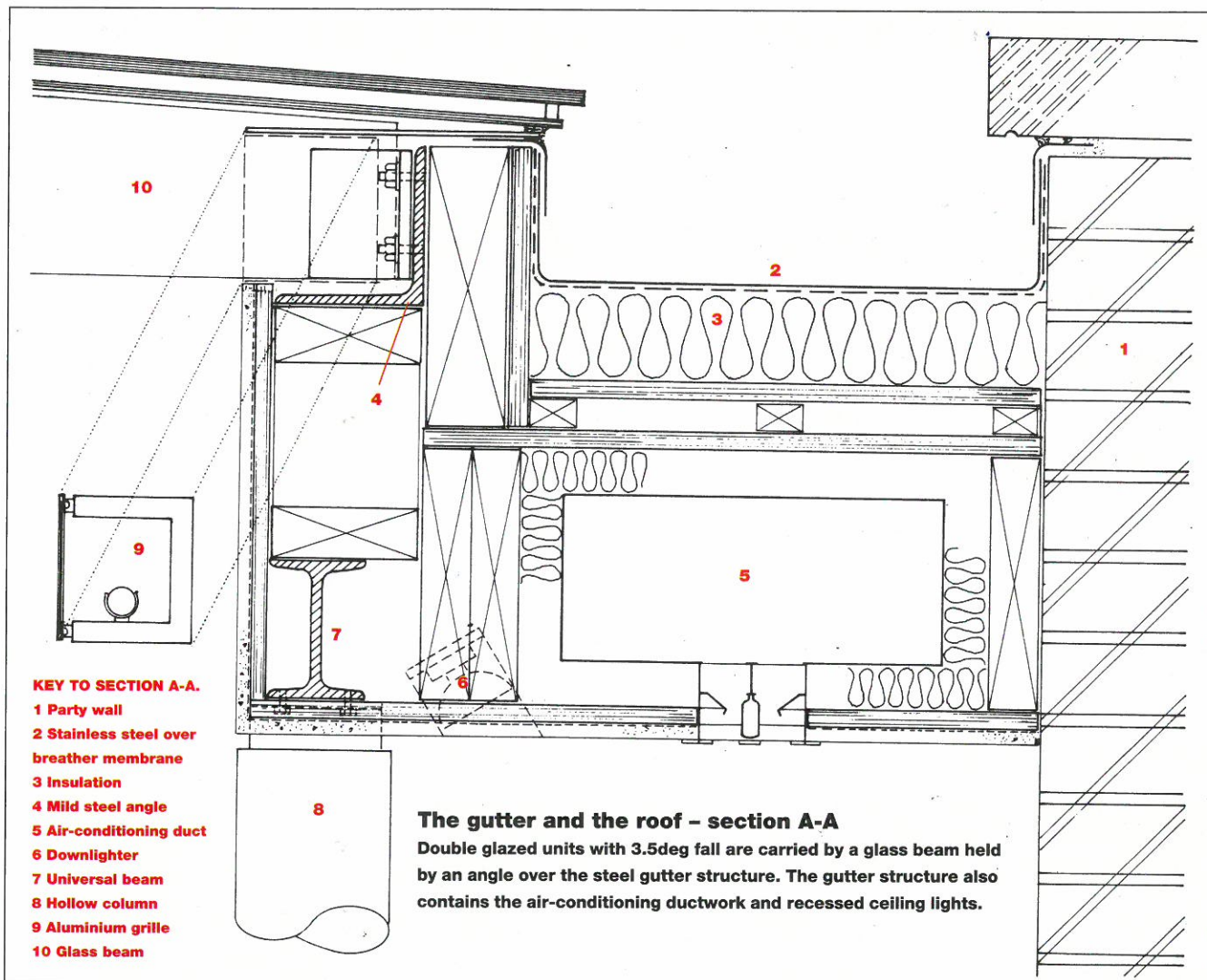


A clean simple appearance belies the complex structure of the pond.

into what remains of the courtyard. Originally, before the decision was taken to install air-conditioning, a single door would not have allowed sufficient air movement, while adding a window did not work aesthetically with a planar glazing system. The double doors are now superfluous but the detailing is of such a quality one hardly notices.

The pond is the pièce de résistance and Nasser is justifiably proud of it. Sealed internally, its simplicity belies a complex arrangement that begins with water cascading down marble steps, passing through a filter before being pumped into the pond (see box, previous page). A pond stocked with oriental fish and which you can peer into while in the warmth may strike some as gimmicky, but here it lifts the room out of the ordinary, and reinforces the architect's deliberate play on inside and outside space.

Back inside, a specially designed perforated aluminium grill system holds light-



ing and masks the radiator covers. In the main room, Nasser has designed a simple beech veneer and painted MDF unit to remove the clutter of the television set and massive hi-fi system. Marble steps take you into the garage and the mews house beyond. In contrast to the transparency of the glass, the brickwork is left exposed, acting as an austere backdrop for a large statue of Buddha - one of the few artifacts the client has been allowed to keep.

A family room, in most people's minds, is the part of the house where you are allowed to be untidy. But this is no ordinary family room - or at least one in which you would not want children or teenagers to slob out - but a room for when the kids are grown up.

CREDITS

Architect Belsize Architects

Structural engineer Price & Myers

Main contractor Matthew Vincent Building Contractors

Cost Specification

Total cost	£85,217
Costs	
Preliminaries	£7,000
Substructure	£6,898
Superstructure	£9,957
Glass work	£22,678
Internal finishes	£7,384
Metalwork (finishes)	£2,816
Joinery, including hi-fi unit	£8,058
Heating & air-conditioning	£7,168
Plumbing	£1,000
Electrical	£3,700
External work, including pond	£6,558
General builders' work	£2,000

Specifications

Opening between room and extension

Universal column supported on concrete padstone over nibs. Curved hollow section clad in brick.

Roof

Glass fin beams are three sheets of 10mm clear float glass laminated together; roof panels are 3.8x1m double-glazed sealed units, all by Pilkington (reader enquiry no 301).

Gutter

Two steel circular hollow section columns support universal beam, gutter cantilevers to form canopy.

Glass elevation

Columns are toughened Pilkington (enquiry no 301) glass fins, fixed to mild steel channel, with 100x100x10mm mild steel angle bolted to the channel and the glass fin. Glass panel is 12mm toughened glass on stainless steel channel over large channel over pond. End panels are 12mm toughened glass fixed in aluminium channels in groove. Doors are 12mm clear toughened glass with adjustable floor springs by Dorma Door Controls (enquiry no 302).

Pond

Reinforced concrete with mesh over membrane over blinding over hardcore, finished with render coated with polyurethane. Glass cover has 19mm float glass, 1.5mm inter layer and 12mm float glass laminated together.

Steps

30mm polished unfilled travertine marble by Midland Marble (enquiry no 303).