



The back of the house was removed to create a full-width extension with a terrace above



Minotti sofas divide the living and dining area, while the low, square coffee table was designed by Belsize Architects and was speci

A clever bo

LET an architect loose on your property and you expect a chic, modern result. Yet many home-owners fear the interior won't feel cosy and comfortable. So Gail and David Ingram's decision to employ an architect to turn a converted Victorian property in north London back into a family house was not made lightly.

Downsizing but still wanting enough space for three children in their twenties and four grandchildren to come and stay was the puzzle to be sorted out. Having remodelled two previous houses, the Ingrams were no strangers to major refurbishment projects, especially as David is a self-employed developer of student properties in the Midlands.

This time, however, the structural requirements of converting a maisonette and one-bedroom flat back into a 3,160sq ft house and building a new rear extension to integrate the exterior space with a totally remodelled modern interior seemed too daunting to tackle alone.

Recognising the property's potential, they snapped it up and then interviewed four architects. "We chose Belsize Architects because we liked Shahriar Nasser's architectural style and his personality," says

Downsizing to a modern home with room for family visitors was the task one couple set an architect, says **Nicole Swengley**

David. "It was more than just a case of hand-holding," adds Gail. "With any modern architect-designed house there's the danger you'll end up with something cool and austere. But we didn't want to feel we were walking into a showhome. It had to feel homely, and Shahriar contributed a strong sense of the atmosphere we wanted to create."

A year was spent designing the house. "We got planning permission for the ground-floor extension fairly easily with only very minor changes," says Nasser. He also applied for a Certificate of Lawfulness for work on the first-floor rear alteration, which the council agreed was a permitted development. Building work took a further nine months. "Kutz are very

good them demand Ingram out th "The add a stripp warm panel design there panel glass suspe prove whole days, says C



The high-spec bathroom has a walnut floor, limestone shower cubicle, bath and double basins



A sand-blasted glass panel lets light glow through from the bathroom into the bedroom



...ly made for the Ingrams



Left: white walls and storage units in white and stainless steel give a sleek look to the kitchen

Right: David and Gail Ingram wanted architect design but a home that was also comfortable



Box of tricks

builders," says Nasser. "We often work with because we're confident they can deal with our dining designs and level of detail." Even so, the Ingrams (who were living in a rented house through renovations) had to keep their nerve.

back of the house was removed in order to full-width extension and every wall was red right back and insulated for sound and heat," says Gail. The full-height, sliding glass door at the rear and side of the property were designed to retract fully into the walls. Unusually, there is no column at the corner where the sliding doors meet so, when they are fully retracted, the ceiling above this area appears to be suspended in mid-air. This structural challenge is a triumph. "In summer we can open up the back of the house and, even on gloomy days, the entire ground floor is flooded with light," says Gail.



... outdoor dining area has a black granite table

The exterior space was created by garden designer Julie Toll. The original, messy garden was dug out and paved with grey granite to create an outdoor dining space furnished with a black granite table and all-weather chairs. An olive tree and yew hedging were retained because the Ingrams wanted simple planting, while two raised side-beds are supported by Scottish paddle-stone retaining walls. "We like the contemporary feel and because it looks like dry-stone walling," says Gail.

The exterior appears to flow seamlessly into the combined living, dining and kitchen area, where the use of smoothly textured American walnut flooring, all-white walls and a parallel sweep of high- and low-level white wall units add to the continuity. Full-height, sand-blasted, glass sliding doors close off the kitchen completely or open it up to reveal a sleek run of stainless-steel units with white storage units above. It's all a far cry from the "dark, dank, smelly warren of rooms" that the Ingrams bought.

Gail, whose creative eye has long been honed as co-designer of David Charles's children's clothing line, chose a pair of long, lean, grey flannel Minotti sofas to divide the sitting area. "I wanted something modern but with a homely feel," she says. A low, pearly-grey, coffee table matches the square dining table in the centre of the room. "Square tables are much easier for conversation than long thin ones," she explains. "I couldn't find one anywhere so we had it designed by Belsize Architects and specially made."

The white, wood-lined storage units and bookshelves — also designed by Belsize Architects — are complemented by a black seat-cum-storage unit (designed to house wine and logs), which surrounds a low, contemporary fireplace. "Although we replaced the original Victorian fireplace I wanted to keep the cosiness of a real fire," says Gail. It was Belsize Architects' idea, however, to install two internal lights in the seat, which act as uplighters for the bold Julian Opie print above.

Equally modern and just as cosy is David's upstairs study, which he describes as "a modern take on a traditional gentlemen's club". The full-height storage units and integral desk, all designed to David's specifications by Belsize Architects, are olive green "because it's such a soothing colour".

The master suite, meanwhile, posed another major structural challenge. Here, a floor-to-ceiling glass window was created by removing an original chimney breast at the property's rear. A glass door now leads to a large terrace protected by an almost invisible glass balustrade. At night, sand-blasted glass panels in the grey granite floor-slabs glow with light from the living room below, while square planters filled with box, and woven, all-weather armchairs make this a peaceful oasis during the day.

ALOW, chocolate-leather bed takes centre stage in the master suite. "We couldn't find a sample in London, so we took a low-cost, day flight to Germany to bounce on it at the Interluebke showroom," says Gail. Behind the bed is a walk-in dressing room with full-height storage. Sleeping and bathing areas are divided by a sand-blasted glass panel instead of a solid wall. "It was the architect's idea to have light glowing through from each side," says Gail. A limestone shower at one side of the high-spec bathroom has the bath opposite with double basins and loo in between.

Their children and grandchildren needed accommodation for regular visits. So the top floor is given over to three guest-rooms, an en-suite and a family bathroom, although Gail adds: "We were definitely on a budget by the time we furnished the guest bedrooms." The White Company, Habitat and Ikea were raided for beds, tables, lamps, bedcovers, throws and cushions, while an old rocking chair was repainted and re-covered for the grandchildren's room. Cosy? Definitely. But this modern, architect-designed home is also chic to its core.

'With any modern architect-designed house there is the danger you'll end up with something cold and austere'

HOW TO GET THE LOOK

■ **Architects:** Belsize Architects, 48 Parkhill Road, NW3 (020 7482 4420; www.belsizearchitects.com).

■ **Builders:** Kutz, 608 Finchley Road, NW11 (020 8905 5637).

■ **Exterior space:** Julie Toll (www.julietoll.co.uk).

■ **Sliding doors and structural glass floor:** Culmax, Unit 10, Stewarts Lane Goods Depot, Silverthorne Road, SW8 (020 7498 1699).

■ **Living room:** square dining table and coffee table made by Solid Surfaces (www.solid-surfaces-northwest.co.uk). Chocolate leather dining chairs from Ligne Roset (www.ligne-rosset.co.uk). Grey flannel sofas from Minotti (www.minotti.it). Corner armchair by Todd Hass was bought at Gotham (www.gothamnottinghill.com). Standard lamp by Christian Liaigre (www.christian-liaigre.co.uk).

■ **Artworks:** Bronze sculpture by Ingrid Myerson.

■ **Black-and-white photographic prints from The Photographers' Gallery** (www.photonet.org).

■ **Kitchen:** stainless-steel units and storage designed by Belsize Architects (as before).

■ **Joinery:** Yonaka, Unit 24, Sheraton Business Centre, 20 Wadsworth Road, Perivale, Middlesex (020 8997 8881).

■ **Master suite:** Leather bed from Interluebke (www.interluebke.de) or check out Aram Store's Interluebke selection (www.aram.co.uk). Bespoke bedside tables made by Solid Surfaces (as before). Bedside lamps by Christian Liaigre (as before). Vintage chair from a junk shop.

■ **Granite on first-floor terrace and limestone in bathrooms:** Yonaka (as before).

■ **Walnut flooring:** Burke Brothers Flooring, 61 Shawbrooke Road, SE9 (020 8859 0128).

Pictures by Rebecca Duke

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