



above A rear extension makes clever use of previously dead space to house the Bulthaup kitchen. The glass roof is a neat design solution in this compact space



left The wall-mounted fire from Focus Fires makes a dramatic statement in the living room

above Thomas is a huge fan of Vitsoe and has been collecting its classic shelving since the Eighties. The chairs are vintage Dieter Rams and the modern nest of tables is also by Vitsoe

Since 2001, home for Thomas and Maxine Croft has been a mews house sandwiched between the smart terraces of Notting Hill. The surrounding mature gardens create a leafy setting, but unfortunately the roots of a large plane tree had caused the house to shift and crack. The subsidence put a halt to our plans to reconfigure the layout until the insurance claim was resolved, which meant we were stuck with a scheme that was dark and starved of light for an awfully long time,' says Thomas, who runs Thomas Croft Architects. The claim to repair the damage took years to be resolved, but was finally settled in a cash payout – a double win in that it meant that the long-anticipated renovation could get under way, and the money from the payout would be the deposit for the work. 'However, a subsidence claim is a serious black mark against a property, so we would only settle once our insurer had guaranteed to provide new subsidence insurance on the rebuild. Without this a property can be seriously devalued,' says Thomas. Having spent years conceptualising and reworking his plans, Thomas was eager to get started. 'I gave him free rein,' says Maxine, a journalist. 'It's good to know where your strengths lie and Thomas' skills lie squarely in design. All I wanted out of the brief was lots more natural light.'

Plans were submitted for a reworked layout that involved half the mass of the house being removed and rebuilt, with the other half renovated and the ground excavated to create new basement rooms. 'The plans went through fire, but in the end we decided against excavating the basement as it was going to be prohibitively expensive,' says Thomas, 'but it's useful to have the permission on record should things change in the future.'

The reworked scheme involved small extensions to the side and rear, one to house the kitchen and the other to add to the living room, making good use of redundant space. 'In fact,' says Thomas, 'we managed to create an extra thirty-five per cent of space simply by revising the previous footprint and going right up to the boundaries.' As architect and owner Thomas naturally took on the role of project manager, appointing a main contractor that his practice had used regularly. With the planning granted, the first job was to remove the existing living room walls and dig down to renew the foundations and create a barrier against any further root penetration. It was simply more effective to knock down and rebuild this section,' says Thomas, 'whereas the remaining fabric of the building was retained and remodelled.'

The footprint of the house is unusual in that it consists of two squares set diagonally and connected at the corners by the entrance, with the two living spaces framing the garden. Thomas' design replaced the walls of the living area and dining room with sliding doors, their profiles flush to the ceiling and floor, to remove boundaries between house and garden. From the entrance, with its slickly finished utility room, you can go left into the living space or straight on into the open-plan kitchen-diner, in the corner of which is a spiral staircase, a key original feature. 'We considered removing it at the start,' says Thomas, 'but in its refurbished state, with its circular light well, it's become a defining feature of the finished scheme.'

The dining room has iconic tables by Alvar Aalto and modular shelving, and opens onto the smart Bulthaup...



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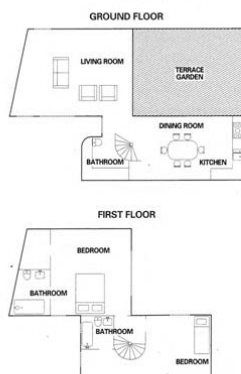
REINVENTING the Seventies

Architect Thomas Croft has added light and space to his London mews house by delving into his own career for design tricks paired with meticulously chosen modern classics Words Duncan Hayes Photography Luke White



left and far left The master bedroom has an en suite and compact office, each with a skylight and glazed panel in the floor to cast light into the living area downstairs; storage is Composita by Kartell

The layout: 130sqm N →



kitchen, located in an extension topped with structural glass. 'The kitchen is so well designed it's a pleasure to use,' says Thomas. 'Sleek panels conceal spaces for everything from clingfilm to rubber gloves, and the finish is immaculate, which is important for architects as we love details.'

Returning across the dining room you move into the living room, again with a glazed wall at right angles to the dining room window. At the rear of the room is another arresting detail to the house – a pair of opaque circular light wells that pierce the ceiling, inspired by the original light well above the stairs. Daylight penetrates through the glass panels from matching roof lights upstairs, casting a subtle diffused glow into the lounge below.

Echoing his wife's sentiment about letting people do what they do best, Thomas listened to the specialist teams that worked on the project, using their expertise to bring a high-quality finish to the details. 'This is the joy of building your own home,' he says. 'You can experiment with elements that you might not want to risk when working for a client. For example, the flooring team suggested cutting wooden grilles to top the trench heating instead of the usual metal ones, and it looks perfect with the wooden floor. So much so that I'd happily use this detail again.'

Upstairs the ceilings were raised throughout to create a more spacious set of rooms, each with its own bathroom. On one side the couple's daughter has a snug area leading off her bedroom, while the master bedroom has an en-suite shower room and compact office space, both of which are topped with skylights and have the glazed light wells set in

their floor. 'The shower tray was designed to be the same size as a bath, which gives us the choice to change it in the future, should we need to,' says Thomas. A run of fitted wardrobes lines one wall of the master bedroom combined with a bespoke chest of drawers and a blanket box that cleverly conceals a television.

The defining feature of the master bedroom is the large box window suspended over the garden, which has a pair of blinds – one for modesty that allows light to penetrate and the other a blackout blind for sleeping. It also cleverly incorporates a concealed hatch to get furniture upstairs – essential in a house with a spiral stair.

Clever solutions and elegant detailing are evident throughout the Crofts' home, but it is the building's relationship with the garden that defines the new scheme. 'A lot of the effect of the house is to do with realising the garden as part of the space,' says Thomas. 'We looked at the garden on the plans at the start and knew it would work. But it wasn't until we were living in the house that we realised just how special it is. I love witnessing the seasonal changes, even though the garden is dominated by hard, sculptural surfaces. The inside is static and beautiful, but the changing weather and light really help you understand the relationship between the rooms and the outside space.'

It's a sentiment that's echoed by Maxine. 'It's changed our lives,' she says. 'We hardly ever had visitors before, but now we love having people over, especially when it's warm enough to open up the house to the garden – it's become a real party place.' GD