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Dig deep

A modest terraced house has been enlarged by excavating a lower ground floor to make space for a kitchen

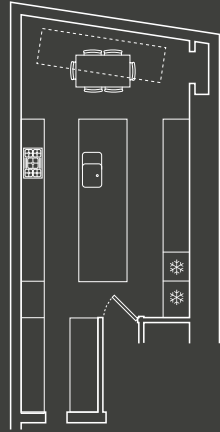
Report and styling: Sally Maton Photography: Bruce Hemming

Architect Stephen Fletcher recalls Sebastian and Tea Johnston's house before it was renovated. "It was a complete dump that was falling down," he says of the typical early Victorian London terraced property. "The footprint of the house was only two rooms wide, and there were no windows in the front elevation at all, making it dark inside. The rest of the terrace was bombed during the war so there was just this little bookend left on its own."

Sebastian and Tea asked Stephen to completely rebuild the house using traditional materials in keeping with the nearby buildings. Lowering the ceiling heights allowed them to incorporate three floors, while adding an extension to the side of the building provided space for an extra bedroom on the ground and first floors, with a roof terrace above accessed from the second-floor bathroom and landing.

A basement was excavated to house a new kitchen, a small cloakroom and a compact utility room with a wine cellar tucked behind it. Obtaining planning permission proved to be very problematic – Stephen worked on the project for two years before he even got on site. It took a year to get party wall agreements. The Party Wall Act 1996 applies if you intend to excavate within six metres of an adjoining building or work on a wall, floor or ceiling shared with another property. This is quite different from planning permission and building regulations, which have to be approved separately. It's also an expensive process.

Stephen explains, "Next door is a college where they do experiments. Apparently any vibration would have wiped out a year's research. There was so much red tape involved and we were dealing with someone who was uncooperative. Things dragged on and on but then, suddenly, that individual was replaced and the new member of staff signed the agreement within a week." Stephen intended to use a digger and conveyor belt to excavate the basement but it had to be done by hand because the walls weren't in very good structural condition. "It's very hard to predict how long a basement is going to take. At the end of the day, it was two guys and a shovel!" he adds. The workmen had to dig a metre at a time and underpin the exterior walls as they went. The basement took five months to complete. Once the walls had been lined with a special membrane to keep out damp, it was time to fit the kitchen. ▶



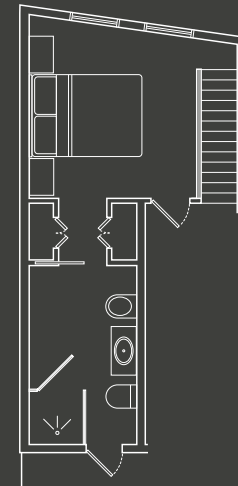
Left: A pull-out larder is a great storage solution, keeping tins and packets within easy reach without any bending to peer into the back of base units **Below:** The marble-topped central island unit is illuminated by Romeo pendant lights from Flos. This light and the daylight from the skylight are reflected by the mirrored extractor cover and the white walls **Right:** A skylight runs the width of the kitchen to let in natural daylight. The Frisbi pendant light is from Flos; for a similar table and chairs try John Lewis (0845 604 9049 or www.johnlewis.com)

“There was so much red tape involved – any vibration would have wiped out a year’s research”





Top left: The ensuite is intimate without feeling claustrophobic, due to the use of wall-hung sanitaryware, mirror and a frameless glass shower cubicle. **Far left:** The spacious shower cubicle is lined with porcelain tiles. Practical concerns have been addressed by incorporating niches for toiletries and both a fixed overhead rose and a hand-held shower for a choice of bathing options. **Left:** The stone-topped vanity unit and medicine chest were designed by Stephen Fletcher. A simple surface-mounted basin and wall-mounted brassware keep the look simple yet sophisticated. **Above:** Incorporating the loft space provided enough ceiling height to accommodate a mezzanine dressing area. **Below:** The cantilevered staircase was installed by Voytex, the building contractor for the rebuild. The floating treads keep the staircase from dominating the room.



SourceBook

DESIGN

Architect Stephen Fletcher of Stephen Fletcher Architects (020 7637 1244 or www.stephen-fletcher.co.uk)
Builder Voytex (020 8568 5172 or www.voytex.co.uk)

KITCHEN

Design Jane Stewart of Mowlem & Co (020 7610 6626 or www.mowlemandco.co.uk)
Units and worktops Mowlem & Co, as before
Combi ovens, plate warmer and dishwasher Siemens (0870 840 3300 or www.siemensappliances.co.uk)
Hob and fridges Miele (01235 233530 or www.miele.co.uk)
Undermounted sinks and taps Franke (0161 436 6280 or www.franke.co.uk)
Pendant lights Flos (020 7258 0600 or www.flos.com)

BEDROOM

Bed head and bedside ledges designed by Stephen Fletcher, as before
Joinery Voytex, as before
Curtains and bedcover Serge Byrme (07894 512266)
Oak flooring AH Peck Flooring Contractors (020 8788 1795 or www.ahpeckltd.co.uk)

BATHROOM

All bathroom fittings supplied by West One Bathrooms (020 7499 1845 or www.westonebathrooms.co.uk)
Furniture designed by Stephen Fletcher, as before
Shower cubicle custom built by Voytex, as before

COST

A similar kitchen would cost £50,000, including installation but excluding building work. The Johnstons' bedroom and bathroom cost in the region of £15,000 each

"It's very hard to predict how long a basement is going to take. At the end of the day, it was two guys and a shovel!"



Above: The citrus green bedcover and curtains by Serge Byrme were the finishing touch for the master bedroom scheme and add a splash of colour to the monochrome palette

Stephen specified the layout and called on Jane Stewart of Mowlem & Co to design and fit it. Cream units with a high-gloss finish were teamed with bespoke, oak cupboard doors that were given a dark stain to reveal the grain. Jane tracked down the unusual coloured marble used to make the worktops. A space-saving pull-out larder was placed next to two integrated fridges from Miele, which were installed side by side with left and right-opening doors for ease of access. Natural light, via a skylight

running the width of the kitchen, makes a welcome addition to the lower ground floor.

The new first-floor layout accommodates two bedrooms – one with an ensuite shower room – and the main bathroom, while the top of the house was reserved for the Johnstons' master suite.

Here, white walls and wood flooring provide a light backdrop for the couple's collection of art and dark furniture, which echoes the kitchen. The incorporation of the loft space, providing a volume that is capable of

accommodating a mezzanine dressing area accessed via a cantilevered staircase, created a bright and airy room. A further small dressing area links the bedroom and ensuite.

In contrast to the light bedroom, the ensuite bathroom has a more intimate feel, enveloped, as it is, in rich brown tiles. Crisp white sanitaryware is wall hung and surface mounted to enhance the feeling of space, and a minimal shower cubicle was custom built by builder Voytex for a wetroom look without the spray. Stephen

designed cabinets to hide toiletries, keeping the room clutter free.

The project was finally completed in June this year when a citrus green made-to-order bedspread and curtains from Serge Byrme were delivered for the master bedroom. "As an architect, I am particularly pleased with how the house has opened up and the addition of the lower ground-floor kitchen," reflects Stephen. "We really used every square inch of the space and the clients are very pleased too." KBB