

# Character evolution

Modernising a 1920s mock-Tudor home, while taking care to minimise the impact of any extension on the surrounding conservation area, was the challenge the Rileys set their architect

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## IN BRIEF

**NAMES** Bruce and Catherine Riley, and their two children  
**LOCATION** Richmond, Surrey  
**TYPE OF PROPERTY** Detached 1920s home  
**BEDROOMS** 5 **BATHROOMS** 3, plus cloakroom  
**PROJECT STARTED** October 2015  
**PROJECT FINISHED** June 2016  
**SIZE** 250sqm (originally 200sqm)  
**PROJECT COST** circa £500,000  
**CURRENT ESTIMATED VALUE** circa £2.5m

The fireplace was designed using non-combustible fire panels with slide and folding doors above. The concrete floating shelf was cast off site and had to be wheeled in through the entire house, over the parquet floor

The back garden planting will mature to create a low-level boundary, adding bright colour to the carefully balanced scheme



Working with an architect who had experience of designing modern homes was the key to success for our project,' says Catherine Riley who, with her husband Bruce, commissioned R2 Studio Architects to modernise their 1920s home in Richmond.

'The project took nine months to complete and, with hindsight, it went fairly smoothly, thanks in no small part to R2 Studio's detailed preparation and network of contractors and suppliers, and to lead architect Frederik Rissom's impressive attention to detail,' she says.

It was one of Bruce's work colleagues who had recommended the architect to the couple, having used Rissom to design his own new home in nearby Petersham. Bruce and Catherine had liked what they saw of that contemporary building very much and, having met Rissom, they felt confident he was the right person to create the home that they themselves wanted.

Catherine recalls: 'We were living in Fulham, in a lovely, small Victorian terraced house, but I was expecting our second child and we needed a house with a garden, and more lateral space, somewhere that would involve less running up and down stairs. We also wanted an opportunity to create a super-modern home, something very contemporary, with significant visual impact.'

An early plan to move out of London was moderated in favour of relocating a few miles up river, to the picturesque town of Richmond. 'Because of the baby, we needed to move quickly but we couldn't find anything that suited our plans, so we rented in Richmond for a year while we continued our search.'

Bruce and Catherine had their eyes set on a particular street of houses situated within one of the town's conservation areas, close to a good local school, and when, in due course, one of the properties – a classic 1920s detached house with a large garden – came on to the market, they snapped it up. 'We knew there would be planning restrictions to deal with, but it's such a gorgeous road, we would never have wanted to change the front facade in any way, and anything we did at the back >>



Wall-washers around the perimeter of the family room, with pendants and floor lamps in the centre, allow the family to adjust the lighting according to mood >>

Imported from Austria, the largest pane of glass was just 20mm shorter than the truck that delivered it



would be sympathetic. It was the inside space that we wanted to adapt,' Catherine explains.

The part-brick, part-mock-Tudor building had a double-storey bay and projecting window features on the rear facade, as well as a small, octagonal conservatory at the back and a double-storey extension that had been built on to one side by previous owners.

'The area is part of what was quite a radical masterplan for the time,' says Rissom, 'to create garden suburbs with a country feel. Each house had to have a strip of green between the front garden and the street, and they were all free-standing buildings with deliberately substantial gaps between them.'

'Over the years, the pressure to extend has seen many of these gaps and strips of green disappear, which is why this part of Richmond was given conservation status in 2004, to preserve what is left of the original quality.'

While they were happy with Rissom's plan to do a 'little bit of dentistry work' on the streetside facade, to make it look more purposeful but still very traditional, The Rileys were clear about what they wanted to do with the interior: 'We wanted a large family room at the back of the house, a loft room, and we wanted to improve the connections between the rooms. We liked the idea of a glass wrap-around structure but intended to keep other existing elements, such as the staircase,' Catherine recalls.

'At our first meeting, we showed Frederik some pictures of super-modern family rooms filled with natural light, and we went from there, with weekly pre-planning meetings that resulted in detailed drawings, to ensure our proposal would be accepted by the planners at the first time of asking, which it was.'

'The planning is what made this project so very interesting,' recalls Rissom of the Rileys' brief. 'Today, the finished building remains a traditional house at the front but looks completely different – very modern – at the back. To achieve that modern aspect, which would enable us to

design the largest possible open space inside, we had to be very inventive, and minimise the impact of the new build on the surrounding environment.'

The existing layout of both floors had none of the through-the-house sight lines, enfilade spaces or ways of moving easily between rooms that Bruce and Catherine wanted, while 'the steel-framed, faux-Georgian windows were falling apart', remembers Rissom. 'They also made the house look and feel very closed, so we agreed that it was important to get clear glass into both facades, and to open up the internal spaces by taking down walls and moving some features, as well as build the glazed extension.'

Before any of this could be done, however, it was necessary to remove previous modifications and to tidy up the exterior of the upper elevation; the rear double-storey bay was removed and new windows were put into the now flat first-floor rear wall. A new, hipped roof, taking >>

**'We had to be very inventive to design the largest space inside with minimal impact outside'**

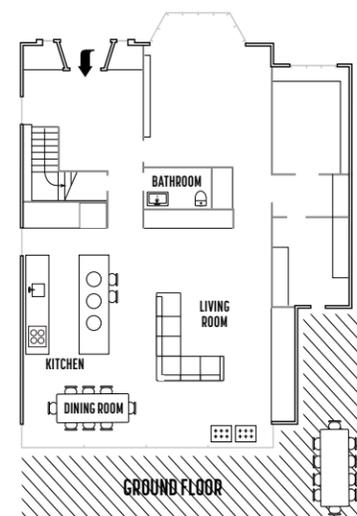


The extension's green roof has the benefit of providing an attractive view from inside the first-floor bedrooms and helping reduce the ambient temperature of the room below by up to three degrees



The units are designed to almost reach the ceiling, to avoid any sense of wasted space and draw attention to the height of the extension. The Rileys chose a grey colour palette to contrast with the vibrant garden planting. The splashback and work surface are made of a robust quartz composite

**FLOOR PLANS**



FIRST FLOOR

SECOND FLOOR

in the existing side extension, was added, and within this, Rissom was able to construct a loft. With mansards precluded by the conservation restrictions, he designed a large, triangular dormer window, with bespoke timber frames to match the new windows on the floor below and on the street side. The finished effect is at once modern and traditional, sitting extraordinarily comfortably within the street's wider roofscape.

'A mansard would perhaps have given us a bit more height inside, but the dormer is beautifully designed and provides a more elegant rear facade,' says Catherine of the new loft. Just as eye-catching are the new family room and adjoining garden, with their painstakingly composed balance of spaces and proportions enhanced by planting and minimalist furnishings, are equally eye-catching.

The internal space, which has as its rear boundaries the outside edges of the earlier extensions, is entirely open-plan, with all the sight lines and flow of movement the family wanted. Catherine admits this is, ironically, largely due to the fact that, contrary to the original intent, Rissom suggested they flip the staircase around. He also advised they take out the downstairs loo and a small front room and install a new cloakroom between the formal sitting room at the front and the family room at the back.

'Now, you can stand on the first-floor landing and look up to the roof and down to the ground floor. From the front door, you can see right through the house and you can walk all the way around the new cloakroom, without coming up against any dead ends. And during the day, natural light floods the whole house.'

'I wasn't sure about the vastness of the space,' Catherine admits. 'I was worried it felt too open. We discussed the idea of putting in a dividing wall between the kitchen and the seating area but agreed to move in first, to see how it went. Now, I love it and wouldn't have it any other way.'

Rissom is particularly pleased with the wrap-around glazed wall, which he sourced from Josko in Austria. 'We wanted to find the most cost-effective way of building this kind of glass system; at four metres by three metres, the largest piece of glass is just twenty millimetres shorter than the length of the truck that brought it over; seeing it arrive was one of a couple of nail-biting moments during the build. The asymmetric dynamic created by the different-sized panels is a vital part of the design – it guides the eye to look at certain things, often subconsciously, and is a key component in many of our designs,' he says.

'It was an extraordinarily exciting time, but there were so many decisions to make in a short period of time, while also managing two very small children. We spent some six months or so going over the details of the design with Frederik before we'd even reached the planning stage,' says Catherine. 'Later, during the winter, as we were sitting in the middle of the building site with our hard hats on, it was wonderful to see our designs taking shape.'

'We're delighted with the result. It's exceeded our expectations and given us the modern family home we wanted. We moved four times in two years but now we don't plan to move again for quite some time.' GD



Flipping the staircase around helped achieve an entirely open-plan ground floor

To turn the entire ground floor into an open-plan space flooded with natural light, the staircase has been turned around, a downstairs loo and small anteroom taken out and new windows and doors put in

**SUPPLIERS**

<p><b>PROJECT TEAM</b>  <b>Architect and landscape design</b>                  Frederik Rissom, R2 Studio Architects                  (020 8766 6116; r2studio.co.uk)  <b>Structural engineer</b> Barnard Associates                  (020 8874 9005; ba-engineers.com)  <b>Contractor</b> Radek Wieczorek                  (07885 814 538; wdesignandbuild.co.uk)  <b>Landscape contractor</b> Chauncey Gardens                  (07966 375 496; chaunceygardens.co.uk)</p> <p><b>STRUCTURE</b>  <b>Roofing</b> Sarnafil (gbr.sarnafil.sika.com);                  Marley Eternit (marleyeternit.co.uk)  <b>Ground-floor glazing</b> Josko (josko.uk);                  Zipco Construction (020 3735 6685)  <b>Windows</b> Stanbrook &amp; Nicholson (01932 503                  280; stanbrookandnicholson.co.uk)</p>	<p><b>Rooflights</b> Glazing Vision                  (01379 658 300; glazingvision.co.uk)  <b>Pressed flashings</b> Paneltech (01424 870 111;                  paneltech-systems.co.uk)  <b>FIXTURES &amp; FITTINGS</b>  <b>Kitchen</b> Hi-Spec Design                  (020 7371 7070; hi-specdesign.com)  <b>Fitted shelving</b> Proline (prolineinteriors.co.uk)  <b>Fireplace</b> Woodsmith                  (woodsmith-workshop.com)  <b>Ironmongery</b> Allgood                  (020 7387 9951; allgood.co.uk)  <b>Concrete bench</b> Mortise Concrete                  (020 7859 4730; mortiseconcrete.co.uk)  <b>Blinds</b> iLE Solutions (0800 668 1270;                  ilesolutions.com)  <b>Parquet floor</b> Hitt Oak (020 8896 1900;                  hittook.co.uk)</p>
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Strict conservation rules influenced the design of the loft window, which is glazed with clear glass rather than traditional leaded panes



The door ways throughout the house have all been redesigned to almost reach the line of the ceiling, helping to emphasise the height of the rooms and creating a consistent panel effect in the run of walls

‘Seeing the large panes of glass arrive was one of a few nail-biting moments during the build’

To add a note of soft colour and texture to the ground floor, wood parquet was used inside the house, rather than continuing the large-format stone slabs that line the terrace