

## AT A GLANCE

**Names** Jake and Katherine Edgley  
**Location** South-east London  
**Property** Concrete and timber-frame new-build  
**Bedrooms** 6 **Bathrooms** 4  
**Project started** January 2011  
**Project finished** November 2013  
**Size of house** 408sqm  
**Build cost** 5975,000

# Holding court

*With a hundred-year-old pear tree at its heart, the Edgleys' courtyard home feels cosy and domestic, despite its large scale and concrete walls.*

*Words* Emily Innes *Photography* Jack Holliman

This picture-glazing makes the tree visible from the majority of rooms, giving it a strong presence in the home.



This picture shows the living area in white, with a black leather sofa and a wooden coffee table. The large windows look out onto the courtyard.

London's suburbs were once studded with market gardens – fertile plots where fruit and vegetables were grown to feed the populace. And while many of these pieces of land have long since been buried beneath bricks and mortar, there are still a few forgotten survivors to be found.

This was the nature of the plot that was purchased by Jake and Katherine Edgley in 2010. A former market garden in south-east London, the land sat behind a row of Victorian terraces and had been left untouched for at least 30 years while nature took its course, covering the ground in a tangle of self-seeded sycamore trees and ivy. Now, however, it has been transformed; the couple has built a contemporary home

that's completely at odds with the former wildness, yet pays homage to the plot's pastoral history.

The property has a courtyard layout, with an undeniable reminder of its history at the heart: a gnarled, century-old pear tree, which still bears fruit. 'We didn't even know the tree was here when we bought the plot at auction,' says Jake, an architect who designed the house for his family (Katherine plus children Sadie, six, Leila, four, and baby Finn). 'When I came to visit the site, it was so overgrown that I could only get about a couple of metres in.'

Inconveniently, the pear tree was a third of the way along the plot, but there was never any question of removing it. Instead, it has been turned into a virtue – it's the fulcrum



left In the kitchen-diner, an island offers an informal space for eating and socialising. A red sliding door conceals ovens and storage

right Sadie and Leila like to read in the snug, which is between the formal seating area and the dining space



*'There's a lot of white in modern architecture – I try to create more atmosphere and richness'*



This picture looks like the eyes down the glazed link that connects the two wings

around which the building unfolds. It even gave the place its name: Pear Tree House. 'As an architect, it's actually great to have constraints like that,' says Jake. 'It's often how you create something interesting.' The property has two wings that face each other, with the courtyard in the centre and a single-storey glazed link uniting the design. 'It feels very light and glassy, but also private, because the glazing surrounds the courtyard,' Jake explains. One wing houses a seating area that leads down to a kitchen-diner, with a glazed sliding door to the garden. Upstairs are two guest bedrooms and a study area. The other wing features the main entrance, a playroom and laundry, with a second staircase leading to four more bedrooms.

The couple had to chop down at least 50 trees to clear the site, which took a year of negotiation with concerned neighbours. But it was trees that provided the inspiration for the house's design and materials, rather than the surrounding red-brick Victorian terraces. The ground floor is constructed from board-formed concrete that is imprinted with the woodgrain of the larch boards used as moulds, while the top floor has a timber frame clad externally in dark-stained wood. 'Even though I love the concrete, the neighbours see only the timber,' says a pragmatic Jake. A thin, vertical trim in gold-anodised aluminium glimmers against the dark cladding. 'We've →

PROJECT PLAN ↘ N



**this picture** A built-in headboard in the master bedroom echoes the timber on the exterior and is another nod to the house's setting



**this picture** Floor-to-ceiling glazing gives the feeling of sleeping in the treetops

tried to minimise horizontal lines everywhere, with the simple idea that the design would blend in with the trees,' adds Jake.

'The walls were something of an experiment. I wanted to explore concrete as a building material, and as an architect it's not the kind of thing you do for the first time when you're working for someone else,' explains Jake. 'It's not an off-the-shelf technique.' The structure consists of two separate leaves of concrete, with a layer of insulation sandwiched inside. This involved building up shuttering boards on either side and precisely holding the insulation in place while the concrete was poured in. 'The workmen were so skilful,' says Jake of his concrete contractors, who were more used to major civil engineering projects. Instead of steel ties holding everything together, basalt-fibre versions were specified, which are much stronger and minimise heat transfer across the wall.

'The layout is a great example of how to make a large house feel domestic in scale. 'Some simple shifts of sightlines mean there are glimpses of things, but you never see everything,' says Jake. Interior materials also help to soften the look of the concrete, with oak veneer used in wall cladding, window trims and for all the storage, including the kitchen. 'There's a lot of whiteness in modern architecture and I always try to find ways of bringing more atmosphere and richness to projects,' says Jake. 'When you've got a cold, concrete building, oak is a really nice contrast.' Soft furnishings, such as rugs and brightly coloured felt curtains in the bedrooms, absorb sound and make the place feel homely. 'It's quite architectural downstairs, but more breezy and simple

**below** Frosting on the windows is high enough to ensure privacy in the family bathroom, while still allowing in light and views



**this picture** Hard materials are softened with bold rugs and felt curtains – each room has a different colour

upstairs,' adds Jake. The custom-painted Ikea wardrobes and soft linoleum floor are economical as well as colourful.

Aside from his ingenious concrete cavity walls, Jake has employed other clever ideas. The upstairs 'windows' are in fact fixed panes of glass, with adjacent, separate openings for ventilation. Downstairs, low built-in storage running along the walls conceals pipework and cables at floor level. The couple has also thriftyly utilised the larch boards that made the formwork, repurposing them as outdoor fencing. An air source heat pump warms the home, while hot water comes from thermodynamic panels on the roof.

The experimental nature of this scheme meant that the couple didn't take on a main contractor – a regular builder couldn't have costed a job that had so many unknowns. Instead, they employed an experienced friend to help project manage, and did much of the buying themselves. The big thing that Jake says he's learned is 'exactly what builders do' – not so much the construction itself, but the sourcing and timely scheduling of goods and labour. The unorthodox development also accounts for the two-plus years the house took to complete, and Jake is thankful that it finally feels 'like a home, and not a project'.

Katherine and Jake have large families and, unsurprisingly, Pear Tree House has become a place where everyone gathers for big occasions. But it's also a peaceful, private family home – with the pear tree never far from view. 'It's quite cool when we wake up,' says Jake. 'The kids come into the bedroom and we all watch the squirrels running around in the tree.' **GD**



above Vertical lines created by the timber and aluminium cladding are intended to help the design blend in with surrounding trees

## Suppliers

**PROJECT TEAM** Architect Edgley Design

(020 7033 9522; edgleydesign.co.uk)

**Contractor (external works)** Silverwood

(07545 876 079; silverwoodcm.com)

**Contractor (internal works, including**

**joinery)** New House Construction

(020 78 19 9994) **Structural engineer**

Hardman Structural Engineers (020 7729

7900; hardmanengineers.com)

**Engineering consultant** Mendick Waring

(020 8446 9696; mendickwaring.co.uk)

**Building control approved inspector** BBS

Building Control (01892 891 282;

bbsgroup.co.uk) **Electrics** Highwood

Electrical (020 8249 7735;

beckenhamelectrician.co.uk)

**Plumbing** NSL Plumbing & Heating

Services (07973 675 988) **STRUCTURE**

**Sliding doors** Finesse Aluminium (01934

429 922; finessealuminium.co.uk)

**Glazing** Complete Glass & Glazing (020

7226 4762) **Concrete walls** Toureen

Mangan (020 8424 7999; toureen

mangan.co.uk) **Concrete floors** Steyson

Granolithic Contractors (020 8553 2636;

steysonconcretefloors.co.uk) **Glulam**

Inwood (01825 872 550; in-wood.co.uk)

**Green roofs** BBS Green Roofing (020

7622 6225; green-roofing.co.uk)

**Gold-anodised aluminium on exterior**

Neville Precision Engineering (01773

619 237; nevilles.co.uk) **Aluminium**

**fascias/copings** Bailey (0800 849

8558; bailey-uk.com) **Oak-veneered**

**plywood** Peter Benson Plywood

(01254 775 033; pbplywood.co.uk)

**FIXTURES & FITTINGS** **Lino flooring**

Westminster Carpets & Flooring (0800

216 094; westminstercarpetsandflooring

.co.uk) **Brass handrail** BA Systems

(01603 722 330; basystems.co.uk)

**Door handles** Trapex (01992 462 150;

trapex.com) **Bathroom basins** Catalano

(catalano.co.uk) **Sanitaryware**

Bathstore (0330 024 0845; bathstore.

com) **Vanity counter** Stonemasters

(020 8566 8222; stonemasters.co.uk)

**Bathroom tiles** Royal Mosa (020 7490

0484; mosa.nl) **Domus** (020 8481 9500;

domustiles.co.uk) **Shower tiles** The

Natural Slate Company (01262 606 070;

theslatecompany.co.uk)

**FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES** **Furniture**

Habitat (0344 499 4586; habitat.co.uk);

Modern Shows (modernshows.com)

**Upholstery** Angel Upholstery (020 8693

4869; angelupholstery.co.uk) **Upholstery**

**fabric** Bute Fabrics (01700 503 734;

butefabrics.co.uk); Kvadrat (kvadrat.dk)



## IN FOCUS

Inspired by the Edgley's timber-clad home? To achieve a similar finish, use a protective zinc stain on each cladding. Try fibreglass larch-impregnated tongue-and-groove cladding from £21.54 per sqm. Siva Timber (01599 223 300; sivatimber.co.uk)

## STYLE FINDER

Natural materials will mimic the Edgley's cosy interiors

Compiled by *Abi Gregg*



**Warm textile** Indus rug in wool (01140x200cm), £215, Line Designs of Heal's (020 7896 7451; heels.com)



**Clean lines** Dublin six-seater dining table in walnut-stained oak and glass (0172xW180xD80cm), £375, Habitat (0344 499 4586; habitat.co.uk)



**Chic seat** Firenze three-seater sofa in walnut and leather in black (0167xW218xD87cm), £1,699, Dwell (0845 675 9090; dwell.co.uk)



**Flexible design** IGLight in PVC in white (Diameter 30cm), £269, Holger Starm of Designer-Lights.com (0131 557 9120; designer-lights.com)



**Industrial look** Cement in steel, £138 per sqm, Topocer (07459 477 782; topocer.com)