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Homebuilding & Renovating

*Britain's
Best-Selling
Self-build
Magazine*

BRITAIN'S 20 BEST NEW HOMES

Inside: What You Can Learn
from the Best Self-builds
and Renovations of 2015

**A GUIDE TO
ELECTRICS**

**BUILD COST
SURVEY**

**RENEWABLES
SPECIAL**



January 2016 | £4.35

The Tree House

A Remarkable New Family Home in the City

PROJECT NOTES

Project:
Contemporary
self-build

Location:
Dulwich, London

Build time: Jan
2012 - Apr 2014

Size: 407m²

Plot cost:
Undisclosed

Build cost:
£2,000/m²

Value: Unknown

BEST
HOMES
of 2015

HOMES CONTEMPORARY SELF-BUILD


A Lesson in 'Wow'

Rising up from a former derelict, rubbish-laden site in London comes an impressive new home which brings together mid-century modern design and raw materials, all built around a century-old pear tree

Words: Daisy Jeffery Photography: Jack Hobhouse c/o Edgley Architects

The Daily Telegraph
Homebuilding
& Renovating

AWARDS

2015 

Overall Winner
& Best Contemporary
Home

HONES CONTEMPORARY SELF-BUILD

Exterior

This contemporary home is built in two halves, joined by a bridge (below right) – this glazed walkway is on the same level as the ground floor but is supported beneath by steelwork, designed to accommodate the pear tree roots. The entrance to the house is tucked beneath a cantilevered element supported on glulam beams. Concrete walls, cast in situ within timber formwork, dominate the ground level, while timber cladding (pine, stained in Sikkers) above allows the house to nestle among the surrounding trees. Slim gold trims help break up the mass of the building and frame the large glazed panels.



The Shug

Ideal for keeping an eye on the kids from the formal living space, the shug acts as a cosy retreat. With built-in seating it's perfect as a reading spot or for watching TV (which is hidden behind the joinery when not in use).



THE QUICK READ

➤ Architect Jake Edgley has built a stunning contemporary home for his family — becoming the Overall Winner of the Daily Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards 2015

➤ Despite a problematic plot and receiving 70 objections, the Edgleys won planning permission at appeal

➤ In order to preserve the 100-year-old pear tree on site, the home has been designed around the tree. This led to the creation of an internal courtyard, which provides the house with both privacy and light

The Overall Winner of this year's Daily Telegraph Homebuilding & Renovating Awards is living proof that modern design can also make for a warm, comfortable and practical family home — indeed, it rather leaves you wondering why everyone else doesn't do it quite like this.

While this remarkable self-build in south-east London, the home of architect Jake Edgley of Edgley Design and his family, now oozes effortless style, the starting point for the project was not without its challenges. Indeed, the Edgleys faced a six-year long journey battling the plot itself, risking the unknown in the process.

Jake takes up the story: "We looked at about 400 sites before we found this plot which was up for sale by public auction, and although we came second in the bidding we fortunately ended up with the plot as it transpired the winning bidder didn't have any money. As the plot had no access or planning permission we got a good deal — you couldn't even get on to the plot as the neighbours had put railings up and the site hadn't been entered for 50 years."

A Problematic Plot

The plot in question had originally been a Victorian fruit orchard, but had since become a derelict backland site surrounded by houses and filled with trees growing from piles of rubbish. The neighbours were nervous about the trees on site being cut down, so the council

HOMES CONTEMPORARY SELF-BUILD



Kitchen

Stepping down from the snug, the kitchen is a lesson in pared-down style, with warm oak joinery and brass trim sitting alongside polished concrete flooring and shuttered concrete walls. High ceilings here also provide visual impact.

had agreed to place a blanket Tree Preservation Order on the site until an agreement could be reached on which trees needed to be removed — a process which took a year. A year of planning negotiations then followed, with the scheme approved on appeal following resistance to new housing in the area. Once planning was approved it then took a further four months just to clear all of the rubbish from the site.

"We had a lot of objections — 70 to be exact! — as people found it hard to accept the loss of trees, but of course they couldn't have known that beneath the branches the site was littered with piles of rubbish," explains Jake. "Once we achieved planning permission through the neighbours were very good."

"It's important to know that the process not easy though," he continues. "The bank said they'd fund the project and we started clearing the site using our savings, but then the bank turned round and said they couldn't see the point of what we were doing and wouldn't lend us the money. We had to sell our house as fast as possible and move into rental to fund the project."

The Bold Build

For a hugely ambitious site, many people would have rightly been put off seeing the project through, but for Jake and his wife — who had self-built their previous house — it was an exciting adventure. Thanks to Jake's architectural skills, there was also the confidence they could pull such a scheme off.

"When I first stepped on site I was attracted by the wilderness appearance and could envisage a house snaking around the existing 100-year-old pear tree on site, creating an internal courtyard design



Top: Dining Space

Open plan to the kitchen and snug, the dining space provides uninterrupted views of the garden and terrace thanks to full-height glazed sliding doors from Fineline Aluminium. The gold trim on the joinery here is a subtle nod to the gold running down the exterior, and the timber formwork used to create the concrete walls was recycled for the garden fencing

which allows the house to look inward and offer privacy," says Jake. "As the pear tree's root protection area spans the full width of the site, however, the house ended up in two halves and the only way of connecting the two was to build a bridge structure which doesn't touch the ground but instead sits on steelwork." Fortunately, the bridge allowed for an interesting flow between spaces, with the pillars between the glazed panels tilting slightly to guide the eye through the house. "It offers privacy and separation depending on where you are in the house, but as you move around you catch glimpses of rooms and the views beyond which is exciting," says Jake.

The ground floor features concrete walls which provide the structure with a solid base; the first floor is constructed in timber frame. The concrete provides the building with a lot of thermal mass. The solar-coated glazing on the southern elevations also prevents overheating in the summer months. The upper storey, supported by the concrete walls below and also glulam beams, is clad in dark-stained pine, helping the house to blend in to its surroundings. Meanwhile, vertical slim gold trims go some way to breaking up the mass of the building.

While concrete plays a key role in the house, the experience was new to Jake. "I'd never done any concrete work before, but I got the idea from the National Theatre (one of my favourite buildings) and wanted to take that style of materiality and refine it into a scale suitable for a house. Concrete is a joinery craft and the contractors made a lot of samples of timber formwork especially to achieve the different textures and wood grains. The concrete was then poured into these and, once we'd finished the timber formwork was used to construct the courtyard fence. Everything left over in this project was reused — even the chandeliers in the double-height stairwells were made from timber offcuts."



"The most successful designs come down to contrast, proportion and composition," explains Jake. "We chose contrasting materials by using the warm tones of the sharp oak joinery which offsets the roughness of the concrete on the ground floor interiors. It's important when using these raw materials not to make everything else white, but instead create atmosphere through materials. We also tried to eliminate the use of any downlights but instead light the walls around the edges so that the lighting in the spaces is not too oppressive. The advent of quality LED strips transformed everything too and allowed us to glue these strips to aluminium which sits in the ceiling of the bridge and provide a brilliant lighting solution."

"We spent a lot of time looking at '60s and '70s architecture and their use of materials and mid-century modern design — the furniture being more crafty than flat-pack," continues Jake. "Upstairs though we decided to keep everything simple, not architectural, with different coloured walls and a very easy-going feel. We then approached the glazing by only putting it in places that provided a view, and instead of buying windows we bought pieces of glass and glued these into the timber frame. It was a much more cost-effective method."

"The use of low-toxicity products was also a key part of the brief. For my wife it was quite a personal thing to use these products — it's something she's very passionate about," says Jake. "It's part of what sustainable building is all about and I was amazed how many products we could find and how much nicer they were to use."

With a friend working as site manager and teams of people on board to handle the different tasks one section at a time, everyone worked hard to get the project done. While not having the bank or a main contractor on board was financially tough, Jake believes this only allowed them to create a much better building. And what a building it is. "I'm very happy that it is now my house and not a project!" laughs Jake. "It takes a long time before it changes and you can relax in it." While Jake remains very humble about what is without question a significant achievement, one can't help but feel incredibly inspired, if not slightly jealous. 🏠



Above: Master Suite

A secluded oasis situated above the first 'half' of the house — and the opposite end to the kids' bedrooms — the master suite enjoys full-height views of the courtyard and pear tree as well as a long dressing area and en suite bathroom. Lino flooring here was just one of the many low-toxicity products used throughout the house.



HOMES CONTEMPORARY SELF-BUILD

The Project



Jason Orme
Judge and
Homebuilding &
Renovating Editor

THE JUDGE'S VIEW

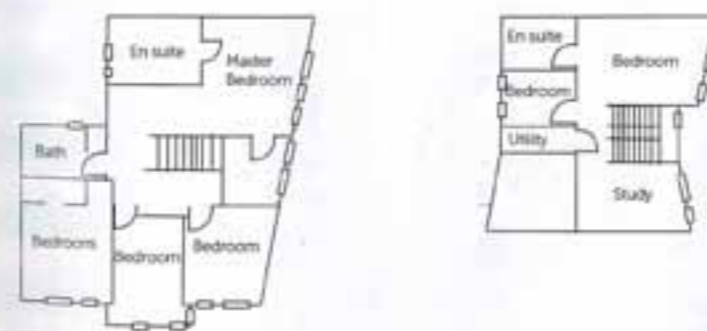
From the moment we entered Jake's home we knew we had found something truly special. Firstly, the vision and ambition to take on such a difficult site, take on the planning battle others had given up on and, of course, prove the power of high-quality design.

Secondly, the design itself, taking into account its difficult immediate surroundings, and managing to avoid the problems of overlooking and jarring that almost any other design would have suffered from — the new house truly is a positive addition to its neighbourhood.

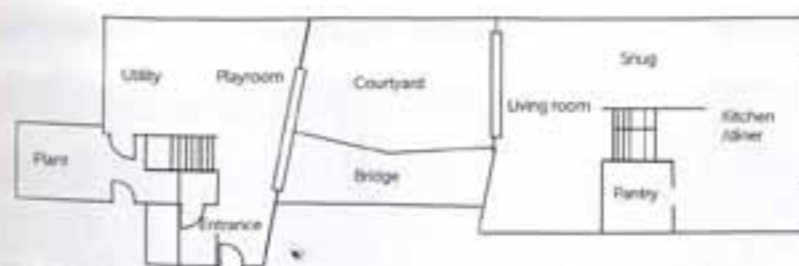
Best of all, the execution. What stuck us first of all was, for a tricky urban site, how large the house was — one of the most spacious and serene inner-city homes we have ever come across. The glazed link, the courtyard around the tree — such clever solutions to problems others would have considered insurmountable.

My favourite element was the blend of materials. This is the last word in modern house design: strong, bold shapes and tactile, warm floors, details and walls, with concrete, glass and timber providing the palette. To add to the distinctly mid-century feel, the joinery is critical, with built-in furniture a major feature.

First Floor



Ground Floor



SUPPLIERS

- Architect** Edgley Design
edgleydesign.co.uk; 020 7033 9522
- Engineers** Hardman Structural Engineers ..
.....020 7729 7900
- M+E consultants** Mendick Waring
.....020 8446 9696
- Planning consultant** Greer Pritchard
.....greerpritchard.com
- Building Control Inspector** BBS Approved
Inspectors01892 891282
- Planting design** Helen Robson of
Gardenia Gardens020 8291 4971
- External contractors** Silverwood
.....silverwoodcm.com
- Internal contractors** New House Con-
struction020 7819 9994
- Concrete** Toureen Mangan
.....020 8424 7999
- Concrete floors** Steyson Granolithic
Contractors020 8553 2636
- Electricians** Highwood Electrical
.....020 8249 7735
- Plumbing** NSL Plumbing and Heating
Services07973 675988
- Green roofs** BBS Green Roofing
.....020 7622 6225
- Lino** Westminster Carpets020 8613 1700
- Upholstery** Angel Upholstery
.....020 8693 4869
- Glulam beams** Inwood01825 872550
- Sliding doors** Fineline Aluminium
.....01934 429922
- Glazing** Complete Glass020 7226 4762
- Aluminium fascias/copings** Baileys
.....0800 849 8558
- Oak-veneered ply** Peter Benson Plywood
.....01254 775033
- Gold-anodised aluminium** Neville
Precision Engineering01773 819237
- Brass handrail** BA Systems01603 722330