

# The end of the terrace?

Unlike its neighbours, there's nothing traditional about the Dudzickis' south London home. For one thing, the walls arrived on the back of a lorry from Germany. **Ian Tucker** discovers a modern masterpiece. Photographs **Jason Oddy**

**M**y experience and what I'd liked was the older, Victorian-type home, high ceilings, stripped floorboards, sash windows – places that creaked a lot,' says Eva, wife of architect Richard Dudzicki. When her husband first mooted the idea of building a home of their own, a modern white-and-glass box wasn't the idea top of her list.

But now, sitting on her roof terrace watching the sun set over the chimney pots of East Dulwich, she confesses she's convinced. 'Maybe I thought it was going to be a bit soulless, lack atmosphere or not have much spirit. But now I'm a bit of a convert, I don't think I'd go back to traditional now.'

It was back in 2002 when Dudzicki, 40, first obtained planning permission for his compact family home. He already owned the land – it was adjacent to the office of his architectural practice, where the couple were

also living. The sight had had a blighted past: it had been a mini-cab office, a stockcar mechanic's garage and was now disused – a dumping ground for old mattresses. So the neighbours and the planning department were won over with his card model and computer-generated images. 'It might be modern but the character, volume and scale is very much of the streetscape,' claims Dudzicki. 'And we talked about how it worked as a punctuation mark, a full stop to the street – classic architect-speak.'

A full stop to the whole project was almost provided by a neighbour disputing some boundary issues which took nearly a year and a lot of legal fees to resolve. While the project was stalling, *Grand Designs* lost interest in filming the build and the couple began to think: 'If this is the start, what other things are going to pop up?'

Fortunately, they ploughed on. And now, exploring the house, it's easy to understand why they are so pleased with their decision. The building's footprint is only 6.5m x 7m, but they've packed a lot in. The ground floor has a bespoke kitchen bordering a dining area and 'family room' with glass sliding doors opening out on to a front garden landscaped in limestone, complete with 15-year-old olive tree – imported from Tuscany. Up some stairs you find the main bedroom, a children's bedroom and, on the top floor, ▶

A place in the sun: the new house (right) acts as 'a full stop' to the street; and, left, the bright terrace with views over the chimney pots of south London





◀ a lounge which opens out on to a roof terrace boasting the aforementioned views of south London. And dotted around the home are three bathrooms, including a Jacuzzi.

One of the reasons they've been able to cram so much in is because of the thinness of the walls. Dudzicki chose to use Structural Insulated Panels (SIPs) manufactured from recycled glass, clad on to recycled wood boards and rendered – making a wall less than 20cm thick. The entire structure arrived on a lorry from Germany on Valentine's Day 2005 and the family were living in it by November.

Consequently there are no steel beams and no load-bearing walls; so, for instance, the walls on the first floor could be moved around to create an extra bedroom. Factors which



Above: light streams into the top-floor living room, which opens through sliding doors on to a roof terrace; below, one of the three stylish bathrooms

have helped secure Dudzicki two other commissions to design homes using similar methods in Kensal Rise and Forest Hill.

The panels also contribute to the house's impressive green credentials. While we are chatting on the stairwell, I hear a whirring noise. Above us a small thermostatically controlled skylight window is opening to let some fresh air in and warm air out, as the house reaches the designated 22 degrees. Combined, the super-insulated walls and roof, the A-rated Keston boiler, the underfloor heating and the thermal effect of the ▶



Left: the mix-and-match kitchen with Corian worktop and Ikea spotlights; and, below, an olive tree imported from Tuscany in the front garden

◀ foundations mean their heating bills are 'peanuts – about 50 quid all winter'. Bills could further be reduced if they decide to install a wind turbine on the roof.

In fact, while the running costs are pretty meagre the actual cost of the building was a very competitive £150,000 including all the interior fittings. Dudzicki estimates the plot was worth around £100,000 once planning permission had been granted. Of course, being an architect was a cost-saving advantage – he called in favours and couldn't bill himself for his own time – but he reckons the build would have cost about £200,000 without the headstart. And it's very difficult to find a maintenance-hungry Victorian house in the area for less.

For the interior they took a mix-and-match approach. While the kitchen might be an Italian import, with a £2,500 Corian worktop and a £300 Vola tap – Dudzicki is most proud of the hidden LED spotlights from Ikea – 'three for 12 quid'. Other cost-saving tips include Ikea bedroom wardrobes, with 'oversized doors cut down so they look like B&B Italia', electrical switches from Screwfix – 'clients often go for Lutrons; waste of money' – and a likeness of a B&B Italia Charles corner sofa made by 'a guy in Blackheath' for £1,600.

While Richard waxes about the technical detail and crafty savings they made, his wife Eva, a lawyer, talks about how their lives have been improved by living here. 'The building has a life of its own: the sun flows in and you feel like you're part of the outside. Sometimes, on the top floor, all you can see is the sky and you feel like you're in it. It's really peaceful.'

Not long before they moved into the house the couple had a daughter, now two years old. So moving out of their previous live/work arrangement was a relief – 'It's given us room to relax and breathe. Our daughter has the run of the house and it gives Richard separation from his stressful architectural world.'

One unexpected benefit of living in the house is that their daughter's asthma and eczema have cleared up – possibly due to the lack of chemicals in the house, use of natural fibres and lack of places for dust to settle. And Richard reveals one other recent development: 'We feel closer for doing it as a family, so much so that my wife is expecting another kid.'

So will they take advantage of their home's adaptability, or find somewhere bigger? 'I hope we stay for many years,' says Eva. 'How can we top this? In the meantime, Eva will continue to take advantage of her favourite spot – the top room, early in the morning. 'I have my cup of tea before everyone wakes up,' she says. 'But I have to creep up here – there's a creaky floorboard to jump over!' Maybe there's a hint of Victorian in this house after all. ★

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