

# It's a slimline tonic

The plot for architect Richard Dudzicki's south London home was narrow, so he made the walls thin to create space, says **Dominic Bradbury**

**B**uilding a contemporary family home on a difficult plot of land in just six months on a budget of less than £150,000 is more than just a challenge. Richard Dudzicki, a south London-based architect, managed just that, however, when he squeezed a three-storey modernist house into a narrow stretch of wasteland in the midst of a row of Victorian semis in East Dulwich.

The house, which sits on a modest sized plot 23ft x 21ft, is not only compact, but also environmentally friendly. It is built from slim, prefabricated panels made of recycled timber and clad with rendered Verotec boards known as Sips, which are manufactured using recycled glass.

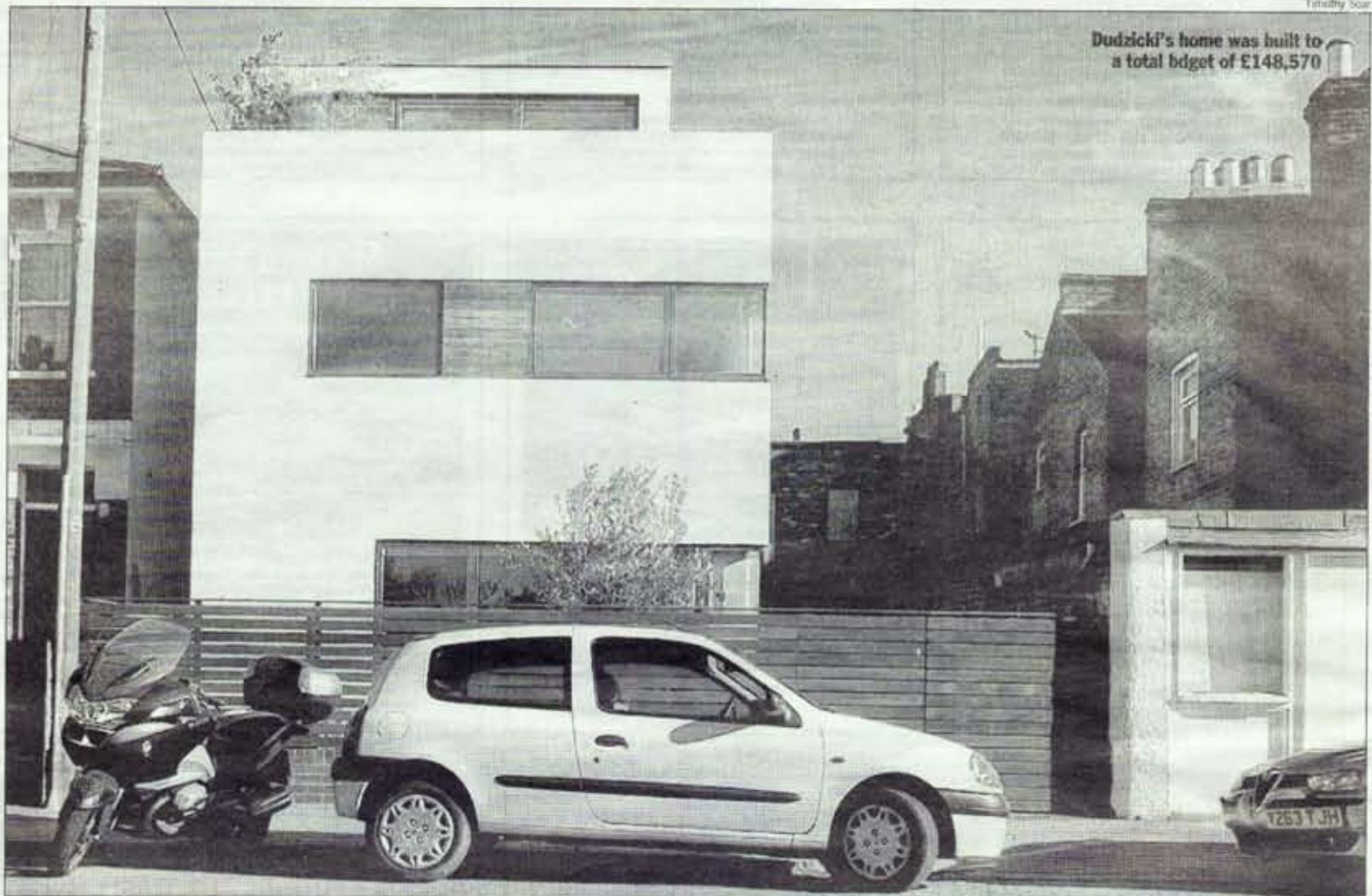
"One of our greatest restrictions on the site was space," says Dudzicki, 39, who shares the house with his wife, Eva, 36, a solicitor specialising in family law, and their daughter, Grace, 2. "Because the site is so narrow we had to maximise our living space, and we needed a very thin but insulated wall frame, which is why we chose the Sips, giving you walls that are less than 30cm [11in] thick.

"But we also had a tight budget. The panel kit, which was brought over from Germany on two articulated lorries, cost £20,000, plus another £10,000 to assemble.

Dudzicki moved to East Dulwich six years ago, after selling his flat in Brixton. His practice, Richard Dudzicki Associates, was doing some work for a property developer who wanted to offload some sites quickly, and Dudzicki bought the plot. At the very back of it was a derelict Victorian brick-built, timber-yard building and at its front was a parking spot, crumbling garage and an electricity substation.

Dudzicki converted and updated the existing building as home and office. But as the practice grew and took on more staff, the need for extra space became more urgent, especially after Eva became pregnant with Grace.

So they cleared the waste ground around the substation and put in a planning application for a new, detached home. Although it took five months to go through, Southwark council agreed to it after Dudzicki showed it computer-generated images of his project. "There was a good reaction in the street because for a long time the site had just been used as a dumping ground," he says. "The neighbours were very pleased to see it cleaned up and put to good use."



Dudzicki's home was built to a total budget of £148,570



The open-plan ground floor consists of a kitchen and two living areas; right, the architect at home with his family — walls could be shifted to create a third bedroom

The couple designed a slim building with a largely open-plan ground floor, comprising a kitchen, dining space and family sitting room. The first floor has two bedrooms, while above it is a large sitting room, complete with a balcony with views across the rooftops. "It works well having the sitting room up here — it feels very special," says Eva. "To me, the house is like a breath of fresh air."

With all of the structural, load-bearing elements of the house concentrated on the frame and no internal load-bearing walls, the house is also highly flexible. Should Grace be joined by a younger brother or sister, the walls can be shifted and a third bedroom created. There is provision for a wind turbine to generate power, although the energy bills are already low given the high insulation quality

of walls and glazing, with underfloor heating to keep the house warm.

Dudzicki sees his house — completed last autumn — as a prototype for a new form of affordable home, with a total budget of £148,570, including fittings and furnishings. His practice — which has expanded within the old Victorian building to the rear — is already looking at similar projects for clients also using Sips.

"You can design and build houses using panels that are delivered to you and can be assembled without a huge amount of skill or manpower," says Dudzicki. "We wanted something that was quick to build, affordable and sustainable, and this was perfect. It's environmentally friendly, without looking like a hippie wigwam."   
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