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INTERIORS
My space

How the architect Martyn Clarke has combined not just Victorian with Modern, but also a space for grown-ups with plenty of room for his teenagers

United in difference

WORDS BY KATE JACOBS

MARTYN AND Helen Clarke aren't chronic house-movers, but for each epoch of their family life, they've switched to a new place. They've had the babies-and-toddlers home and the growing-kids home. Now, with their children now aged 18 and 15, they have the living-with-teenagers home.

That said, although Martyn had been keeping his eye on this hilltop in Crouch End for years because of its great views over the rest of London, back in 2008, the family had had no plans to move. Yet, when this house came on to the market, it was hard to resist. As well as having tonnes of space, it had had just two owners since it was built in the late 19th century – so was still crammed with ornate original features.

Although it was in relatively good condition, Clarke, being an architect, couldn't help but make the house over. "I'm a bit sad when it comes to that," he confesses with a laugh. So it was stripped back and polished up with new electrics, plumbing, plastering, roof – the lot.

In his work, Clarke concentrates on residential projects, with extensions his specialist subject, so it's not surprising that he managed to add two on to his

own home. Because the house was such a good size to start with, and to ensure that the budget remained firmly under control, both are modest. Now the ground floor is the family zone, with the original double lounge and a generous new kitchen-dining area leading to the garden. "There was more than enough space in the existing house; it just needed something to unite it with the garden," explains Clarke. His strategy for this was simple: put the kitchen and garden on the same level, open things up with a whole wall of fold-back glass and link the spaces by using the same cabinetry across the kitchen and living areas. Finally he chose a dining table that is easily transferred between house and garden as the mood takes them. "It's a great house to entertain in," says Clarke.

Then, at the top of the house, he has extended the attic – once servant bedrooms – to create his studio and capitalise on the amazing views, with full-height windows looking out over the City. There's also room at the top of the house for the teens' bedrooms and bathroom, thus giving them their own domain during evenings and weekends. Meanwhile, on the first floor, Clarke and his wife have allowed themselves the luxury of a level to themselves with →



INSIDE OUT The original Victorian living-room, with its ornate stained-glass window, leads through to a kitchen-diner extension and the garden beyond, all situated on exactly the same floor level



LIGHT TOUCH A key characteristic of Clarke's projects is to find ways to let sunshine penetrate the whole house, such as the floor-to-ceiling glass window in the kitchen



a bedroom, bathroom and their very own living-room. The crucial thing for Clarke is that it remains a relaxed family home. "I firmly believe you can create a house that looks great without it feeling like a museum piece. Things get scuffed up by everyday life but that's fine. Homes are for living in."

He says this despite a house full of design aficionado kit. Clarke's one indulgence in life is furniture produced by high-end brands such as B&B Italia and Ligne Roset, with Antonio Citterio, his favourite designer, well-represented here: "We save up for it, piece by piece." The overall look is distinctly modern, but these are timeless designs, as comfortable as they are stylish.

And, by the standards of his profession, he is unafraid of bright shades: "It can take me a long time to

make decisions when it's my own home, but I do like to use colour. I tend to do a lot of experimenting – it's just trial and error to get it right. And if in doubt, I think it's safest to stick to colourful furniture and accessories. And gardens!"

In fact, the fusion between inside and outside spaces in this project has made a keen gardener of Clarke. "I play a bit of football but, apart from that, gardening is my thing now." The unpredictable

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nature of gardening is the perfect foil for the strict rigidity of the world of architecture, so Clarke can really let off steam. "My approach to the garden is completely different to what I do internally. It must make my landscape architect friends wince. I like to throw in what I want and see what grows."

When an architect is designing their own home, it's not surprising that they are brimful of ideas and strongly held opinions, but where does Clarke's wife, who runs a publishing company, fit into all this? "Helen is incredibly strong-willed and, in many ways, tougher than me. If she didn't like something, she would say so. But when it comes to architecture and furniture, I suppose I am a bit of a fascist," he laughs. •

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