

CELEBRATE
AMAZING
TRANSFORMATIONS

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EXTERIOR *(opposite)*
To make the existing basement bigger, an extension was added. The flat roof has two skylights to flood the space with light

KITCHEN
The basement's new open-plan living area is cleverly zoned with the help of a run of units, which also houses the hob, and a bespoke oak breakfast bar. The units have been given a designer look with sleek Corian worktops from BSF Solid Surfaces

HOME PROFILE

WHO LIVES HERE
Jo Richards, 46, her husband Alistair, 48, both lawyers, and their children Emily, 14, Tom, 12, and Oliver, 10

THE RENOVATION
A four-bedroom, early Victorian terrace in north London. The basement was converted into a spacious kitchen with dining area and access to the garden at the back, and a separate TV room at the front. The conversion, including the building work, furniture, fittings and a complete overhaul of the garden, cost £400,000



ON
ANOTHER
LEVEL

The dark basement of this Victorian terrace has been turned into a modern space that's the heart of the home

WORDS KATE JACOBS PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH

When Jo and Alistair Richards first set eyes on their north London home thirteen years ago, they fell for the early Victorian terrace's large living room. They had been on a quest for a house with plenty of light and space – commodities that are hard to find in a city – and the big, bright living room won them over. Less pleasing was the dark basement, where the kitchen, dining room and utility room were situated. It was so dingy the lights had to stay on all day, but Jo and Alistair both knew they could transform it into an amazing, light-filled space as soon as they had the time, energy and budget.

With three young children keeping them busy, it wasn't until nine years after they bought the house that the couple were able to start making plans for the basement. And things didn't get off to a smooth start. The first architect they worked with didn't understand the family's needs, so Alistair sat down and trawled the internet, looking for a firm whose style was compatible with theirs. 'It might sound obvious,' says Jo, 'but when you're choosing an architect, you can't just tell them to

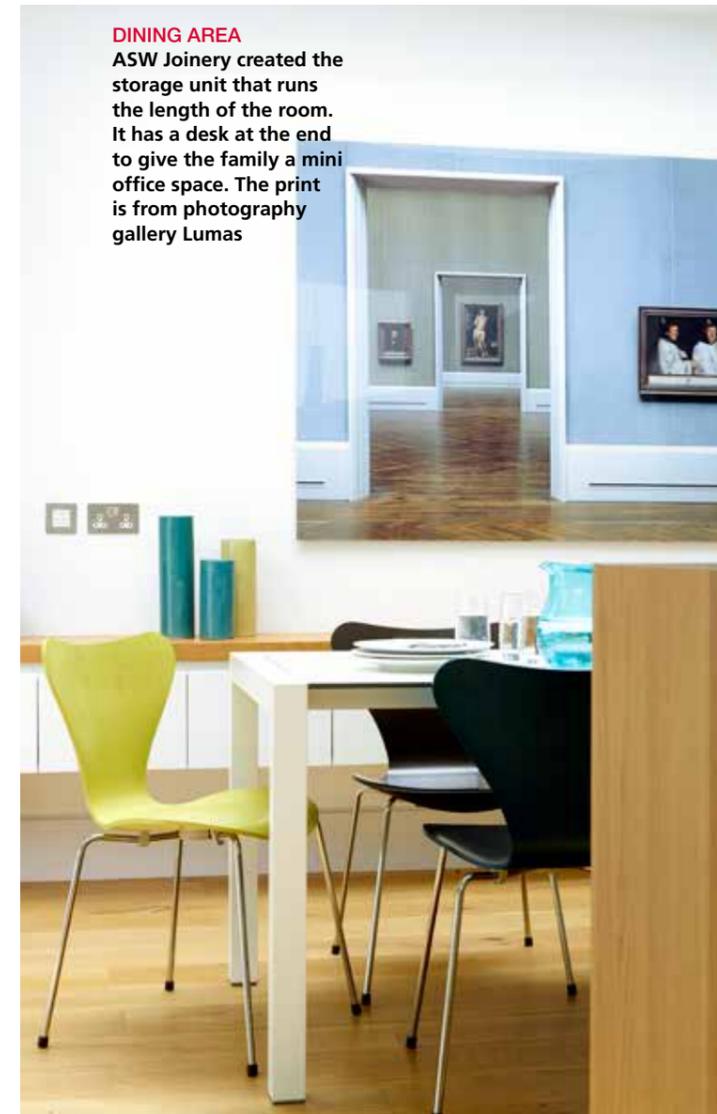
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STAIRWELL
Architect Martyn Clarke devised a glass lantern box and a structural glass stair panel as a way of bringing light down into the basement



BOOK SHELVES
Oak shelving looks striking against the teal glass splashback from Preedy Glass. Jo felt the all-white kitchen needed a hit of colour and the glass also helps reflect light around the room



DINING AREA
ASW Joinery created the storage unit that runs the length of the room. It has a desk at the end to give the family a mini office space. The print is from photography gallery Lumas



SUNKEN GARDEN
The builders excavated the garden to create a terrace that is level with the new kitchen/dining room. It's paved with granite slabs

do this, this and this. You need to spend the time to find one whose work you love and then trust them to get on with it.'

Their chosen architect, Martyn Clarke, had made a name for himself with residential extensions and instantly understood what the pair were hoping to achieve. Inside, where the kitchen and utility room used to be they would create one large open-plan space with separate zones for cooking and dining, and the old dining room would become a separate TV room. Martyn also suggested extending the basement out widthways and back into the garden by more than four metres to get a bigger kitchen/dining space, as well as excavating a large terrace so that the new kitchen would open straight out onto the garden. Finally, he proposed topping the extension with a sedum roof. In addition to being the ecological option, it also meant that from the upper storeys there's a view onto an area of greenery rather than a large expanse of asphalt.

The family moved into a rented flat just down the road while the work was going on, allowing Jo to make frequent trips to the site. 'Martyn and the building team were great,' she says. 'They never seemed to mind my visits and always listened to my suggestions.' A huge amount of excavation work was involved to get the inside and outside areas level and to achieve a better room height for the new kitchen/dining space. 'Towards the end there was just room for the digger next to a vast hole,' says Jo. 'I worried that it might fall in!' An

access track at the rear of the garden allowed the builders to remove the countless skips of earth relatively simply. 'We managed to avoid the dreaded conveyor belt through the house,' says Jo.

The amount of excavation needed wasn't quite as extensive as it might have been as the couple decided to zone the kitchen and dining areas by putting them on two separate levels. These levels are now divided by a simple oak breakfast bar and the division is also emphasised by two skylights and two separate floor-to-ceiling glass doors, which open on to the new terrace. Walls and floors were kept the same in both sections for a cohesive look.

Everyone in the family is a passionate cook so Jo and Alistair splashed out on gadgets, buying four ovens, including a steam version. Choosing a fridge, however, raised a few problems. 'Martyn urged us to go for something integral, but we knew we wanted a water dispenser so we held our ground,' says Jo. It was she who chose the beautiful teal glass splashback. 'I spent many wonderful childhood holidays in South Africa and it was only after this glass was in place that I realised it's the colour of the sea over there.' Likewise, she opted for lots of pale oak wood because it reflects her personal history, evoking memories of her father's furniture factory, which she loved visiting as a child.

With the garden now completely accessible from the kitchen, the family uses it so much more. 'Since the renovations, we feel we've

got the best of both worlds,' says Jo. 'We're in the middle of London but with all the space and light we need, and we have a home that looks out onto a garden and the park beyond. We can watch the birds and squirrels in the trees!' Jo's advice to anyone contemplating a similar renovation is simple: 'Just have confidence and go ahead and do it. We've got a great family home now, with enough room for everyone. It's completely changed the way we live.'

● **Find out more about the couple's architect Martyn Clarke by visiting martynclarkearchitecture.com**

WHAT IT COST

Construction, fit-out and architect	£320,000
Kitchen.....	£17,000
Appliances.....	£15,000
Flooring.....	£12,000
Furniture.....	£6,000
Green roof, garden landscaping and planting.....	£30,000
TOTAL.....	£400,000

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LETTING the light in

* Jo and Alistair's architect looked for every opportunity to bring light into the lower level of the house. He devised a glass lantern box on the floor above, which adds a sculptural element to the building and allows light to flood into the stairwell leading down to the basement. The new staircase is also flanked by a structural glass screen that helps bring light into the basement.

* The basement's rear extension has a flat roof, which gave the couple the opportunity to have two skylights – one over the centre of the kitchen space and the other over the dining area, making the entire space feel open and bright.

* Another area that plays its part in keeping the basement light-filled is the garden, which was once at a higher level and only linked to the basement by steps down through a narrow light well. By excavating a large terrace that is at the same level as the basement kitchen, and paving it with light-reflecting silver-grey granite slabs, the architect has allowed light to flood into the kitchen's glass doors.

* Practical light fittings also keep the space bright. There's a trio of pendants over the breakfast bar, plus dimmable recessed spotlights that provide both bright task lighting and low-level mood lighting.

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