



When Leigh Radford and Mel Crolla first saw their eventual home, it was deeply unlovely. Once the street's Victorian corner shop, it was bombed in the blitz and rebuilt in the 70s, with only a nod to its period past. Having lain empty for two years, it was back on the market after its last owner, a builder, decided it wasn't worth the effort. "It was poky, ugly as sin. Everyone told us not to get it. Our eldest daughter burst into tears when she saw it," Radford says. But it was in their favourite corner of Hackney, east London, close to Victoria Park. And the couple, who run design practice, Born (borndesign.com), were after a "project".

Even for a pair of designers, it was unthinkable without an architect on board. Step forward Martyn Clarke (martynclarkearchitecture.com), who specialises in maximising space using big, bright extensions that sit sympathetically with older houses. The house was just a two up, two down, plus a garage in the basement, so Radford and Crolla knew they'd have to extend to create a family home - but Clarke was more audacious. He proposed increasing their space by 60%, »

Before its makeover (above, left) the house was "ugly as sin". Now (above), it has stylish windows fitted flush to the walls, a top floor and an external black dye designed to weather over time. A skylight set into a turfed flat roof floods the lower ground with light.



Previous pages: A trio of Lantern lights, now discontinued, by the Bouroullecs for Belux (belux.com), sits above a granite kitchen island. A blackboard paint panel (try Amazon) keeps the family organised. In the living room are a Matthew Hilton chair and ottoman, and a Ribbon stool by Nendo for Cappellini (found on eBay). Radford designed the rosewood table (left); the stool is by Ikea founder, Ingvar Kamprad from Habitat's VIP collection (habitat.co.uk).

This red Polder sofa (left) is by Hella Jongerius for Vitra (vitra.com). In the garden (right), a concrete raised bed and batten walls are painted black. A pair of black Tolix chairs from Made (made.com) sit beside a concrete planter from Habitat, now discontinued - but Twentytwentyone has a Spindle planter that is very similar (twentytwentyone.com).





All change

It was a small, unloved house, so bad that even builders wouldn't touch it. So how did it become a spacious family home? Kate Jacobs finds out. Photographs by Rachel Whiting





extending up and down, front and rear. They stood to gain a master suite, a huge kitchen-diner-snug in the basement and an expanded lounge, bedrooms and bathroom on the middle floors.

It helped that Hackney council is sympathetic towards modern architecture, and that the existing house looked like “the one broken tooth” in the street, as Clarke puts it. The building was dilapidated, so neighbours were understandably more amenable to his plans to bring it more in line with others in the terrace, albeit in a fiercely contemporary way. “You have to make it difficult for planners to say no,” he says.

Because they were extending in four directions, the whole house was taken apart to install a steel frame - a nerve-racking time. But the family was able to move in within six months, with all the essentials in place. “When you have children, you can’t let a project take over your lives,” Crolla says.

For the interior, the pair saved a fortune by choosing their fittings and furniture, then waiting until they appeared on eBay (ebay.co.uk) or in the sales. Radford did all the joinery himself, including the Dinesen Douglas wooden floors on the top three storeys (dinesen.com), and used leftover planks to create their bed. Even the unusual windows were born of economic necessity - fixed panes, fitted dramatically flush with the outside walls, with ventilation courtesy of simple wooden shutters. “We always imagined we’d do something like this in our retirement,” says Crolla. “But I’m glad we took a punt - we now have something that fits us.” ●

Leigh Radford and Mel Crolla with a world time zones clock they rescued from a London hotel refit. Above: A Fronzoni '64 table for Cappellini (try Skandium, skandium.com) and a set of Hans Wegner Wishbone chairs (try Aram, aram.co.uk) came from their old house. Right: The bathroom is clad in Rotondo tiles from Domus (domustiles.com); the Polo chair is by Robin Day - try eBay.

