

A LOVE OF LIGHT



Neil Dusheiko - Architect

Neil Dusheiko founded his architectural practice in 2010, and since then it has built a reputation for design combined with excellent client service, with a portfolio of carefully crafted residential projects. Neil Dusheiko Architects is known for its extensive

use of natural light and natural materials. Before setting up his own practice South African born Neil worked for a number of well-known practices in London and Sydney. Current projects include the restoration of a historic Thames fire

barge, an environmentally friendly new-build house in Hackney and the complex modification of a house in Hammersmith for a media executive to include an underground cinema.

FIND OUT MORE
neildusheiko.com

LEADING Light

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD HOMES

I spent a large part of my childhood in Cape Town, moving to Johannesburg to go to high school and university. In the Cape I was lucky to have a lot of family living nearby. We had a large garden with a swimming pool, and I remember spending Sunday afternoons playing cricket on the lawn with my cousins and building a tree house with my dad. I don't remember much about the actual houses as we spent most of the time outdoors, but I know the house did have lovely natural slate crazy-paved floors. My parents built an aviary and kept exotic birds, and we had a large vegetable patch where we grew tomatoes and strawberries. There was a lot of music in our house: my dad played the piano and there were great sing alongs with the whole family, so my earliest memories were of a warm and friendly environment.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME AN ARCHITECT?

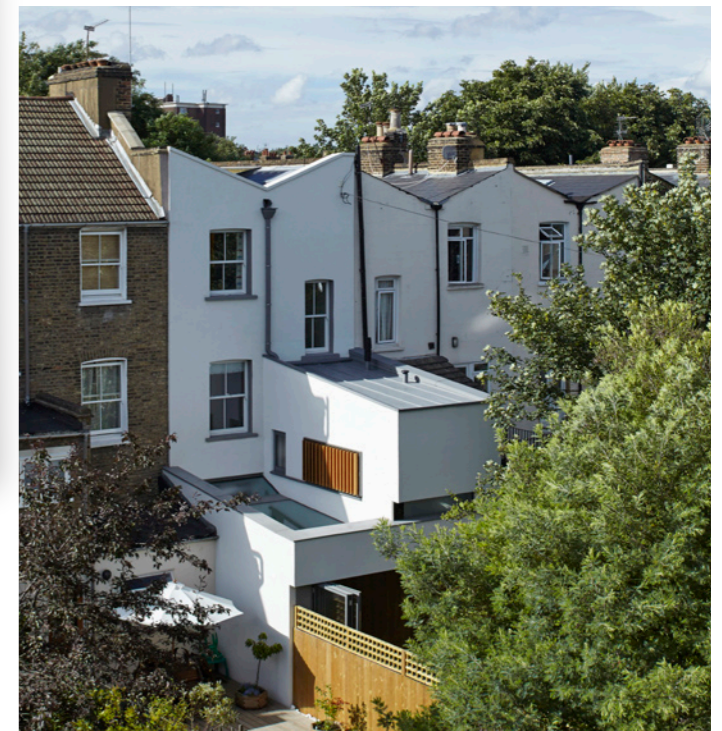
I remember seeing a house being built from scratch across the road from where I lived as a child, and I was fascinated by the build process from start to finish - how raw materials would arrive one day and be shaped into floors and walls the next. I loved watching things progress and take shape. At high school I learnt about the Modern Movement and about architects Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius in my art class. I was fascinated how architecture shaped the history of our cities and society, by the way modernist architecture embodied ideas of social order and politics and the idea that buildings could contribute to society. I was brought up in apartheid South Africa and was studying architecture when that era finally ended. I started to see architecture as one of the tools that could help build a new, democratic society.

I started off studying law. I was building up a portfolio in my spare time but had to enrol in university to avoid military service, which was compulsory at that time in South Africa. Luckily I had a chance encounter with Mozambiquean architect Pancho Guedes, professor of architecture at the time, in the courtyard at university. He let me do a first year project as a sort of entrance exam in lieu of having a portfolio. Luckily I aced it - got the highest mark in the class



House in Islington

Building a contemporary two-storey rear extension has completely changed the look and layout of this rundown Victorian terraced house in Islington. The extension contains an open-plan kitchen/diner on the ground floor, which is stepped down from the sitting room in the older part of the house. Upstairs, a new family bathroom in the zinc-roofed extension appears to be supported on a single exposed column.



“ I remember seeing a house being built from scratch across the road from where I lived as a child, and I was fascinated by the build. ”

Timber Fin House

Neil Dusheiko reinvented a small Edwardian terraced house by adding an exciting, award-winning extension which provides bright, flexible living space. The single-storey extension was built entirely out of timber and clad in Siberian larch mounted onto an oak frame.

and so was immediately accepted into first year that afternoon.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT YOUR WORK?

I love working with clients to design and build better spaces for them to live in. Communication is really important, and we are constantly talking to our clients about how they live and translating their thoughts into ideas that will give them a home they like living in every day. I enjoy the discussions I have with my staff, consultants and builders about how to make the projects a reality – how we are going to build it and what materials to use. It is the tangible and creative nature of making architecture I love so much.

WHAT HAS GIVEN YOU THE MOST SATISFACTION IN THE WORKPLACE?

Definitely the opportunity to open my own architectural practice in London. It has allowed me to find my own voice as a designer and to work with a range of interesting clients including families, high-profile media executives and artists. Before this I was fortunate to have been able to work for Allies and Morrison on the redevelopment of King's Cross Station, a large and complex piece of infrastructure that allowed the regeneration of a whole area of London. I enjoyed being part of a huge project that gave a new heart to London.

SUM UP YOUR STYLE IN THREE WORDS

Light, warm and collaborative. In all our projects we work really hard to bring in natural light. One of the first projects for the practice was a timber house in Walthamstow, where we designed a cranked façade to the extension to maximize the effect of the light. For our project in Islington we overheard one of our clients saying that they felt their house was supported on light, reflecting the amount we had brought into the building. It was a lovely thing to hear. Wherever possible I also like to bring in natural materials, like wood, which create a feeling of warmth. And finally collaboration – I love working with my clients, understanding their lifestyle and bringing ideas to life.

WHO OR WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

I think definitely my experiences growing up in South Africa and Australia. The large open spaces and richness and



diversity of the people and culture there constantly inform my work. I lived in Sydney for three years and managed to meet significant and inspiring architects such as Neil Durbach and Camilla Block, whose practice was very influential to me, particularly in the way their conceptual ideas are easily read in their work. In our practice we try to give each project its own identity so that the ideas that conceived it are clear and have their own sense of design integrity.

We draw as much inspiration as we can from our clients and their individual lives. Our practice is an extremely collaborative one – we have a workshop approach to making projects, and clients and assistants are all expected to roll up their sleeves and participate. Everything is discussed and the best ideas can come from any source.

HAVE YOU NOTICED ANY RECENT TRENDS?

There is more emphasis on new, sustainable technologies that can deliver healthier and happier homes and workplaces. I think projects used to be evaluated in the short term but now the whole lifespan of a project is considered – this comes down to the choices of materials but also the way buildings are constructed to minimise wastage and be as efficient as possible.

ANY FUTURE PLANS?

We are still building up the office and exploring ideas with different building types and technologies. I'm lucky to have attracted good staff to work with, and would like to invest more in the studio to enable it to grow and have its own distinct life and character – a place where people are happy working and clients are happy to trust us with their projects.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER SELFBUILDERS?

Consider the surroundings as much as possible and take inspiration from the context in which the project is going to be situated. Get the design right, build physical models or do three-dimensional drawings and explore it thoroughly. Buildings should improve and enhance their surroundings.

TELL US ONE INTERESTING FACT ABOUT YOURSELF

I love train stations. They are so atmospheric, there's something very romantic about them and they are often in really beautiful buildings. I often try to make sure that any trip we go on takes in a pretty train station – from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus station in Mumbai, to the Calatrava's Lyon-Satolas Station in Lyon or the Southern Cross Station in Melbourne.

My own home

I live with my wife, daughter and cat in a Victorian terraced house in Stoke Newington, which is my favourite part of London. There is no tube here so the area feels like a village, with all the advantages of London on your doorstep. We know about eight other families in our street alone, so feel a strong sense of community there. We haven't done any work to our house yet as

we wanted to live in it for a while before changing it. We have just applied for planning permission so that should happen soon. We have a large kitchen with a huge skylight and love our garden, which has a great big tree in it. The new design will connect our living spaces, which are on different levels, to each other and to the garden, so the family can all be together indoors and outside.