



Dream home: Erica and Niels Swinkels have lovingly created the perfect house for themselves and their toddler son, Dash

SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME

Philippa Stockley meets a couple whose home is full of surprises, not least a glass floor to keep an eye on their little boy's basement playroom

SPACE and light are buzzwords often used in modern architecture. But together they can have a huge impact on how a house looks, and how it feels to live in. These two factors certainly helped the dramatic transformation of the home of Erica and Niels Swinkels in Ravenscourt Park, west London.

The 19th-century house was a drab series of little rooms, with an Eighties pine kitchen and brown wood furniture. Over 13 months the couple, who have a toddler son, Dash, turned it into a spectacular home with wide, open spaces that allow natural light to flood in.

As soon as you walk in, you can see right through to the courtyard. The ground-floor walls have been swept away to make one clean, clear space with a circular pillar at the centre. The original dogleg kitchen at the back is now open plan and its original brick side wall has been replaced by glass that looks out to the courtyard.

The back wall of the house has been pushed further out, leaving a small yard encased by floor-to-ceiling glass doors that can be completely opened. The yard and the new section of the home is decked in highly polished concrete flooring with a grey-green sheen. Other floors are in gently waxed white oak.

The open-plan kitchen features grey

fittings, a Silestone worktop that resembles Carrara marble and little copper pendant lights.

With the décor showcasing an elegant, neutral palette, together with the abundance of natural light and the softening effect of wood floors, the overall look is easy on the eye. The couple have achieved a balance of sleek and homely.

LIGHT OF OUR LIVES

A big surprise is the rectangular glass panel in the floor, through which you can see down to the new basement that doubles as a playroom and cinema. It's a good way to keep an eye on Dash when he is playing below.

The upper part of the house holds surprises, too. The master bedroom and attic have been combined to create a soaring space, while two bathrooms feature skylights – there's another over the stairwell – that make the whole upper floor incredibly bright. "When we first moved in and hadn't yet got the blinds, Erica had to wear sunglasses," Niels jokes. "But there's some truth – you would expect this sort of light in a South African house, not an English one. It's uplifting."

Niels, 42, met half-Swedish Erica, 34, at the office Christmas party. They both worked in the film industry, and each

had their own flat. Niels was based in Stoke Newington, while home for Erica was Shepherd's Bush.

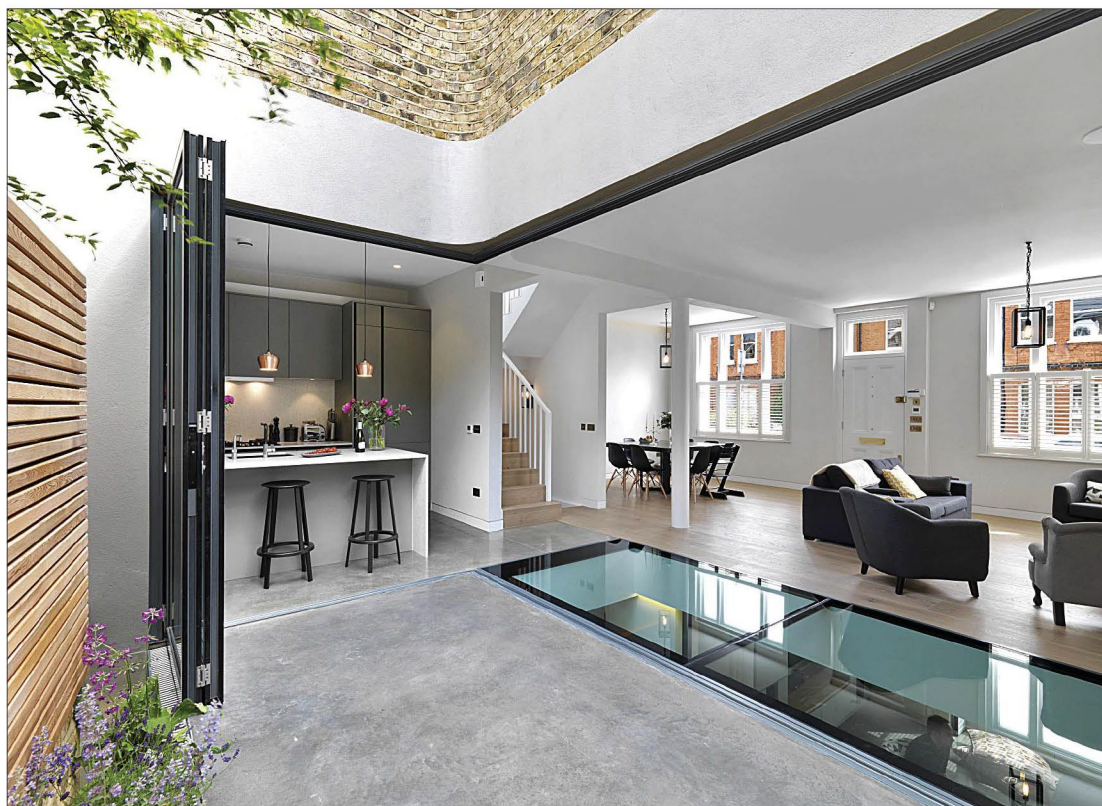
They moved into Niels's apartment but in 2012, when Erica was pregnant and it was time to think about a family home, they sold that one and moved into Erica's flat.

Niels found that his commute into central London took just 20 minutes. "Erica had always said that Shepherd's Bush is really well connected – and she's right," he says. So they refurbished Erica's flat, sold it and started house-hunting in west London.

But the search wasn't easy. They looked at 40 houses, then Dash was born and they were still looking. Their spirits sagged.

"At first, we saw ourselves as a modern family who wouldn't need a big house, so we began looking around Notting Hill and Brook Green," says Niels. But they soon found that even shoebox homes cost the earth, and that cash buyers were gazumping them. So they pushed out to Ravenscourt Park, which has a likeable village feel with plenty of elegant houses.

One day, as they walked past a house, their estate agent appeared at the front door having shown someone else round, so on a whim they had a look. "Niels is analytical, he point-scores,"



Sleek finish: left, the open-plan living area and the glass panel set into the floor, revealing the basement cinema and playroom

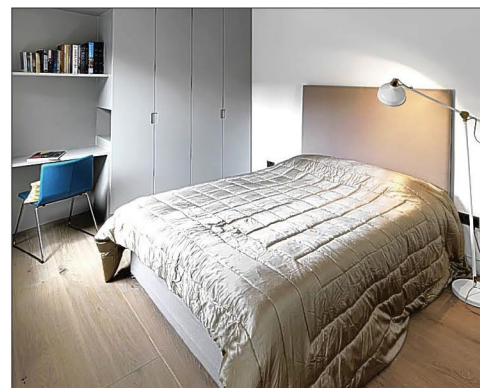
Shades of grey: right, one of two bathrooms that feature skylights, flooding the upper floor with natural light

Make yourself at home: below, the finish is high end but the house still feels cosy and comfortable



Accents of colour: left, a splash of yellow in the study space adds interest to neutral décor

Photographs: Charles Hosea



Niels – would kill for one. "As you can see, we have lots of built-in storage," says Niels, "but we don't like clutter. If you have a loft, you fill it with stuff you never see again."

This is a very good point and, certainly, the soaring ceiling space in the bedroom is magical. "Niels is so proud of the house that he can't stop talking about it," says Erica, warmly.

Niels adds: "We created something we really value. I found that exciting – and I'd do it all again in a heartbeat."

Keep it simple: above, gently waxed white oak floors have been laid in the elegant master bedroom



HOW TO GET THE LOOK

What it costs: House in March 2013: £1,325,000
Total money spent: £715,000
Value now: £2.3 million

Get the look:
Architect: Neil Dusheiko at neildusheiko.com
Builder: Hoktiff at hoktiff.com
Glazing by EKS via accordrial.co.uk

Basement works by Structural London at structuralondon.com
Concrete floor by Lazenby at lazenby.co.uk
Oak floors by Parkwood Interiors at parkwood-interiors.co.uk
Kitchen by Schmidt Kitchens at schmidt-kitchens.com
Sanitary ware by Just Add Water at justaddwater.co.uk

Eames chairs from Hamiltons at hamiltonsnt16.co.uk
Colourful furniture from Flock at flock.org.uk
Tiles by Pentagon Tiles at pentagon-tiles.co.uk
Brass switches from Sparks at sparksdirect.co.uk
Blinds by Interiors of Chiswick at interiorsofchiswick.co.uk