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HOME PROFILE

WHO LIVES HERE

Erica Swinkels, 35, her husband Niels, 43, and their two children

THE PROPERTY

A traditional double-fronted Victorian terrace in Hammersmith, west London



EXTERIOR
Erica and Niels outside their west London home

Victorian FOLLY

The owners wanted to create a big surprise inside this house and they've achieved it with a dramatic, innovative renovation

WORDS CLARE MORRISROE/SOLO SYNDICATION
PHOTOGRAPHY CHARLES HOSEA

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KITCHEN/DINER
Erica relaxes in the amazing open-plan kitchen with its glass floor revealing the basement living space



LIVING SPACE

The house has virtually no internal walls, and a glass panel in the floor means Erica can keep her eye on the children when they're in the media room beneath



Looking from the outside, anyone would assume this traditional double-fronted Victorian terrace is filled with the usual period features... ornate cornicing, open fires, high skirtings. But open the front door and there's not a dado rail in sight. In fact, this stunning renovation doesn't even have interior walls on the ground floor.

After a 13-month facelift – which left only the front facade and side walls standing – Brackenbury House has been transformed from something small and gloomy into a state-of-the-art modern home. And the key ingredient was light. Thanks to a magnificent basement extension with a glass ceiling that offers views to two floors, and a double-height ceiling on the upper floors, light floods the house.

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BATHROOM

The skylight above the bath means it's possible to lie back and look at the stars



MAIN BEDROOM

With white oak floors and a ceiling that sweeps up to the roof the bedroom is beautifully airy and calm

Erica. When the bifold doors are open, the house and garden connect seamlessly, with the terrace's polished concrete floors blending beautifully with the waxed white oak inside.

The open-plan kitchen is grey and understated, with marble worktops and copper pendant lights. But the star of the show is the basement, which is revealed through a toughened glass panel in the floor. Below this panel is a media room, complete with a cinema, and a playroom for the couple's two young children.

'We wanted a cinema room and play area downstairs as we're not keen on having toys or televisions in the social areas,' says Erica. 'When our architect suggested a glass floor we loved the idea. Not only does it connect the two floors and flood the basement with light, it also means I can keep an eye on the children when they're playing and I'm in the kitchen.'

Also in the basement is a utility room and a guest suite for when they have visitors. But the upper half of the house also contains surprises. The ceilings have been removed so the main bedroom and attic have been combined to expose the roof, creating height and space. And the two bathrooms feature skylights – there's another over the stairwell – that make the whole upper floor incredibly bright. 'We can lie in the bath looking at the stars,' says Erica. 'It's quite magical and so uplifting.'

Creating this spectacular home was made easier because the couple were lucky enough to find an architect, Neil Dusheiko, who understood exactly what they were trying to achieve. 'We loved his vision and his passion,' says Erica.

The planning application went through in eight weeks without a quibble, but the real challenges came once the building work started, as the house had to be completely gutted. 'At one point

pretty much only the front facade and side walls were standing,' says Niels. 'There weren't even proper floors on the ground or first floor and the back was entirely gone.' New electrics, plumbing and insulation were installed and a new roof and underfloor heating were also added. Original London brick stock was used for all the work, with Welsh slate sourced for the roof.

'We really did build it from the inside out,' says Niels. 'It's now a fabulous family home and a great space for entertaining. We're very proud of what we've achieved here.'

'The truth is we could have found a bigger house for less money. But for us this project was about creating a home that fitted our requirements perfectly – somewhere we could really appreciate every element of the build. What you get from designing your own place is so much more than just a house.'

SEE-THROUGH flooring

★ 'Walkable glazed panels used as ceilings are great for allowing light in,' says Paul Schaaf of the Basement Design Studio and the glass floors have certainly made a huge difference to the Swinkels' home.

★ Glass floors can be installed to sit seamlessly in the ceiling of a basement or under-garden extension. It's crucial that they're constructed of tough and resilient materials. The glass used has to be durable and reach fire safety standards, and must be made to a high specification to let through maximum light. Special anti-slip can be applied to the surface for when it's used in high-traffic areas.

★ Prices start from around £1,200 at IQ glass, and will be affected by the size and number of glass panels, and the finish requested.

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