



Timber Fin House, Winns Avenue, Walthamstow, London Borough of Waltham Forest

by Neil Dusheiko Architects

- 19th century end of terrace house

In contrast to the deep-plan terraces of Victorian cities, some 19th-century artisan housing was built with larger gardens to allow for an element of sustainability; the growing of vegetables, space for livestock and the recycling of waste. Typically, these houses are only one room deep, presenting a double front to the street with living rooms on either side of a

central entrance door. Neil Dusheiko has transformed an example of this modest type of dwelling in Walthamstow, adding a timber-framed, single-storey extension and flooding the interior with light.

Neil studied at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa and practised in Sydney. He found relocating to London a real contrast. 'Moving to England was a definite culture shock,' says Neil. 'The privileged in South Africa live in detached houses set in large plots in gated communities in a blockaded streetscape. In direct contrast, houses in London are largely open to the street with front gardens forming a line of defensive space that is essentially public. London is bound by strict planning laws to protect the dense historic fabric but there are also special cases where there is the opportunity for innovation.'

◀ Figure 4.10

Hinged and sliding/folding doors open up the new accommodation to the garden. Sunlight streaks across the vertical timber cladding, creating ever-changing textures and light effects.

Photo: Daryl Dusheiko



◀ Figure 4.11

The single-storey rear extension is timber framed and clad in timber in keeping with existing structures in adjoining gardens. Different functions and volumes are reflected in the 'informal stack' of three boxes.

Photo: Daryl Dusheiko



Collaborative approach

'The project began one afternoon while sitting with the client on their existing terrace discussing ideas about how to create more space for the family in the tiny terrace house,' says Neil. 'We thought it would be interesting if the existing central staircase in the double-fronted house somehow continued up and over into the garden from the mid-landing and so the idea of extending the house came about.'

A combination of a series of enlightened clients, appreciative planning officers, unusual building types and Neil's creative approach has resulted in a series of innovative domestic projects which have helped him to establish a growing architectural practice in London's Clerkenwell, an enclave of several emerging firms. One of his first projects, the Timber Fin House in Waltham Forest, is the result of collaboration with his clients. The resulting house is an exemplar of how to breathe new life into a tired building.

The original cottage is one room deep, arranged lengthways on to the street. On either side of the entrance door are the sitting room and dining room, above these on the first floor are two bedrooms and a two-storey side extension houses the kitchen on the ground floor and bathroom on the first floor. The benefit of this configuration was that there is a sizeable garden but also plenty of space for a large extension.

Sustainable timber construction

The local planners insisted that any extension should utilise the building materials of the original house: brick walls and pitched slate roof. However, Neil's client wanted a timber-framed and timber-clad extension as it was more sustainable and Neil convinced them that a timber structure in the leafy rear garden was more in keeping with the existing timber structures – sheds, fences and so on – in the gardens of adjoining properties. 'The concept was to create a series of different volumes to accommodate the various functions in an informal stack of boxes placed next to each other like packing crates,' Neil explains. 'The extension exists as three timber containers sitting next to and on top of one another with a singular nature borne out of using one material.'

A brick extension may have been possible under permitted development but Neil's clients were set on an all timber addition and the scheme was submitted for planning permission. Due to the early consultation Neil carried out



◀◀ Figure 4.12

A new staircase in the living room gives access to two first-floor bedrooms and a bathroom. The master bedroom is on the ground floor, opening on to the garden.

Photo: Dennis Gilbert/VIEW

◀ Figure 4.13

Existing door and window openings have been retained between the kitchen and the new living room so that the original form of the building is still apparent.

Photo: Daryl Dusheiko

with the planning department, his designs were supported by the conservation officer and the plans were approved with no amendments to the initial design. The project later received an award for best residential extension from the local authority as part of their annual design awards.

Doubling the footprint

Neil used the proportions of the existing rooms to work out how large to make the new extension so that the new living space would have a hierarchy but also relate well to the smaller spaces. New accommodation on the ground floor more than doubles the original footprint of the house. The former sitting room is now a study/guest bedroom and the

Figure 4.14 ▶

The vertical timber cladding is designed to catch the slanting sunlight, creating interesting patterns of light; this inventive handling of light is continued on the interior of the house.

Photo: Neil Dusheiko

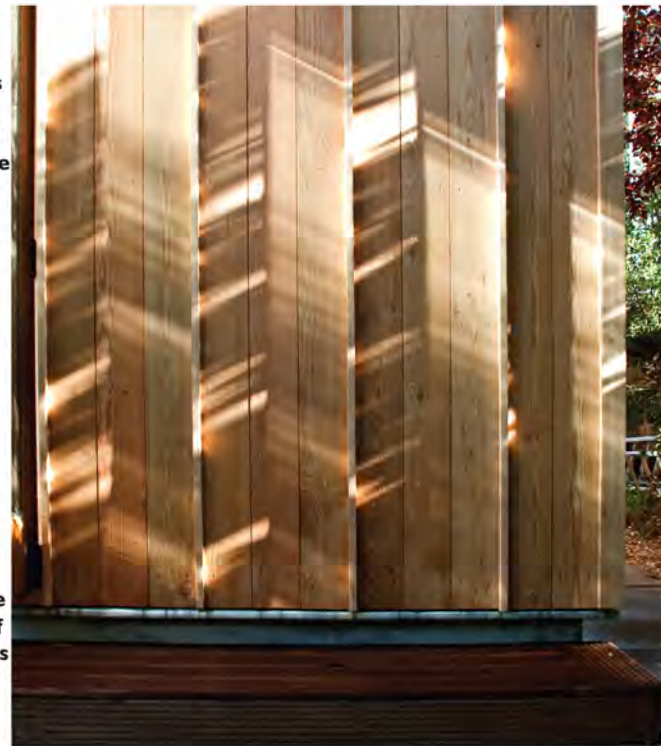


Figure 4.15 ▶▶

Rooflights and artificial light strips illuminate the top of the staircase. The manipulation of light is one of the key elements of the new intervention.

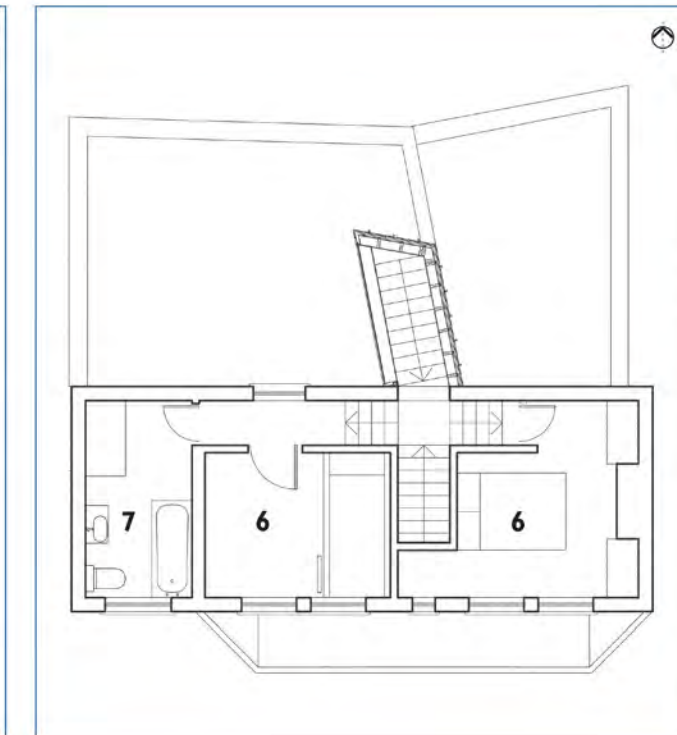
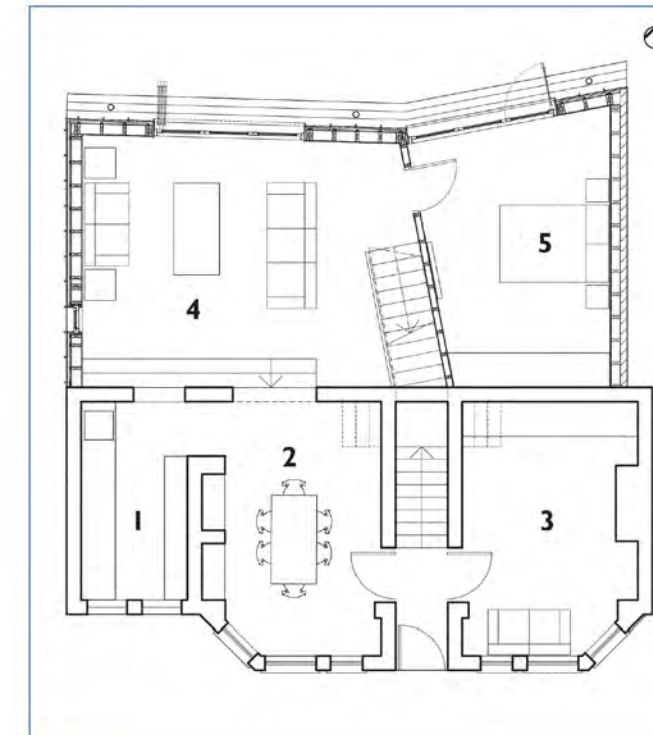
Photo: Dennis Gilbert/VIEW

rear extension houses the new living area and the master bedroom, together with a new staircase to the first-floor landing. New openings have been formed between the kitchen and dining room and the living area, although the original form of the building is still apparent.

The rear of the house faces north and manipulation of light is one of the key elements of the new intervention; Neil's client is a film-maker, someone who plays with light, with images, with effects to create his very special art form. 'He was interested in the cinematic qualities of light,' says Neil. 'So I designed a staircase "funnel" to catch the light, to create amazing light effects internally as the sun moves around in the afternoon and evening.'

Sustainable materials

The north-facing rear façade is asymmetrical with two cranked planes clad with vertical timber fins angled to catch the evening light, creating a magical and ever-changing effect as the light flickers through the surrounding trees, distorting and disturbing the shadows. Carpentry skills came to the fore in the building of the single-storey extension. The main



◀ Figure 4.16

Ground floor plan, far left
First floor plan, left

Key

- 1 Kitchen
- 2 Dining room
- 3 Study
- 4 Living room
- 5 Master bedroom
- 6 Bedroom
- 7 Bathroom

Images: Neil Dusheiko Architects

structural framework is built out of oak and the cladding is Siberian larch from local sustainable sources, which will weather to a silvery-grey over time. Wastage was minimised during construction. For example, the height of the extension was regulated by the length of the larch planks so that any wastage from offcuts was virtually eliminated; there are few visible joints. Birch plywood sheets are utilised for the flooring and the staircase is formed from laminated plywood.

The larch planks are mounted on to battens fixed to Panelvent sheathing boards which have a high 'racking' strength but also allow for a water vapour permeable construction. Panelvent is made from wood chips and forest thinnings, utilising a Masonite defibration system to combine low formaldehyde emissions in use and low embodied energy in manufacture. The original Panelvent board has now been replaced with a new version, Panelvent DHF.

'The use of timber gives a warmth and richness and it seems appropriate in the suburban context of this outlying district of London which is close to water reservoirs and Epping Forest,' says Neil. The roof of the extension is designed to allow for a

KEY FEATURES

- Sustainable timber construction;
- Built by a team of highly skilled carpenters as opposed to a traditional building contractor;
- Use of artificial lighting to enhance natural light sources;
- Innovative use of rooflights and windows to flood previously dark interiors with light and to create interesting light effects.

Site: Fin House, Walthamstow
Start on site: June 2009
Completion: October 2009
Client: Bella Relph
Contract value: £74,000

finishing layer of sedum to be added at a later date, as the initial budget did not allow for this.

The young family was able to live on site during construction of the extension, which saved additional rental costs. Once the new work was completed, a temporary partition was removed, uniting the two ages of the house and extending the use of the house into the following centuries.