

METRO PROPERTY

ROCK & AWE

Interior designer Sophie Bush shares her tips for a hotel-inspired concrete finish

Page 21 »



OUR 2-IN-1 HOME

SOPHIE VENING MEETS THE SIBLINGS WHO TRANSFORMED A NEGLECTED FORMER REFUGE INTO TWO HOMES FIT FOR ALL THE FAMILY...



Garden party:
Charlie and Gemma
with cousin Shaun

WHAT we wanted was a hub, a place my whole family could spend time together, but with our own separate spaces,' explains Gemma Thompson of her and her brother Charlie's duplex apartments in Kentish Town, London. This was the brief given to architect Shaun O'Brien of ROAR Architects - who also happens to be Gemma and Charlie's cousin, firmly cementing this project as a true family affair. Gemma, 30, was living in north London at the time, her parents in Buckinghamshire while Charlie, 27, being in the Army, didn't have a

permanent abode. They would regularly meet at Gemma's small flat at weekends. With their parents keen to spend more time in London, Charlie needing a base and Gemma wanting to put her stamp on a property she could call her own, an idea to get a place together came to fruition. But what made the idea even more possible was when their parents came across an advert for a five-bedroom house in total disrepair for sale at auction on the same street as a pub that they all frequented together. A site viewing was organised and within a week the property was purchased. 'I couldn't believe it,' says

Gemma. 'My parents viewed it with Shaun and immediately saw its potential,' she explains. Located in Kentish Town's Conservation Area, the house had served as a women's refuge centre since the 1980s and had been left unoccupied for five years. 'It was in a complete state,' says Shaun. 'The property had been divided up into a series of small rooms with multiple bathrooms and there was a large tree in the garden causing damage to the building.' Despite the obvious setbacks, Shaun envisaged the property being split into two duplex apartments. The upstairs

would be Gemma's and the downstairs Charlie's. As Charlie would be away for intervals, he would share his flat with their parents and it would be a base for family get-togethers. 'The property entrance was on the side of the building which meant we could alter the home's circulation and move the bottom flat's staircase to the centre of the building and still have space for a separate staircase to access the upper flat in the existing outrigger extension,' says Shaun. 'The design would allow for separate entrances and, as there were other loft extensions further down the road, there was a precedence to build up.'

Shaun took a methodical approach when it came to gaining planning permission. 'When the house was purchased, there wasn't a clear planning history for the property,' explains Shaun. 'It had been split into a number of flats and bedsits, which meant we had to establish the building as a single dwelling before we could do anything.' He immediately applied for a certificate of lawfulness to ensure the building was just one house. 'Once consent was granted and we had substantially commenced with the

Continued on **Page 20** »

METRO PROPERTY

Looking back:
Charlie and Gemma, left, the rear extension

Flight of fancy:
Gemma and, right, her journey staircase

DANIEL LYNCH

‘It has been a real family project’

» From **Page 17**

works, we then applied to convert the house into two flats,’ says Shaun.

The first task in Shaun’s plan was to strip back the property to allow for remedial work, to ensure the building was structurally safe and could withstand alterations.

A ground-floor rear extension was added to accommodate the new open-plan kitchen/dining area in Charlie’s flat. A bathroom was placed at the side of the property where the old staircase used to be, and the new stairwell, which was moved to the centre of the property, leads up to two bedrooms, one with en suite, and a separate bathroom.

Back on the ground level, the existing outrigger extension was demolished and rebuilt to accommodate the stunning staircase up to Gemma’s flat. ‘I liked the idea of playing with the contrast of light and dark,’ says Gemma. ‘I wanted the journey to start in a very dark space and, as you travel up the stairwell, the space would get lighter.’

To achieve her goal, Gemma painted the walls a very dark blue leading up to white on the second-floor landing. There’s a glass roof over the staircase and a pane of glass built into the wall connects the hallway with the open-plan kitchen, dining and living area and helps flood the space with natural light.

Back on to the landing and up another flight of stairs, you reach the loft extension with two double bedrooms and a bathroom. This time light green adorns the walls. ‘I like the idea of sticking with bold, but few colours,’ says Gemma, whose career in fashion and interest in interior design is evident throughout her home.

Shaun says that, although it was a tough project to work on, it was very satisfying: ‘The main thing is that I was designing two flats at the same time for two completely different people, but also somewhere they could spend time together as a family,’ he says. ‘I think we’ve achieved that.’

Gemma agrees: ‘It has been a real family project and it has been great, now that lockdown is lifting, to be able to spend more time with Charlie and my parents,’ she says. ‘With the added benefit of bringing my family and Shaun so much closer together.’

roar-architects.com

Bright idea: An extension floods the rear with light and houses Charlie’s open-plan kitchen-diner (top). Charlie’s home is now big enough to act as a base for family get-togethers

Photo finish: Gemma’s kitchen, living area and bedroom all reflect her career in fashion and passion for interior design and her love of bold colours