

The height of style

The interior of a terraced mews house was fully reworked to create a space for this airy, modern bathroom

Report and styling: Heather Young. Photography: Richard Smith

If you had visited this terraced mews house in Brixton, South London, whilst work was underway to transform it from a warren of dark rooms, you'd have found nothing behind the front door. Architect Simon Whitehead embarked on what is termed 'facade retention' on the property, which means that all that was kept of the existing building was the front wall and two party walls. Everything else was gutted, including all internal walls and fittings.

Simon was employed by Helen Mitchell to completely redesign her property. 'The brief was to get the maximum that was possible out of the house,' says Simon – and he didn't hold back when deciding what needed to go. 'We were asked to design the best space we could achieve, and it basically came down to a straightforward choice between working with something that was fundamentally flawed or taking a brave decision to completely rework it,' he says.

Helen's trust in Simon meant that she was happy to follow his extreme solution to realise the style of interior she required, and the bathroom is a great example of what has been achieved. 'The upstairs was originally a rat-run,' recalls Simon, describing how access to the main bedroom was through the bedroom. The floor plan has been reorganised so that the bathroom is now at the top of the stairs, and can be accessed both from the corridor and from the master bedroom.

This means the room can function as an ensuite for the master bedroom, and also as a bathroom for guests. Having two doorways made designing the room's layout more difficult for Simon, but he has managed to make it feel both spacious and functional.

'I concentrated on putting a palette of materials together,' says Simon. He selected large, square, limestone-effect tiles

Left: Simon has added a feeling of warmth to the contemporary bathroom by using dark panga panga wood for the bath panels, recessed shelf and vanity unit



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Q&A: ARCHITECT

How much input did Helen have in the design scheme?

"Coming up with the design was a two-way process. I always show clients samples, and Helen did some of her own research as well and then left us to get on with it."

What's the secret of a good relationship with your architect?

"You've got to put your trust in the people who know what they're doing; the people you've employed to do the job."

Did you have any problems during the building stage?

"We were really lucky to have a fantastic builder on board, something which is absolutely essential when you're dealing with a project of this scale."

Is there any advice you would offer someone considering a similar project?

"Be prepared to spend the right money in the right places if you want to achieve the wow factor. Don't expect to be able to do it on the cheap."

for the floor, the bath splashback and inside the shower enclosure. Crisp white painted walls above the level of the tiles and on the wall behind the basin keep the space light. "I wanted to get as much natural light as possible into the room," he explains, referring to the installation of two Velux windows. "Making use of natural light is something that I try to do in all my projects."

With the pale walls and sleek white contemporary sanitaryware, it was important to prevent the space from feeling cold, so Simon introduced panga panga wood, a durable hardwood that brings some warmth into the design scheme. The wood has been ▶

Left: The vanity unit provides valuable storage, including a large shelf and two pull-out drawers. Right: The height of the ceiling was raised so that two large Velux windows could be installed to let natural light flood into the room.



COST

A similar bathroom would cost approximately £10,000

CONTACTS

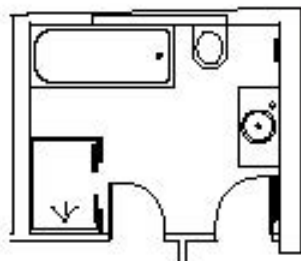
DESIGN

Simon Whitehead of Simon Whitehead Architects
(020 7163 1063 or www.simonwhitehead.com)

BATHROOM

WC, shower enclosure, bath, shower, basin and brassware
Bathstore (0800 023 2323 or www.bathstore.com)
Tiler Stone11 Direct
(0800 083 2283 or www.stone11direct.com)
Accessories Vases, Tiles
(0845 355 1144 or www.ikesa.co.uk) and
Woolworths
(0870 411 7112 or www.woolworths.co.uk);
Wooden Letters, Emily
Readett Bayley
(01400 261563 or www.emilyreadettbayley.com)

Right: The generous walk-in shower enclosure feels roomy, and has been neatly slotted in behind the door that leads to the corridor. The shower controls are sleek and minimal to keep the look uncluttered and modern.



used for the bath panel and to line the recessed shelf above the bath. The dark wood vanity unit finishes the look.

Lighting plays a key role in the room's design. The main ceiling lights are industrial-style spots. 'Not what you'd find in your average bathroom,' admits Simon. And when these main

lights are dimmed, the spotlights within the recess can be used to highlight chosen accessories, and to provide a relaxing atmosphere for a long soak in the bath.

The final consideration was storage; something Simon was determined to address. 'Storage is often overlooked in small

bedrooms,' he says. 'We found a vanity unit that includes storage drawers and shelving, and the recess above the bath provides a valuable extra surface as well.'

The Velux windows are definitely a major factor in the success of this bathroom. Despite its dimensions, which

certainly aren't enormous, the room feels extremely spacious and airy. 'The space only works because of the huge amount of natural light coming in,' says Simon. 'Without it, it would have been a very ordinary bathroom - but I think we've managed to create something quite special.'