



‘I miss the light in Croatia,’ Jelena Cousins explains. When she and her husband, Ben, designed a home for their growing family in north London, not only did they want to create ‘as much space as possible’, they also wanted ‘an uncompromised view of the sky’.

The couple met when they were students, she at the Bartlett School of Architecture (originally from Croatia, Jelena studied architecture at Venice University, before her parents moved to London for work in 1993) and he at Kingston University. They married in 2000, which is also when they took on their first project together: renovating a derelict house in Hackney. As well as designing the house, they carried out most of the work, from sanding the floors to painting the walls. ‘We were in our 20s when we took it on,’ she says. ‘If we’d been any older, we wouldn’t have done it.’

Over the next decade they each worked at various architectural practices in London before setting up their own firm, Cousins & Cousins, in 2012. This was also when Jelena and Ben decided to move from east London to Dartmouth Park on the east side of Hampstead Heath near where Ben grew up. Their daughters, Sophia (now nine) and Isabella (seven), were growing up and a third daughter, Imogen (now four), was on the way. ‘The heath is as close as you can be to the country in a city,’ he says. ‘For me it really brings back those childhood feelings of excitement and adventure, and I wanted that for our kids.’

They found a late-Victorian home a few hundred feet from heath that was relatively untouched having been owned by the same family since the 1930s. Of course, it needed plenty of work. Ben and Jelena had to replace the entire roof and every window in the house, redo the plumbing, renew the electrics and put down new flooring throughout the ground floor.

‘The main thing was to get light into what was a long, narrow house,’ Ben explains. Although their solution – to add a glazed extension at the back – was a familiar one, the Cousins’ particular

PERFECT PITCH

A glass extension echoes the roofline of a Victorian terrace and transforms the space within.

By **Chloe Grimshaw**.

Photographs by **Luke White**

The living space is the perfect place to display Jelena’s art collection featuring works from her mother, Olga Vujadinovic, who studied at the Academy of Arts in Belgrade in the 1960s, Radomir Damnjan, who exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1976, and Ljuba Popovic, whose paintings are in the collection of the Pompidou Centre in Paris.

design is unusual. Taking inspiration from the pitched Victorian roofline of their terrace, the architects mimicked the triangular shape in the glass roof of the extension. 'It also maximises the amount of light,' Ben says.

This is now a large open-plan space where the minimalist Bulthaup kitchen island overlooks an informal lounge area beneath the new glass roof, allowing the 'uncompromised' view of the sky. There is also plenty of space for a dining table that can extend to seat 10, and one of the extension's nicest touches: a large window seat that overlooks the garden.

The layout of the house is largely unchanged. At the front is the family living room, and the adjoining space – which would have been the original dining room – is now Jelena's study. A bit of rejigging and reconfiguring

The minimalist kitchen island overlooks an informal lounge area beneath the glass roof, allowing an 'uncompromised' view of the sky



The kitchen The blank white walls of the Cousins' new home, bathed in light from the glass extension, show off their art collection, including Radomir Damnjan's *The Beach and Yellow*. To appreciate the array of paintings, there is a leather Eila sofa and armchair from Habitat (habitat.co.uk) arranged around the Sax glass coffee table by Terence Woodgate for SCP (scp.co.uk) on a Designers Guild rug (designersguild.com).

The dining area The kitchen table – Andoo by Walter Knoll from Aram (aram.co.uk) – is the perfect place for doodling and drawing, perched on Ikea chairs upholstered with Marimekko oilcloth. The exuberant painting on the wall above it is by Jelena's mother, titled *The Dream*.

The study Jelena works from home at a Scrittarellio desk, by Achille Castiglioni from TwentyTwentyOne (twentytwentyone.com), with a DSW Eames Plastic Side Chair from Aram (as before), and keeps her books on design, art and architecture on the 606 Universal Shelving System by Vitsoe (vitsoe.com).



upstairs means there are now four bedrooms and two bathrooms over two floors.

The decoration is modern and simple with white walls allowing bright pops of colour to really stand out. They were also the perfect backdrop for Jelena to introduce some memories of her own childhood. When her artist mother, Olga, saw Jelena's blank white walls, she wanted her to have some of her paintings and wall sculptures, to remind her of home. Now almost every room is filled with Olga's work and pieces by her 1960s contemporaries at the Academy of Arts in Belgrade. And for the girls, it means that when they aren't playing and picnicking on the heath, they can make, draw and build surrounded by the art that Jelena grew up with.

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The living room The dove grey Charles sofa is by Antonio Citterio for B&B Italia (bebitalia.com). Vintage pieces, such as the Murano glass table lamp, contrast with contemporary classics, such as Matthew Hilton's Wing armchair, from SCP (scp.co.uk), the floor lamp Tolomeo Mega Artemide by TwentyTwentyOne (twentytwentyone.com) and a Donna Wilson knitted pouffe from SCP (as before).

The master bedroom highlights contemporary design and iconic pieces, from the Componibili bedside tables by Anna Ferrieri for Kartell (heals.co.uk), to Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chair for Knoll (conranshop.co.uk), bedside lights by Tolomeo Artemide and a collection of white vases from TwentyTwentyOne and Two Colombia Road (twocolumbiaroad.co.uk). The rug is from SCP.

Izzie's bedroom is a changing gallery of pictures and drawings that she arranges herself. The grey sofa and footstool are brightened up with Donna Wilson cushions.

Storage A Joyce cabinet by Russell Pinch (pinchdesign.com) is used to store ceramics and glassware.

