



UNITED KINGDOM

MODERN DESIGN HERITAGE HOME

Remodelling a Georgian house in a conservation area poses a challenge for homeowners. By incorporating high quality, contemporary design into a traditional building form, the De Beauvoir House is made fit for the 21st century while preserving the character of the local area.

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When the owners of this character three-storey home in Hackney, east London, needed more space to accommodate their growing family, a rear extension provided the obvious solution.

But being located in a conservation area meant that strict planning regulations are in place. Award-winning architects Cousins & Cousins focused on lightness and transparency in the new structure to minimise its visual impact, while a bespoke sculptural steel staircase creates a new heart for the home.

Extra space was formed by opening up and extending the living, dining and kitchen areas at garden level, and adding a study – which doubles as a spare bedroom – above.

The extension is supported by an exposed framework of larch glulam beams. Glued laminated timber – commonly known as glulam – is an engineered wood product that uses multiple thin timber layers and durable adhesives to form strong, structural components.

To create a large, unobstructed glass wall at the rear, the glulam beams form a Vierendeel truss – designed by specialist structural engineers – to span the full-width sliding doors that open onto the garden. This use of lightweight timber and extensive glazing received praise from the local planning department, who commented that it “reduces the visual bulk and ensures that the extension does not overwhelm the property”.

Linking the new and existing spaces, the bespoke staircase rises through a glass box that floods the area below with daylight. This dramatic centrepiece, in curved patinated sheet steel with a flush leather handrail and timber treads, contrasts sharply with the crisp white walls, and becomes the focal point for the house, unlocking the design and connecting the spaces.

Although a key feature of the extension is its transparency, the new study/bedroom space is an enclosed volume cleverly shuttered to offer privacy when needed.

External timber shutters open to give views over the garden, whilst an internal shutter onto the staircase void allows the room’s occupants to connect with the rest of the household. With both shutters closed, the room becomes a private sanctuary for study, sleep or quiet contemplation.



What makes the De Beauvoir House so successful – and can you do the same?

The demands of modern life and a growing family mean that many period homes require a re-model or update. The challenge for this family was to transform their Georgian house to suit their lifestyle whilst meeting strict planning rules. When updating an older property, here are a few ideas to steal from the De Beauvoir House:

» Create an eye-catching feature inside the house. Changes you can make to the external appearance of your home may be severely restricted, so think about ways to make a statement on the inside, such as a bespoke sculptural staircase. Other

possibilities include a double (or triple) height space, unusual or luxury finishes or a dual-aspect fireplace.

» Maximise transparency to minimise visual impact in a conservation area. Hiring an architect with experience in this field can be invaluable – the design may be modern, but a light touch and sensitive use of materials can win over the neighbours and the planning authorities.

» Choose materials and finishes that will complement both the new extension and the original structure. Continuity of floor finishes and wall treatments will tie the two together to maintain a cohesive style as you walk through the house. A limited palette and contrasting textures provide interest whilst keeping the focus on the key features.

quick facts

- » **Type of reno:** Two-storey extension to semi-detached family home
- » **When:** Completed 2017
- » **Key materials:** Exposed structural timber frame; patinated sheet steel; timber cladding; full-height glazing
- » **Key features:** : Bespoke curved steel staircase; glulam timber frame; large glazed sliding doors
- » **Eco features:** Sustainable glulam structure
- » **Best decision:** Placing the staircase inside a double-height glass box
- » **Biggest challenge:** Creating a contemporary design that would meet the approval of planning authorities in a conservation area



