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Back to front

Its tucked-away location and lush garden give this cleverly reversed house – a collaboration between the owners and Todhunter Earle – the feeling of a country retreat, but it is in fact in south London

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KITCHEN AND DINING AREA (*this page*) The resin worktops and cupboards were made by OrsiniBrewin, while the table is from Christian Liaigre. It is topped with two turquoise pots from Anthropologie and sits on a 'Fez' dhurrie from Vanderhurd. **SITTING ROOM** (*opposite*) A neutral palette retains the light and airy feel of this double-height room, which has a gallery running around three sides of it, sofas and armchairs from Flexform and a coffee table from Barn in the City. Doors on either side of the fireplace lead into the entrance hall





SITTING ROOM AND GARDEN (*both pages*) The garden, designed by Darryl Osada, is dominated by a long rill centred on the sitting room, with river birch and honey locust trees on either side of it. The garden furniture was shipped over from Restoration Hardware in the US. Full-length curtains in 'Fuji' linen from de Le Cuona hang at the windows, while ikat cushions from Yastik by Rifat Ozbek add a dash of colour



'The brief was for a beach house in the city, which is where the colour palette developed from'



ENTRANCE HALL (*both pages*) An artwork sourced from the Decorative Antiques & Textiles Fair hangs on the wall above the suspended limed oak staircase, which has lighting concealed underneath. The use of oak continues on the floors, which are from Schotten & Hansen. An antique Chinese lamp base sits on the carved wood console



OUTDOOR DINING AREA (*top left*) This area is connected to the kitchen by sliding glass doors. **MAIN BATHROOM** (*top right*) On the ground floor, this is fitted with a computerised Dornbracht 'Smart Water' system from Walton Bathrooms. **SPARE BATHROOM** (*bottom left*) The patterned tiles are from Douglas Watson Studio. **GARDEN AND ENTRANCE** (*bottom right*) The front door is reached by a flagstone path across the garden. **SPARE ROOM** (*opposite*) This first-floor bedroom has walls covered in a fabric from Langton Textiles and a bedside table from Julian Chichester



city as densely built as London is full of surprises. Take this house. With its substantial proportions, light-flooded interiors and artfully tousled garden shaded by mature trees and swathed in creepers, it could be in the country, or at least in one of the leafier outer suburbs of the Great Wen. Au contraire: it can be found in south London, though perhaps 'found' is the wrong word, as it is invisible from the street, tucked behind unremarkable rows of terraced housing.

It is the kind of site that developers dream about finding. As the house's owner explains, 'I had driven past this small, unprepossessing metal gate over the past 20 years and always wondered what was behind it. Finally, technology caught up and Google Earth revealed what was there: acres of weeds and old concrete buildings, and an ocean of potential.'

By one of those coincidences that life throws up occasionally, an estate agent friend called him a few weeks after he and his wife had sold their house in Chelsea, in search of a house with a bigger garden and garage, and asked whether he had ever wanted to live south of the river, because this site had just come up for sale. 'The site looked depressing,' the owner says. 'But it was incredibly bright and faced due south.' It also offered the chance to do something he had always wanted – 'turn a typical London house back to front and, rather than have a garden at the back, approach the house through the garden, like you do with a country house'.

Within hours of seeing the site, he had sketched out the floor plans, but to translate them into three dimensions he turned to Kate Earle of Todhunter Earle, with whom he has worked on other homes over the past 20 years. 'We understand each other's likes and dislikes well,' he says. 'She is a wonderful foil and it is great to have a final arbiter you trust when it comes to a difference of opinion.'

Kate takes up the story: 'The owner's brief was for a beach house in the city, which is where the neutral colour palette developed from. But we also wanted to bring the house and the garden as close together as possible.' As is Todhunter Earle's standard practice, each room was first visualised in the old-fashioned way, using hand-drawn perspective sketches that, Kate says, 'help us work out all the detailing, which can avoid a lot of problems later on'. The architectural work was done by BLDA, another of the owner's long-term collaborators. 'They understand my fetish with symmetry and detail,' he says. They started from scratch, as the site was completely derelict, removing hundreds of tons of concrete and all the old buildings. The new house is built against the northern boundary of the site. The principal rooms all face south, apart from the single-storey main bedroom wing that extends along the eastern side. A gravelled drive leads along the western edge to a garage at the far end of the lushly planted

garden designed by Darryl Osada, which features a long rill exactly centred on the sitting room.

The entrance hall gives an immediate sense of scale, with its suspended limed-oak staircase. Like the rest of the house, it is flooded with light, thanks to skylights above and small internal courtyards at the back. Sliding doors open onto the double-storey sitting room, which leads on one side into the kitchen. The kitchen can be extended into a sheltered outdoor dining area, while a glass-walled corridor leads to the main bedroom.

Upstairs, there are three further bedrooms, as well as a study overlooking the sitting room and garden. The whole house is cleverly planned, with precisely aligned enfilades of windows and doors, while the all-singing, all-dancing services range from rainwater harvesting to solar panels, under-floor heating and an electronic plumbing system.

For Kate, the house offered a chance to introduce bespoke design elements, including pale oak floors from Schotten & Hansen, the patterned matt tiles in the bathrooms from Douglas Watson Studio and – perhaps most impressive of all – the all-resin kitchen cupboards and worktops, made in situ by a team from OrsiniBrewin. And the owner's favourite thing? 'Ridiculous as it may seem, it is the fact that we managed to design the window at the end of the main bathroom to line up exactly with the dressing room and bedroom doorways. Most people wouldn't notice, but I find it worryingly satisfying' □

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