

Metro Property

Edited by Jayne Atherton property@ukmetro.co.uk

Edinburgh's New Town was built between 1767 and 1890 as a collection of seven new towns on a glacial plain.

Deep space find doubles home

TUCKED away in Edinburgh's New Town World Heritage site is a conversion with a difference.

Unlike most conversions, which involve giving a derelict property a new lease of life, transforming a large building into apartments or increasing space in the home by adding rooms in the loft or knocking through into the garage, this one involved creating a two-bedroom maisonette by connecting a B-listed mews workshop vertically with the redundant space underneath.

And it was no ordinary space either – not a cellar or basement but a dark vault with a coal chute as the only source of light.

The complexity and ingenuity involved in designing and creating this stunning contemporary conversion were recently recognised at the Scottish Home Awards, where, against tough competition, WTArchitecture won awards in two categories – for Conversion of the Year and Architectural Excellence.

'The building was originally a silversmith's workshop on the ground

By **Andrea Dean**

floor, with a flat above it,' explains William Tunnell, principal of WTArchitecture.

'There was a heavy brick vault underneath, which had probably been used for storage, but there was no connection vertically to the ground floor.'

'The challenge was to connect the two areas, and the vault had to have light, air and safe access.'

'We took the coal chute as a starting point, and cut away deep openings into the vault and added light chutes for light and ventilation.'

As the spaces to the back and side of the building were in separate ownership, the new openings had to be made on the listed street frontage.

The original coal chute is now a window, and another, identical window was fitted under the adjacent ground floor window to maintain balance and proportion. Although the main sash and case windows were restored, the new light chutes were fitted with contemporary aluminium windows, and this modern theme is continued inside.

The amount of usable floor area has

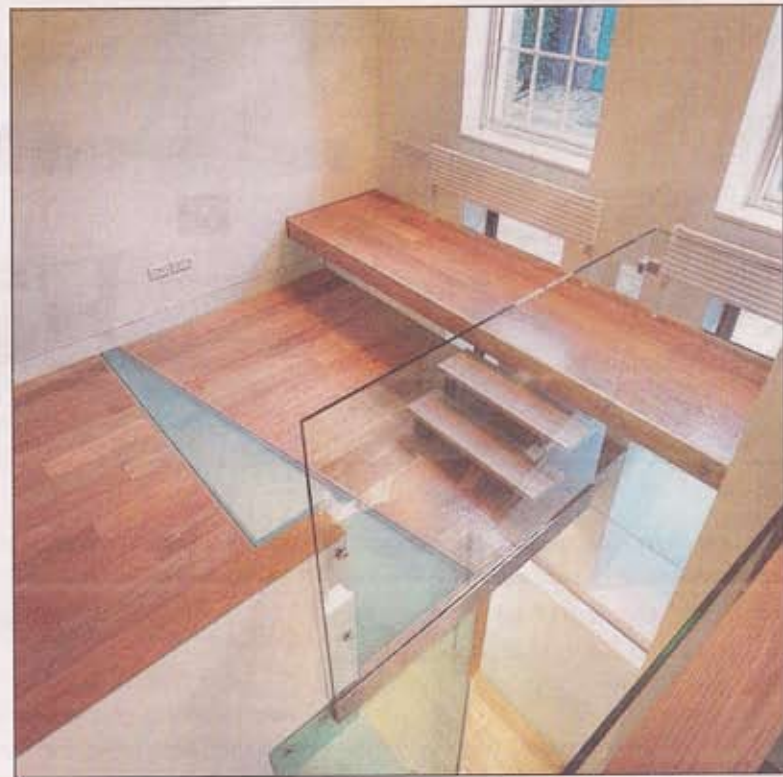
more than doubled, from 35 square metres at ground level to 75 square metres across the two floors, and the property has two bedrooms and a bathroom in the vault, with an open-plan living area, kitchen and entrance above.

Glass floors and balustrades, aided by strategically-placed mirrors, help to maximise light and enhance the feeling of space, while exposed brickwork in the subterranean rooms contrasts dramatically with the modern fittings and serves as a reminder of the building's history.

'It's a very unusual project in that we carved it out of nothing, and the space is now more contemporary,' says Mr Tunnell.

The owners, who live nearby, plan to use it as guest accommodation, but incorporating a small kitchen and bathroom means that it could be a sellable, standalone property.

'Although we're used to tricky sites, we had done nothing like this before and it was extremely challenging as it was very small, vertical, and listed, and involved cutting into the vault. But all went well and we feel we've unlocked the building's potential.'



The vault: By connecting the spaces, a bright living area has opened up