



# Bridge to the past

**I**MAGINE HOW bad it's going to be, and then multiply that by five," reflects architect William Tunnell when recalling the building project that dramatically transformed the terraced house he shares with his wife Juliette and daughters Talitha, 3, and Fionn, 1, in South Queensferry near Edinburgh. "My advice to clients when they're tackling a project is always: if you can, move out," he adds.

And if you can't? "As an architect, I think it's important to go through that process when you expect clients to do the same," agrees William. "Although, in retrospect, I can see how extreme it was..."

William and Juliette, a university lecturer, first viewed the three-storey C-listed property in 1999, having been drawn from Edinburgh to South Queensferry by the town's scenic location overlooking the Firth of Forth. Set back off the main street within an elevated terrace of houses – with each as individual and charming as the last – it isn't hard to understand why the couple were sold on the property from the start, even though the house needed work.

"The place had a lovely feel, although the inside was just this jumble of rooms, and the further down the house you went, the more vision was required for what it could become," recalls William.

Constructed in the 18th century as a single-storey building between two existing gables, the upper floor was

added later, with the property eventually being split into two. Locals evacuated the area during the Second World War for fear of bombing threats to the Forth Bridge (the house is positioned between the rail and road bridges, with striking views to both). During this time the building was apparently used by the military police and by the end of the war it was in a sorry state of disrepair, with subsequent owners tackling the refurbishment to varying degrees.

Although William had formed provisional plans for the building at the outset, the couple lived in the house for four months before starting work, during which time his ideas evolved considerably, particularly as more accurate surveys suggested more efficient ways to carry out the work. The aim was to re-configure the three storeys, creating a bathroom, dining and kitchen space on the ground level, with two bedrooms on the first floor and a main living space on the upper floor, bathed in light from the windows to both the front and rear.

As William says, the project was not only fairly extreme in the level of work required – particularly within a relatively tight and compact plan – but also backbreaking for William as he took a hands-on role alongside the builders. The entire ground level of the building was gutted, with the upper floors at one point being held up by 20 props, and with nothing but a dust-filled void below, from which the team lugged every lump of stone, wood and plaster to a skip in the steeply terraced garden. ➤

➤ It wasn't the architect's first encounter with the physical demands of the job, having rebuilt a derelict croft on the Hebridean isle of Coll during his student days, and indeed he relished the experience. However, for Juliette, who had never lived through anything like it before, the project was a sharp learning curve. The dust was, "Horrendous, as it sifted through the floorboards upstairs every day, and it was difficult keeping just one room we could live in," she says. A comment that takes on greater resonance when you consider that Talitha was born while the work was still in its final throes.

However, the couple have no regrets, as today's interior offers so much more than one might anticipate from the traditionally charming facade. William has successfully blended contemporary with period references that reflect the building's history. On the ground floor, one enters the dining-room to find tongue-and-groove-pannelled walls, combined with antique furniture and framed antique prints. Meanwhile a section of the wall along one side folds back to access the modern kitchen, which offers a sharp contrast to the dining-room's traditional sea-green palette in its bold citrus.

The panelling in the dining-room was based on similar tongue-and-groove detailing found both within the house and in local shops – "so it was original to the area as much as the property itself", says William. When it came to the kitchen, he combined MDF doors and shelving with Ikea units, solid timber worktops and diffused lighting care of fluorescent strips enclosed behind Perspex.

However, the highlight here is the frame-less glass corner that opens into the rear courtyard, pulling light deep into the space. William credits the structural engineers, David Narro Associates, and the contractors, Inscape Joinery, as the visual simplicity belies the technicality of the design, where the timber framed door – the only evident supporting structure – simply pivots out of the way.

The bathroom echoes the modernity of the kitchen in its mix of cherry-wood detailing – used also on the shower screen, the inside of which is clad in waterproof melamine – with contemporary fittings by Aston Matthews. Meanwhile the couple's first-floor bedroom offers a simple calm space, with white walls and a solid cherry-wood bed, which William designed and made himself, along with a seascape painting by Josep Pla.

Climbing up the steep and narrow staircase to the top-floor living-room, one's eye is drawn immediately to the contrasting views that sweep up the height of the garden to the rear, and to the Forth bridges at the front. The first glimpse of the living space is granted from the stairwell, as William ingeniously constructed a wall of open shelving to allow views between both. "So your eye has this idea of the space going beyond this room," he says. The latter's warm ochre walls offer a glowing contrast to the cooler blue of the shelving and window seat, not to mention the crisp white walls of the living space.

"This room is the closest we'll get to being minimalist, and it's still far from being that," says William. "For me it was about trying to balance the number of calm, more adult spaces with the more visually stimulating family spaces such as the kitchen.

"In terms of the way we live, we use every space in the house, but in terms of the spaces I enjoy most, it would be the garden and this living-room. It's good for the soul, which is as much to do with what's happening outside as anything inside," he reflects. □

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