

# Capital gains

Conventional on the outside, but contemporary on the inside is how an American City trader has chosen to build his house. Amanda Baillieu reports

If you have money and want to spend a large chunk of it on creating a contemporary London house, where would you go? Clerkenwell possibly (which features the work of Piers Gough, Paxton Locher), Hampstead (Rick Mather) or Camden Town (David Wilde), maybe. But a mews in Belgravia, probably not.

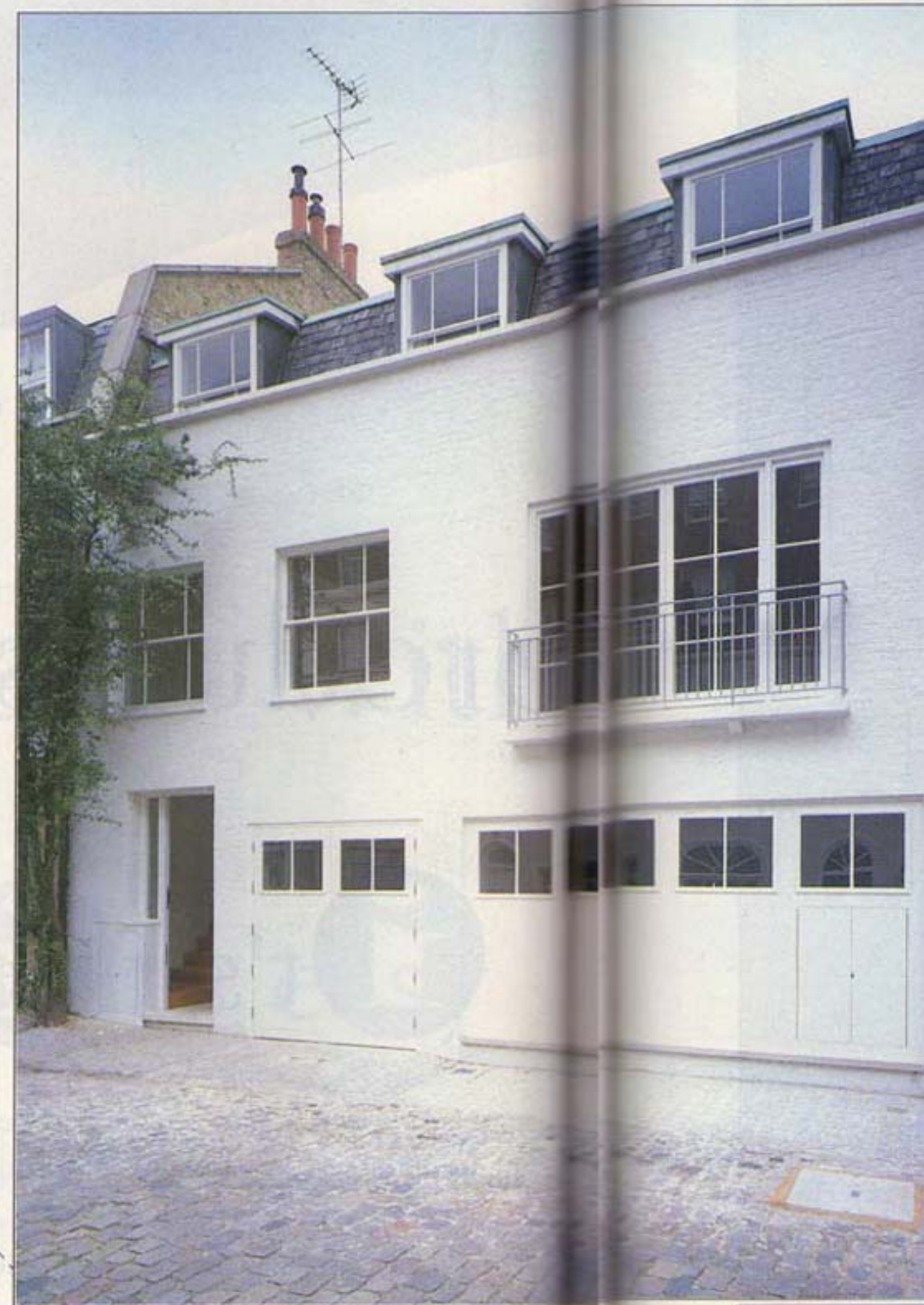
The entire district of Belgravia is a conservation area and much of it is still owned by the Grosvenor Estate, which is responsible for the dominance of magnolia paint and black railings. In contrast to the hubbub of the nearby King's Road the area is almost eerily quiet; stylistically it is marooned somewhere between Peter Jones and Designers Guild.

For the £300,000 purchase price and a further £430,000 building work the client, a wealthy American banker, could have commissioned a new house in one of London's more

vibrant and interesting quarters. But it was precisely the combination of prestige and privacy that attracted him to the area.

The client's architectural taste is however more adventurous, reflected in the list of those he interviewed which included David Chipperfield, John Pawson, and Matthew Priestman/Phillip Tefft (an American architect working in London). He finally decided on the latter pairing – a practice that does not yet have the same high profile as the other two but is well on the way to catching up.

Tackling such a strong and established form – the property (two mews houses which had been knocked into one by a previous owner) – was complicated by planning restrictions. The property could not be altered externally and an existing internal garage also had to be kept. The only new additions are new roof lights, a new front door and the replacement

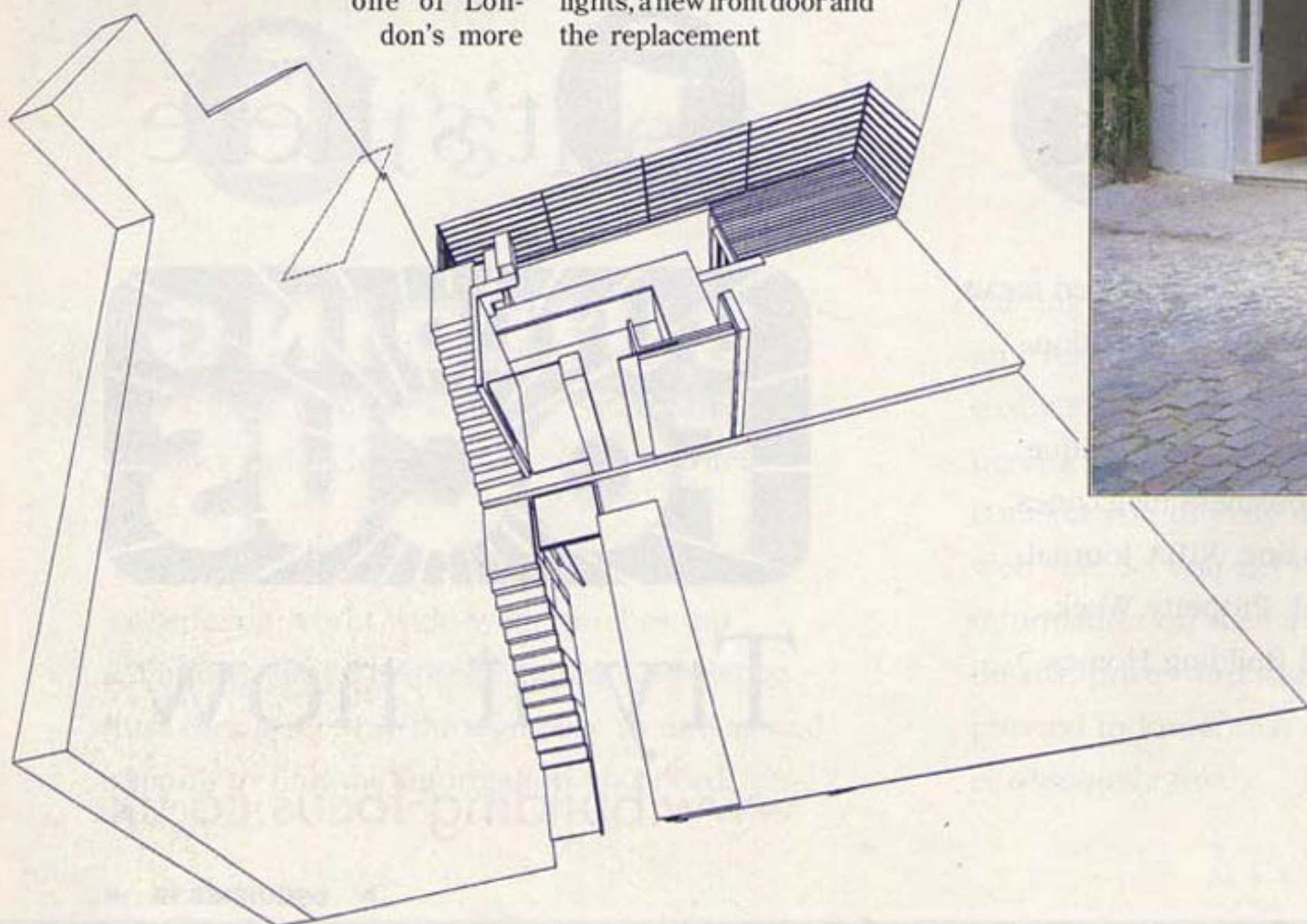


From the outside there is no indication that the double-fronted mews house (above) has undergone such a radical internal transformation (left), of which the new staircase (right) is the most dramatic intervention.

The oak staircase ties the three levels together and is animated by natural and artificial light.



PHOTOS: PETER APRAHAMIAN



The living room overlaps the stair and is connected perpendicularly to the dining area with a terrace beyond.



The generous entertaining space at first-floor level has an integral screen for video projection with steel mesh speakers in the space once occupied by the chimney breast.

of the timber framed windows. The traditional plan – with living area on the ground floor and bedrooms upstairs – has been reversed with guest/children's bedrooms on the ground level, living/dining area and kitchen on first floor and private rooms – a study, master bedroom and bathroom – on the second floor.

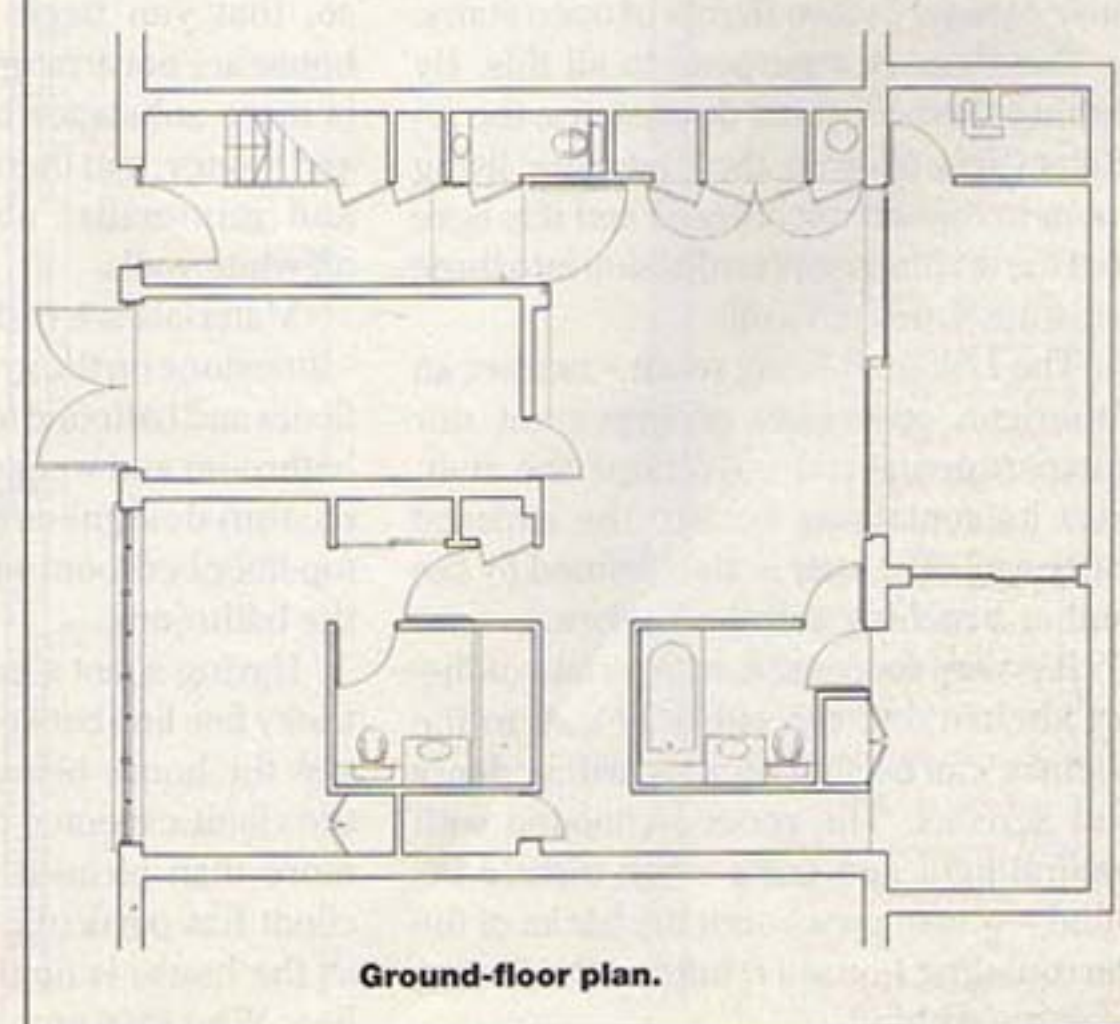
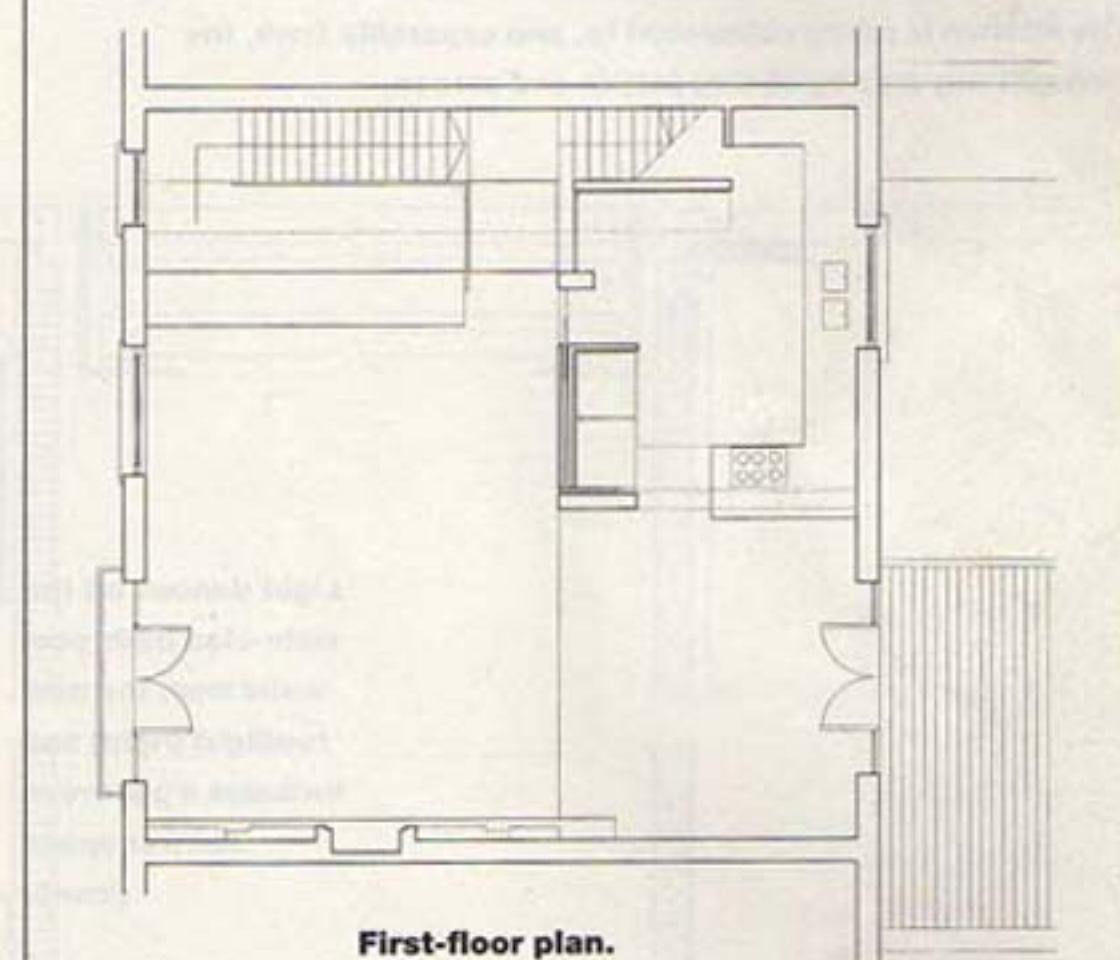
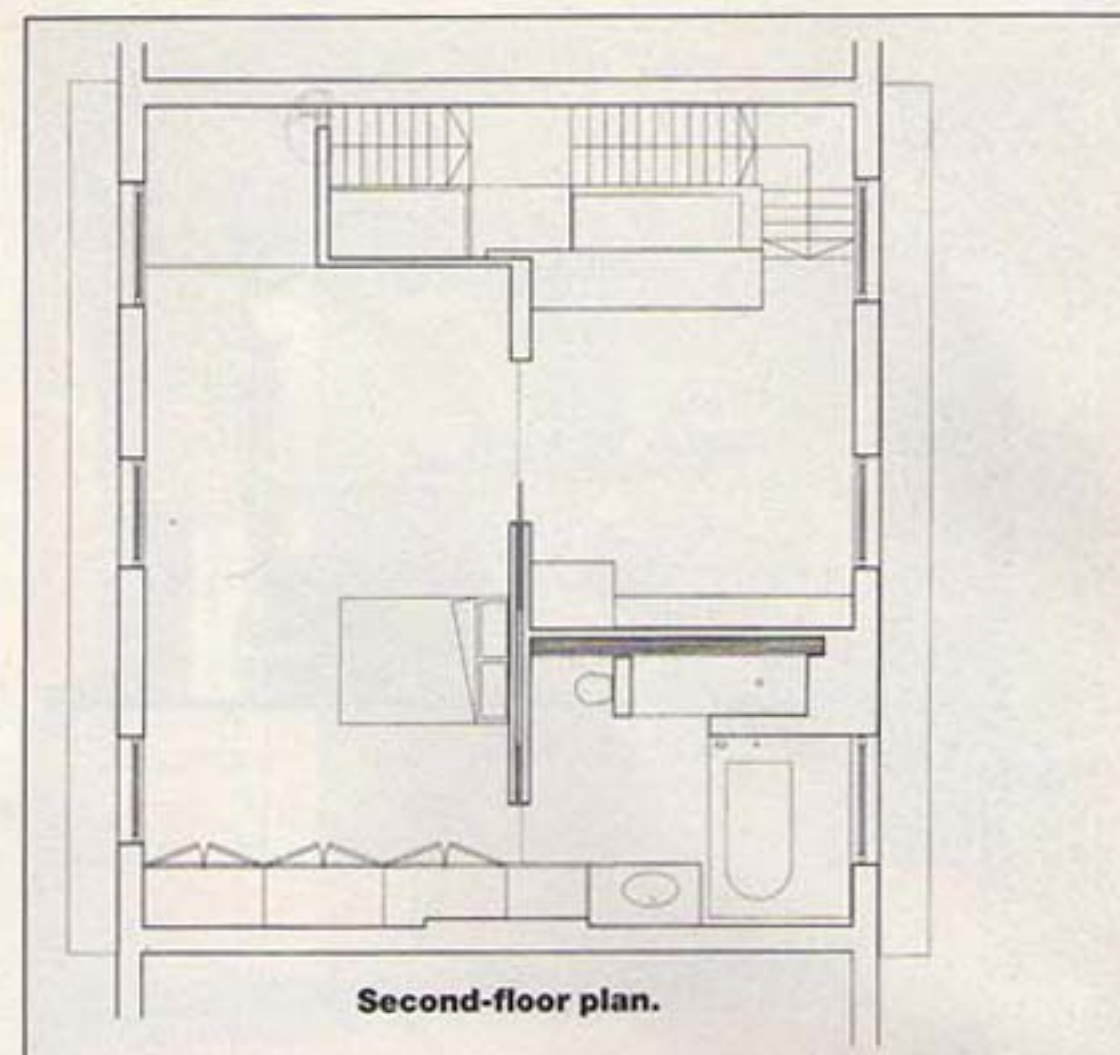
The building's existing volume – both its width and depth can still be clearly made out – has been so broken down and played with that it takes a moment to adjust to the new spaces that sit so satisfactorily within the old ones.

The three levels are tied together by an open 'scala regia' stair that is pushed up against the party wall but is deliberately generous and open, revealing the full height of the house and animated by natural and artificial light.

Conveniently, practical considerations – the stair takes a sharp turn to the right – met the clients' demands for privacy on the second floor. So while visitors are given generous glimpses of the first floor from the hall, the private suite is tantalisingly out of sight.

Not so the ground floor arrangement that kicks in from the threshold. A narrowish corridor with cupboards and toilet tucked under the stairs leads into a sitting room and off from these are three bedrooms, each with their own bathroom.

Practically these bedrooms are a bit of a conundrum. As guest bedrooms they work fine, but as children's bedrooms (the client has kept the rooms deliberately unresolved) are less satisfactory simply because children – unless teenagers – do





The kitchen is partly connected to, and separable from, the dining/living area by sliding panels and screen.



Light dances off the slate-clad bathroom walls from the new rooflight (right) and includes a generous shower space (inset).



not take kindly to being separated from their parents by two flights of open stairs.

But there is a purpose to all this. By putting the bedrooms downstairs, the architect has allowed the first floor living room to remain uncluttered and it is here that the architect's strict division into three separate zones pays off.

The L-shaped living room – neither an American open-plan arrangement nor compartmentalised – overlaps the stair, with its containing surface the exposed party wall. The stair is also defined by the timber benching and the kitchen.

It is very successful, with a state-of-the-art kitchen that can either belong to the room or can be shut off with sliding doors and screens. The room is flooded with natural light and has a small terrace beyond – whose views onto the backs of the surrounding houses reinforce the feeling of space within.

And it is all so simple, deceptively so, that you begin to wonder why all house are not arranged like this. But there is more substance to it than just fashion and money, and there is nothing monastic and minimalist about it, except the off-white walls.

Materials are restrained but luxurious – limestone on the ground floor, oak upper floors and battened top ceiling; slate upper bathroom and wenge timber benching. A custom-designed wardrobe links the top-floor bedroom with the final privacy of the bathroom.

Having spent a long time treading that tricky fine line between how the architects saw the house being best used, and how the client expected to live, both sides are more than pleased with the result. The client has particular reason to celebrate, as the house is on the market for £3 million. Who says architecture doesn't pay?

#### CREDITS

**Architect** Matthew Priestman Architects/Phillip Tefft (Andy Anderson, Donald Matheson, Matthew Priestman, Phillip Tefft and Graham Williams)  
**Structural engineer** Trigram Partnership  
**Services engineer** Blair Thompson  
**Main contractor** Stephens & James

#### Cost Specification

Floor area, inc rear yard/terrace	320m <sup>2</sup>
Total cost	£430,000
Cost per m <sup>2</sup>	£1,343

#### Costs

Preliminaries	£26,000
Stripping out/demolitions	£18,000
Structure and slabs	£33,000
Rooflights and external joinery	£35,000
Services	£65,000
Internal walls and linings	£45,000
Floor and wall finishes	£58,000
Kitchen and bathroom fittings	£65,000
Joinery and miscellaneous	£85,000

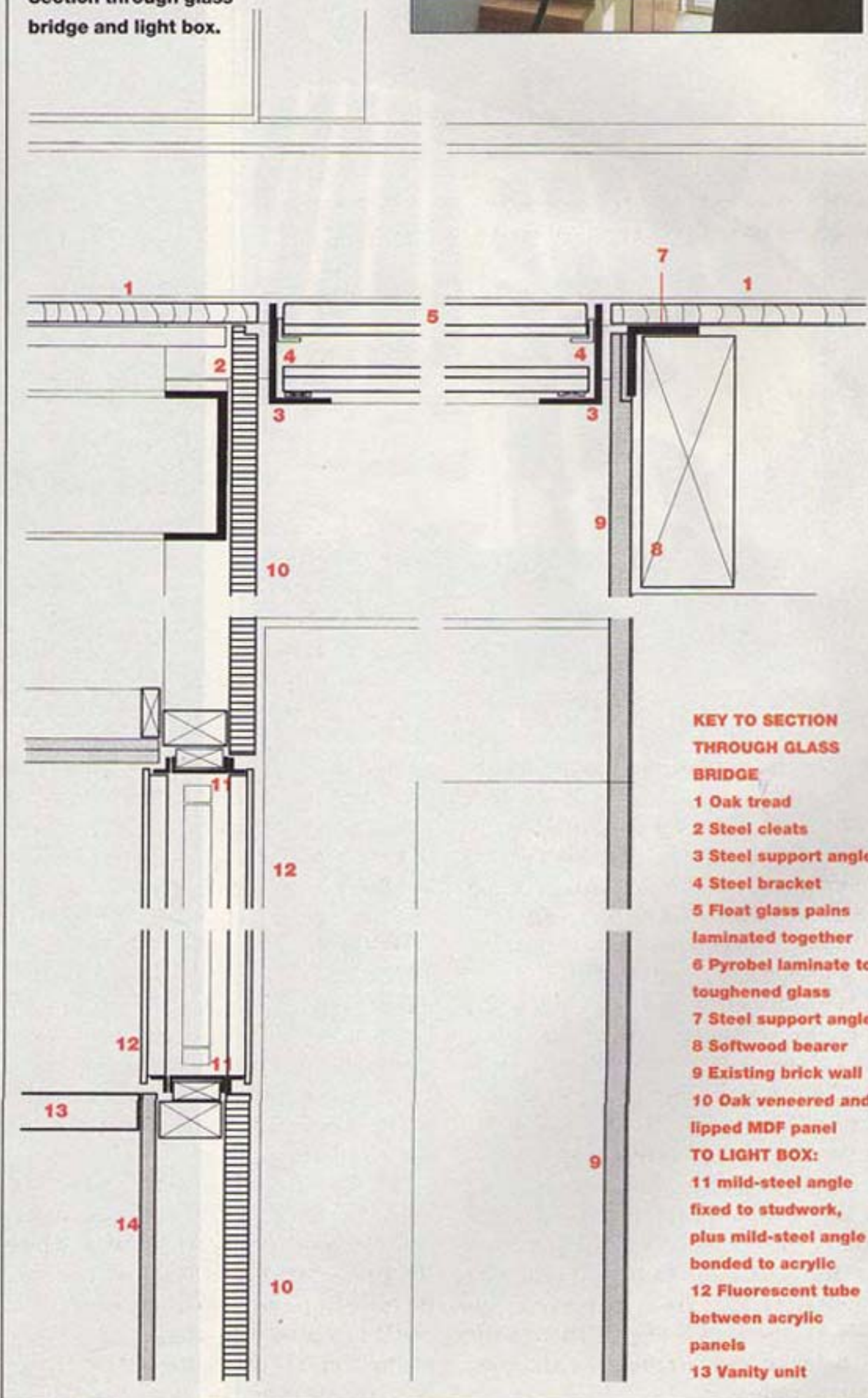
#### Specifications

Kitchen units by Bulthaup (reader enquiry no 401). Stone flooring by Paris Ceramics (enquiry no 402). Stone tiling to main bathroom by Stone Productions (enquiry no 403). Structural glass by Firmis (enquiry no 404). Joinery by Arden Hodges (enquiry no 405). Light control and hi-fi systems by Listening Rooms (enquiry no 406). Bathroom fittings by Max Pike (enquiry no 407). Painting and decorating by Guy Anderson (enquiry no 408)

Light penetrates deep into the home by means of a glass bridge and acrylic-glass light box (right).



Section through glass bridge and light box.



#### KEY TO SECTION THROUGH GLASS BRIDGE

- 1 Oak tread
- 2 Steel cleats
- 3 Steel support angle
- 4 Steel bracket
- 5 Float glass panes laminated together
- 6 Pyrobel laminate to toughened glass
- 7 Steel support angle
- 8 Softwood bearer
- 9 Existing brick wall
- 10 Oak veneered and lipped MDF panel
- 11 mid-steel angle fixed to studwork, plus mid-steel angle bonded to acrylic
- 12 Fluorescent tube between acrylic panels
- 13 Vanity unit