



Peckham Courtyard

Peckham, London

Architect : Unagru Architecture Urbanism
Structural Engineer : Structures Made Easy
Contractor : Rimi Renovations
Photographer : Sara Moiola

Completion Year : 2021
Area : 65 sqm
Budget : < £200,000

Peckham Courtyard is a refurbishment and extension of a Victorian, end of terrace house in Peckham, London. The clients wanted to create a better connection to the sky and garden. Our design brings a new relationship to the internal space, linking the front and rear of the home and connecting the interior space with the garden. The project is another step in our research on space continuity, compression and expansion.

The Project

We met the clients a few years ago to discuss potential works for their flat. They had since moved to an end of terrace Victorian house in Camberwell. They still had their two cats and one child and a second coming! The house has deep, slightly wild gardens. The top floor was incredibly bright, thanks to a recent extension. The first floor was practical and straightforward, which suited the family. The ground floor was more problematic. The kitchen was constrained by a small side garden and dark because of a wide chimney stack on the rear facade. The ceiling was low, the storage was insufficient, and there was hardly any space for a little dining table. The large chimney breast also affected the relationship with the garden was not great. The rest of the ground floor was likewise fragmented and dark, with two additional rooms and a tight corridor between the entrance and the kitchen.

Given their current and the coming family situation, the clients stressed the importance of having a utility space, generous storage (among other things, to fit an unfolded buggy!), and an ample dining kitchen area on the ground floor. They also wanted the house to feel airy and bright and improve the relationship with the garden.

We prepared a set of layout options revolving around the balance between storage and an open layout. It soon became clear that the clients and we aligned on the idea of a fluid open space wrapping around a generous service and storage space in the middle and darkest area of the house. The services area would contain a WC, shoes and coat storage, a laundry room, and at least one unfolded buggy with accessories.

Once we had found the right concept, we worked on modelling the service area to avoid it becoming too overbearing. We all wanted the people living in the house to feel free to move. So the shape of the services area started to change while we addressed the other areas of the large open plan. Slowly, the project developed into a sequence of spaces (no doors and no corridors is one of our rules) designed by a continuous strip of joinery that guides us from the entrance to the garden. Now we had a design strategy, a concept and a programme we were all excited about! The joinery included the new kitchen, the worktop, the crockery cabinet on the back wall (with a hidden cat flap), the semi-transparent entrance bookshelf and the TV cabinet. Working with joinery allows us to play with colours, transparencies and relations. The clients chose the colour palette to match their preferred wood finish.

The planning and tendering stages were quite smooth. We found a builder that fit our budget and proceeded to begin the work. We had to solve just two issues. The first one: a neighbour did not like our proposal for the side wall, at the end of his garden. The clients listened to their neighbour's requests and asked us to design

alternative finishes. They then agreed on the timeframes and methodology and instructed the builder to consult with the neighbour at every step. As a result, the construction could finally progress swiftly.

The second issue was a global pandemic, disrupting supplies and labour. The contractor did all he could to keep the site running, at times carrying on working alone, but it was clear the agreed timeframes would not be met. The clients were incredible at juggling the complexity, moving to parents' and friends' places (while expecting!), were very patient and made decisions on the fly when we had to make changes to speed up the construction. With their help, the works were practically complete when the second child was born, and they could move in with some discomfort, but nothing compared to many others.

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