



Oswyth Road  
Camberwell, London

Architect : Unagru Architecture Urbanism  
Structural Engineer : Structures Made Easy  
Contractor : Rimi Renovations  
Joinery : Progetto 172  
Photographer : French + Tye

Completion Year : 2022  
Area : 53 sqm  
Budget : < £500,000

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The project's aim was to extend the ground floor to provide more space for the dining area and refurbish the rest of the floor to create a coherent whole from the entrance to the garden.

The project was featured in the Open House Festival 2022, with great success.

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The Backstory

The house was a very comfortable and extensive Victorian terrace with several bedrooms, thanks to a previous roof extension. The ground floor, however, was excessively fragmented and dark. The kitchen dining area, in particular, was way too tight for the needs of a modern family: the ceiling was very low, the kitchen had no worktop at all, and the dining table was squeezed inside the bay with a small bench. The garden is split into two levels; starting at the kitchen level, it climbs up about 1.2 metres or eight steps. The raised level provided a brighter and sunnier garden and a feeling of enclosure in the lower kitchen and dining area.

The clients, Euge, Erin and six-year-old Luca, are all foodies and music lovers. The parents have a PhD and work in the culture industry and academia. The couple loves to entertain and are great cooks, as we've tested several times. So the kitchen and dining area were the centre of their life at home. Their current kitchen setup did not allow enough space for the full potential of their talent. Little Luca is a very active child who loves to spend his weekends playing in the garden with his friends. The front of the house was sometimes converted into a projection room by hanging a screen in between the front and rear sitting rooms. So after living for several years and making some improvements on the top floors, the family decided to progress with the extension project. Unfortunately, with the pandemic and all the related disruptions, construction prices were relatively high, and contractors were hard to find. The work with the clients was aimed from the outset at finding the right balance between budget and brief while managing the process strategically to secure a reasonable price.

## The Project

The brief and design were tailored to find the right proportions for the extension, which needed to be large enough to fit the new kitchen and dining areas comfortably but not so large as to become too expensive or overbearing on the compact garden, which was one of the clients' concerns. Together, we tested several options to arrive at the optimal depth. The generous setback creates an intimate courtyard at kitchen level and comfortable access to the garden steps. The extension is finished in dark grey bricks with dark mortar and crowned with a roof light box-up clad in charred wood planks. The dark construction declares itself against the white-rendered ground floor finish. To elevate the sense of openness and brightness, the side extension is almost entirely glazed with a new pivot door to the garden and a huge roof light that both fit into the rooms' geometric composition.

By extending the kitchen and dining area into the side garden, we created new access to the rear of the house through the former rear sitting room window. The new space in the middle of the house is transformed into a service area with a small WC, coat storage and access to the cellar. The compact kitchen and dining area are achieved through bespoke joinery and seating furniture that we designed with the clients and ordered from Italy. The front sitting room is opened to create a larger and more comfortable space, with more direct access to the entrance, improved insulation and windows, and new finishes. From an interior design point of view, we had lots of fun interpreting and redesigning the client's references which ranged from classical Victorian to early 20th century Bauhaus and a lot later Art Deco influences. The front sitting rooms maintain a classical taste, with herringbone parquet flooring and muted decoration: a very subtle grey band replaces skirting boards and cornices, resulting in a lighter feeling. Instead, the kitchen and dining room are an 'explosion' of colour and geometry with black and white joinery, multicoloured floor and walls. The strong geometry of the composition refers to both Bauhaus and the Art Deco examples we discussed with Erin.

The result is a visually open-plan space that can be broken in two with a pocket door separating the front from the rear and light cascading from the roof lights into the middle of the room. The kitchen faces the garden and acts as the centre of the house. The dining room is carved into a deep niche at the back of the house, inviting people to sit close to one another for long conversations and long dinners with close friends. The front rooms have a more flexible layout that allows ample space for the clients' furniture inherited from their parents, Euge's piano and Erin's books. A bespoke cabinet hides an electrically activated projector screen that allows converting the rear of the house into a media room.