



## The Boat and Pavilion

Teddington, London

Architect : Unagru Architecture Urbanism  
Structural Engineer : Structures Made Easy  
Contractor : Gavazzan Building Ltd  
Photographer : Stale Eriksen

Completion Year : 2016  
Area : 180 sqm  
Budget : < £200,000

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The clients, a family of four plus one cat, approached us to design the extension of their ground floor and improve the relationship from the house to the garden. The client wanted to create an overall feeling of light and freedom in their home, that open plan spaces afford, particularly when the design is enriched with a feeling of movement and several points of interest throughout the dwelling.

Since completion of the project the family now really enjoys their home, especially on long weekends spent together with the sliding doors open to the private garden. The natural light filters in through the roof-light, reflects every change of the weather and affecting the atmosphere inside. The feeling is one of brightness and happiness, especially when paired with excellent food and wine (which we can testify to!).

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### The Backstory

Although the client was related to our founder, Davide, there wasn't any hesitation on either side to work together on this personal project; they shared a common Italian heritage, a love for light, the sea and sailing, these common threads have helped shape the design process.

By spending time together at their house, describing their current layout and aspirations, we developed the brief and the main ideas for the home. Together, we re-imagined the whole experience of the house, focusing on an idea of compression and expansion of space.

The house had previously been refurbished with taste about fifteen years earlier, and the clients wanted to retain part of its features. However the spaces felt constrained and fragmented, with a very narrow kitchen tucked behind the stair, an extremely tight entrance and no place to leave coats and shoes— a very unpractical condition for a family with two teenage children who love the outdoors!

From the outset, we decided that the extension was the perfect opportunity to incorporate all the service areas that the family needed, allowing these to be centrally hidden and so offering the opportunity to open up the rest of the house.

After the exciting design stages, we were thrilled to go out for tenders. That's when two major challenges came out. The first, and possibly to most critical was related to budget. After meeting three builders, the client clearly preferred one of them, who was 10% higher than the lowest bidder, and about 2% higher than the second-best. The overall cost was about 5% more than anticipated, making the total difference about 15%. At this point the client had to decide whether to stretch the budget, or opt for a builder he did not trust entirely.

We worked together on both the design and the finishes and agreed on a new, tweaked strategy for the finishes: no compromises on the quality of floors, windows or stone worktops and rationalising all other finishes. The idea

we took forward was to have only one main 'design' element for each space: one beautiful light, one bathroom accessory etc., and the rest would be the best we could afford with a very tight budget.

The second move was to make a minor change to the roof design, to slightly reduce its volume and cost. We had to submit a planning amendment and get it approved in record time to avoid delaying the works and adding to the clients' renting expenses. The clients' strategy worked: after reducing the costs significantly, they decided to increase the budget to cover the remaining difference and appoint the builder they felt most comfortable with.

The hard work was well worth it. After overcoming several other construction challenges, as is typical on all sites, the clients have their dream home/boat. The house is always bright: the roof light and rear doors let in so much light that we can immediately perceive every change in the weather: it's like being outside but in a controlled and comfortable form. The kitchen is a welcoming space, with everything in its place and with the light flowing in from the garden. Light from the front roof light brightens the entrance, and the splashes of bright yellow colour make for a happy beginning of the day and return home.

When we last visited, the doors to the garden were completely open, letting the breeze in. Sitting in the rear room felt like being on a boat, with its deck floating on the grass. The children and Goggy the cat, were playing in and out of the garden. We had lunch (an incredible mix of Italian and Thai) in the dining area, tucked between the kitchen and the rear sliding doors and lit by the massive roof light. Then we had coffee in the sitting area at the end of the garden while the children played on the lawn or watched TV in the front snug room. Our coats were tucked away in the cloakroom, and the kitchen mess was hidden behind the curved wall, so we could enjoy the serenity of the space without distractions.

## The Project

The clients approached us asking to design the extension of the ground floor and to improve the relationship to the garden. The house had been refurbished with taste about fifteen years earlier, and the clients wanted to retain part of its character. By spending time together at their house we developed the brief and the main ideas for the home.

## Layouts and Main Spaces

The main entrance and the kitchen were two crucial areas to the design. The entrance, as the initial introduction to the home, needed to be a welcoming space, with room to greet people into the home and with additional space to get rid of everyday items such as coats and shoes.

The first design move has been widening the entrance hall, including access to service WC and wardrobe; daylight cascades in from above and reflects on a warm, welcoming yellow wall and ceiling. The view to the rest of the ground floor is partially blocked by an expectedly curved wall (a boat?) and a freestanding element.

As you advance into the home, the curved wall pushes us towards the centre of the house. From here, both the ceiling height and the brightness drive us towards the garden on one side and the snug room on the other side. The curve wall hides the kitchen, now placed at the centre of the layout.

For the kitchen layout the clients preferred an enclosed kitchen, or one that could be closed off when it was practical or they were receiving guests. The resolution of the kitchen was probably the most complex design challenge of the project: how do we design a large enough kitchen to feel welcoming and practical without boxing off the ground floor layout? How do we create a closed kitchen, set away from all windows, but still bright and connected to the rest of the house? The solution was a hybrid kitchen behind a curved wall.

The curve softens the effect on the ground floor, actually enhancing the sense of flow. Adding two doors (the one inside the curved wall was quite a challenge!) enables one to walk through the room, making it utterly integral to the rest of the ground floor; finally, the translucent sliding door facing the garden allows light in at all times. The kitchen can also be closed entirely if needed, to contain smells or hide clutter, much to the clients' great satisfaction.

As we advance further into the house, the curved wall pushes us towards the centre of the home. From here, both the ceiling height and the brightness drive us towards the garden on one side and the snug room on the other side.

The extension room (The Pavilion) is the new main dining and sitting space, directly overlooking the garden. It, of course, had to be shaped as reversed hull from a boat. The roof pitched on all four sides is cut at the top to let light filter in from above, enhancing the room's height, with light coming from the sky and from the rear, glazed opening to the garden. The glazed doors had to incorporate a cat flap in the largest glass pane, for Goggy the cat to enter and exit freely.