

# TURNED AROUND

Giles and Heidi Thompson's sensitive renovation and extension of a Victorian villa involved some impressively radical solutions ▶

**Details** Renovation and extension, Somerset, May 2009 – May 2010  
**Project Cost** £250,000 (£1,111/m<sup>2</sup>) **Designer** Designscape Architects

Words: Jason Orme Photography: Jeremy Phillips



**A new entrance**  
 A dramatic stone, cedar-clad and glazed extension forms a new entrance to the house, which had been extended and altered many times since being built in the Victorian era (see 'before' shot). A huge amount of excavation took place to create a level parking area out of this former 'top' garden





For Giles and Heidi Thompson, the purchase of The Fosse, situated in the quiet backwater of Batheaston, Somerset, was a case of heart ruling head. “We absolutely fell in love with it,” explains Heidi, “but we couldn’t see how we’d use it as a family home.”

The problem with the detached house was not its site — indeed it enjoyed an elevated view over the town and splendid gardens, particularly to the front, which really set off its main formal front elevation. Nor was it the house’s Victorian-built core, which was a picture in period double-front formality outside and oozing with character inside. The issues the house faced mainly revolved around a series of unfortunate additions, alterations and ‘improvements’ that it had suffered in the century-and-a-half since being started.

Upon purchasing the property and, to be frank, not really knowing what to do with it, Giles and Heidi



**Fresh spaces**  
The new entrance (1), situated at the former ‘rear’ of the house, features a dramatic double-height space with lots of glass – including balustrading (2) – to maximise light flow. The rubble-stone wall blends inside and out. Further inside the light, open interiors continue, with a bright white gloss kitchen (3), which the Thompsons created by dressing up standard carcasses with spray-lacquered doors, and light-coloured range (from Mercury) that purposefully signal the new-built part of the house — this space was formerly a dated lean-to





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engaged local architectural practice Designscape to identify and address the key problems. “Designscape’s director, Chris Mackenzie, reckoned there were several issues,” explains Heidi. “First of all, put simply, the old house was falling apart — particularly the side lean-to extension. It was completely uninhabitable. Secondly, the previous alterations and additions had introduced several dark corridors into the house that needed to be dealt with. And lastly, the house felt like it was facing the wrong way. So the brief was simple,” she laughs: “Make it useable, and make it a family home.”

Chris takes up the story: “The key concept we decided on was to reverse the roles of the house by excavating the rear north-facing garden and moving the entrance to this side of the house. This would create a front courtyard to receive visitors and vehicles, whilst allowing the elegant south (formerly front) façade and garden to become a private sanctuary for the family. The removal of this top garden also afforded the opportunity to introduce daylight into the north of the property, as well as level access from the highway.”

So the most noticeable change to the house is the alteration to the north-facing rear elevation. “We wanted to design something that signalled that this was the start of a new era for the house,” says Chris, “and also introduce lots of light into the property as a whole, but something overly contemporary would

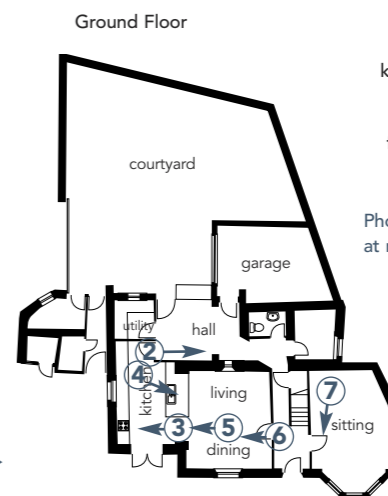
**The ‘replacement’ extension**  
An existing lean-to extension, which was closed off from the existing house, has been upgraded and added to. It’s at a slightly lower level, enabling the island counter to be used more comfortably, and features underfloor heating



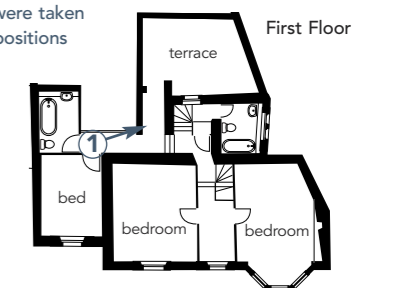
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## High-Volume Living

The Thompsons have created an open plan kitchen/living area in what was formerly an old lean-to, with a further self-contained sitting room and utility spaces on the ground floor. However, the real wow-factor is the double-height entrance hall. The first and second floor (not shown) provide five bedrooms.



Photographs were taken at numbered positions







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have jarred. We wanted to maintain a strong relationship between the new addition and the original house, so we used complementary materials — including a continuous rubble Bath-stone wall (much of the stone was saved from the original building) that wraps around the courtyard and continues into the new entrance hall.”

Unusually for a modern-day remodelling/extension scheme, Giles and Heidi’s project didn’t add any additional space — indeed it actually reduced the floor area of the house as bought (the only aspect of the project that needed planning approval was the works to form the new courtyard). This was much more about making better use of the existing space and opening things up — and much in evidence in the new side extension, which replaces and improves upon a rather ill-conceived lean-to. This side extension now houses a fantastic new kitchen space that is open to a dining/sitting area.

Elsewhere, Giles and Heidi undertook a programme of structural and cosmetic renewal of the original Victorian part of the building. Damp was coming in

**Existing house improved**

The existing Victorian core of the house has undergone impressive and sensitive improvement. The wide-plank oak flooring (7) is from Interior Harmony, with a Charnwood woodburning stove adding a great focal point (8)

**GILES AND HEIDI'S RENOVATION**

**Size** 225m<sup>2</sup>  
**Build Time** One year  
**Build Route** Main contractor  
**House Cost** £550,000  
**Build Cost** £250,000  
**Value on Completion** £800,000+



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USEFUL CONTACTS: Architect: Designscape Architects: 01225 858500 dscape.co.uk  
 Structural engineer Momentum Engineering: 01225 444194 Main contractor Sturland: 01225 872238 Bespoke kitchen Westside Design: 01225 330843 Glazed screen Finline Aluminium: 01934 429922 Timber joinery Acorn Joinery: 01225 744467 Oak flooring Interior Harmony: 01225 483818 Underfloor Heating Uponor: 01455 550355



on the more private eastern side of the house, thanks to decades of the ground being built up, and there was some evidence of structural problems, too, so these were addressed through the introduction of a new retaining wall and heavy landscaping work. The original living areas and bedrooms upstairs have been beautifully refurbished, with new shutters and, unless absolutely unavoidable, the re-focus on original features, such as the restoration of the charming encaustic tiles in the hallway.

Carried out by a main contractor, with Giles and Heidi renting a place locally to enable them to keep a check on progress, the key to the success of this project has clearly been in finding designers who were able to identify and solve the problems that this very complicated house brought up. Through a bold approach – after all, it doesn't get more radical than turning a house around – the result more than matches Giles and Heidi's expectations of a workable, characterful family home.

### Mixing Old and New

The boxy shape of Giles and Heidi's new double-height entrance hall, coupled with the abundant use of glass, would suggest a highly contemporary structure (modern architecture being so keen on strong geometry). But the use of natural materials – timber and locally sourced rubble stone laid randomly – has significantly 'softened' the effect. So while it's obviously new, the fact that it attempts to relate to the existing house makes the marriage of old and new so much more harmonious. 🏡

### Light-filled accommodation over three floors

The existing bedrooms have been characterfully refurbished, with white-painted floorboards giving a New England feel, as here in the master (9). The family bathroom (10) – situated on the top floor of the newly extended entrance section – enjoys light from above

