



Light FANTASTIC

Andre and Tomoko Nogueira have transformed a top-floor maisonette in London into the bright and airy home they always wanted

Words Victoria Metcalf Photography Logan MacDougall Pope

Mary Poppins isn't the only one to see potential in rooftops. Up in the gables of a Victorian townhouse, Andre and Tomoko Nogueira have created a light, open-plan, family friendly home with fabulous views over London.

Tomoko's job in hedge funds took her and Brazilian husband Andre from New York to London in 2005, and the couple decided to rent in St John's Wood while they searched for the perfect house. They were after a three-bedroom property in close proximity to their children's school in Hampstead, north London. 'Not a lot comes on the market around here,' recalls Andre. 'It took about two and a half years working with an estate agent before this became available.'

The property they bought was a maisonette on the top two floors of two Victorian townhouses, which had been converted into six apartments in the Eighties. It ticked all the right boxes: a stone's throw away from the school, with three bedrooms and an enviable view. At first, Andre and Tomoko thought the place simply needed a cosmetic update, but when architect Mark Hillier came to assess it, he pointed out several structural stresses and it became apparent that this would be a much bigger project. Although the conversion was a good one, condensation had gathered between the →

this picture

The removal of internal walls has created a large open-plan living area. A playroom off the kitchen has sliding pocket doors, so it can be closed off and used as a fourth bedroom



this picture Sliding glass doors to the terrace allow light to stream in. Most of the windows are by Velfac, but those facing the street had to be conservation windows to meet council approval



glazing, and since Andre also wanted to install sustainable systems – such as cavity insulation – the decision was made to gut the property completely. The brief was simple: they wanted a fuss-free, open-plan space that was easy to maintain and let in as much natural light as possible.

Mark Hillier responded by removing most of the internal walls upstairs and reclaiming floor space from the opening between the two levels. This allowed enough room for a large kitchen, lounge and dining area. Leading from this is an outside terrace with a glass wall and sliding doors; the external opening was fitted to let light stream in. Off the kitchen is the children's playroom, which doubles up as a fourth bedroom (a pull-down bed is stored in a cupboard).

Downstairs, the layout has been redistributed to make three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a larger landing, with glass internal walls to let in more light. 'That was my idea,' says Andre. The size of the library was reduced, and giant sliding doors replaced the dividing wall between it and the master bedroom. 'When the kids are in bed, we can turn our bedroom into a really big space for relaxing,' says Andre.

To make the most of the view into the communal gardens, the couple wanted to drop the back windows down to the floor. But because the house is in a conservation area, the council refused and they had to keep the foot-high wall. 'I was surprised by all the red tape,' says Andre.

To improve the property's thermal envelope, the walls were stripped back to the bare brick. A heat-recovery system →

above A high bookshelf replaces a conventional balustrade where the double-height space meets the upper level. The limed oak floorboards are extra wide and provide warmth throughout

right Andre and Tomoko have kept the maisonette's original staircase, but replaced the balustrade with a sleek glass design



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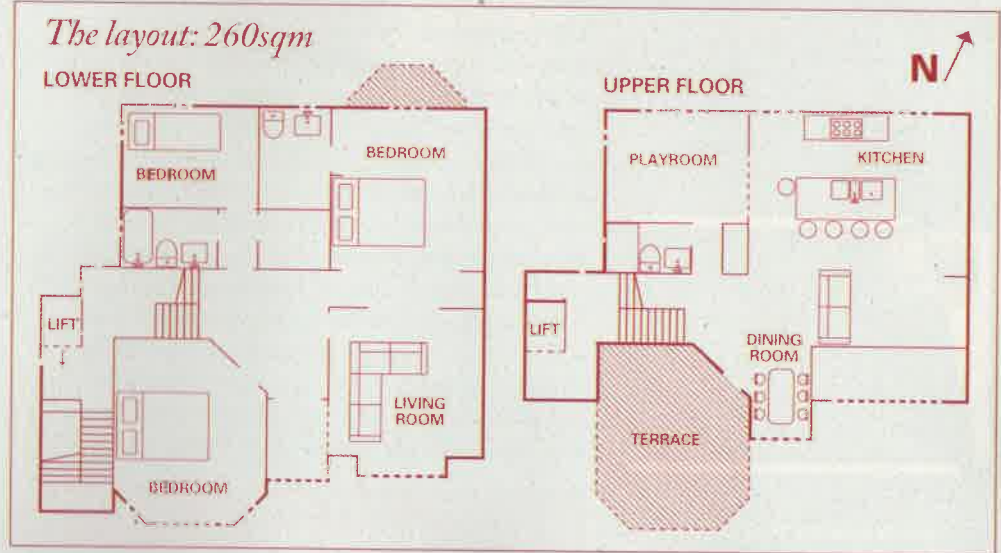
left Andre likes to spend time in the downstairs library with four-year-old Sofia (right) and Fillippa, who is six. This room was reduced in size while the master bedroom has been enlarged, and sliding doors now connect the two spaces. A double-height bookshelf links the lower level with the upper level, and also incorporates a wood-burning stove – the heat from which rises to the upstairs living area



above right In the master bedroom, furniture is kept simple and clean, creating a calm environment for sleeping



right Even the master en-suite bathroom is filled with light. Mirrored cabinets are set into the glass-tiled walls to enhance the spacious feel





top In the children's bedroom, built-in shelving is at the same level as the bedheads to simplify lines as much as possible

above The airy maisonette is part of a handsome townhouse in Hampstead

and 11cm-thick cavity insulation were installed. On top of that, all the windows have been replaced with triple glazing.

But not every aspect of the build was plain sailing. As the builders began to strip back the floor, they discovered dry rot in the joists. The floor had sunk as much as 12cm in some areas, and the whole upper level had to be replaced. This blow delayed the family's moving-in date. Being on the top floor also meant getting all the beams in position was a logistical challenge. Fortunately, the maisonette has a small lift, but anything that didn't fit had to be craned up. 'Thankfully we had very understanding neighbours,' says Andre.

Once the main building work, plumbing and electrics were complete, Sergio from Mortise Furniture Makers was commissioned to create the handleless kitchen units, bathrooms, cupboards and shelving. 'Having no handles is great when you have kids,' says Andre. 'There isn't anything for them to play with, so nothing gets broken.'

Untreated limed-oak floorboards have been fitted throughout, but while Andre thinks they feel wonderful underfoot, the untreated wood does attract dirt and is very high-maintenance. 'At some point we may have to put down sisal carpet in heavy-traffic areas, such as the hallway,' he says. Walls have been painted white, which bounces light around and, mixed with the wood tones and simple clean lines, is a nod to Tomoko's Japanese heritage. Although, as Andre points out: 'White isn't the easiest colour to have with a young family, as it gets dirty quickly.' To prevent their home looking too sterile, the couple have used accents of red and orange in their soft furnishing. Andre says: 'I like to have a few small things which draw attention.'

The family is now firmly settled in its rooftop abode. The light-filled space is easy to look after, and it's close to both local amenities and the school. 'It would be difficult to replicate this home anywhere else,' says Andre. **GD**

Like the pared-back look and Japanese influences? Copy Andre and Tomoko's style with tips on p70

Money matters

Planning applications £165
Preliminary/demolition work £35,000
Structural elements £9,300
Roofing £25,685
Glazing £60,000
Plumbing and electrics £78,200
Joinery £70,000
Kitchen £20,000
Flooring £20,000
Furniture, fittings and decoration £41,650
Professional fees £40,000
Total build cost £400,000
Total build cost per sqm £1,540
Estimated current value £4.2 million

Suppliers

PROJECT TEAM Architect

Mark Hillier at h2architecture (0845 053 0880; h2architecture.co.uk)

Structural engineer KD Leach (01375 641 481; kdleachlimited.com)

Builder Bob at The Azar Building Co (07773 040 511)

Carpenter Sergio at Mortise (020 7924 6020; mortise.co.uk)

Interior designer Valentina Pennazio (07799 661 127; valentinainteriors.com)

STRUCTURE Cavity insulation

Kingspan (01544 388 601; kingspaninsulation.co.uk)

Windows Velfac (01223 897 100; velfac.co.uk); The Rooflight Company (01993 833 155; theroflightcompany.co.uk)

Sliding glass doors IQ Glass (01923 218 348; iqglassuk.com)

Interior doors Linear Building Ideas (0845 054 6327; linearbuildingideas.com)

Heat-recovery system IBD Distribution (01202 825 682; ibd-distribution.com)

FIXTURES & FITTINGS Flooring

Reeve Wood (01553 776 835; reevewood.com)

Decking Dura Composites (01255 423 601; duracomposites.com)

Kitchen units Mortise (as before)

FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES

Kitchen stools Vitra (020 7608 6200; vitra.com)

Range cooker Mercury (0870 756 1236; mercuryappliances.co.uk)

Lounge sofa B&B Italia (020 7591 8111; bebitalia.com)

Dining table Modernica (modernica.net)

Dining chairs Vitra (as before)

Library sofa SCP (020 7739 1869; scp.co.uk)

Library table and chairs Eames at Herman Miller (0845 226 7202; hermanmiller.co.uk)

Ladder MM Furniture (0845 305 8120; mm-furniture.co.uk)

Bed and bedside table Unto This Last (020 7613 0882; untothislast.co.uk)

Bedroom console DWR (+1 203 614 0750; dwr.com)

Kids' bedroom wallpaper Lizzie Allen (07947 474 928; lizzie.allen.co.uk)

Kids' beds The Little White Company (0844 736 4222; thewhitecompany.com)