

In brief

Project Basement extension

Location Chorlton, Manchester

Cost £430,500

Spent £140,000



DIGGING DEEP

Designed for a blended family, this semi-detached Edwardian home in Chorlton has been remodelled internally, and extended into the basement to create a self-contained flat.

STORY: **LOUISE PARKIN** PHOTOS: **CASTRADS**

Julie McCarthy and Claire Wakefield had been together for five years when they began hunting for a new home for their blended family of four children and Claire's ex-husband, Warren. It soon became clear that finding a property that suited their lifestyle and unusual living arrangements would require a clever solution, and would certainly mean some building work.

"We carefully chose our estate agent, based on the properties they advertise, the area they cover and their approach," Claire explains. "We negotiated first refusal on viewings if we appointed the agent to sell both of our existing houses, and so when this six-bedroom Edwardian home in Chorlton was coming on to market, we were the first ones to look at it."



"We were interested in mixing old and new throughout and came up with a term to describe the look we wanted – 'contemporary Victorian.'"

Julie and Claire offered the asking price immediately, and despite receiving a better offer from another party, the owner was keen to sell it to a family and accepted their bid.

The décor needed a facelift. A renovation in the 60s had covered up or removed some original period



features including the staircase, internal doors and fireplaces. The walls were painted dark red and mustard yellow, with Artex ceiling tiles, and the basement still had its original cold slab, used for storing fresh food. However, the couple could see beyond the out-dated décor, and knew they could work with the high ceilings and generously sized rooms to create a contemporary yet sympathetic family home.

The basement of the tired but charming four-storey semi-detached villa had been used for storage. This would become a self-contained flat for Warren.

Upon moving in, the energy efficiency of the bedrooms was improved to create a more comfortable living environment for the children, the walls and roof insulated and a new heating system installed.

EXTERIOR

The house retains its period frontage, with a more contemporary look at the rear.

An architect was appointed to draw up plans for a complete renovation and remodel of the ground floor, raising the floor level to avoid the need to dig down to provide enough head height in the basement, and removing internal walls to create a more open and airy living space encompassing a dining room and kitchen.

Claire and Julie modified some of the architect's ideas, using them as a basis for the design but making significant changes. Julie, who leads a cultural programme for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, explains: "In the original plans the bay windows were removed, and we chose to keep them. This was important to us to maintain the character of the building, but it also saved money because we didn't need to underpin the windows. There were several things included in the design that we



would never have thought of though, for example the rear glazing is really contemporary and looks amazing. We used that design as a springboard, and played around with cardboard models to help us get a feel for the space.”

Only one internal wall was retained, opening up the ground floor by turning three rooms into one large space where the family could spend time together, while a living room to the front of the house can be closed off when required with a large oversized door. This has hidden hinges and is painted the same colour as the walls to reduce its visual impact.

The ground floor walls were stripped back to bare brick, and dated features such as fireplaces were taken out. The rear wall of the house was removed and floor-to-ceiling glass installed encompassing both ground floor and basement, which is accessed by sunken steps. The sliding door leading to the main part of the house has a bronze aluminium finish, setting it apart from gunmetal grey of the frame.

The front of the house retains its period appearance, thanks to the original bay windows, although contemporary panes have replaced the original glazing.

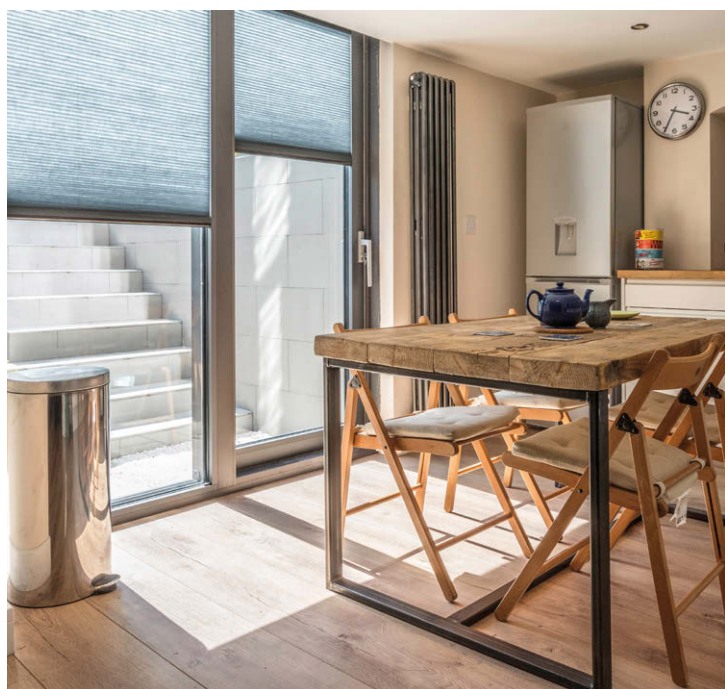
Julie and Claire hired a specialist company to carry out the basement work. This included tanking the walls and pouring a new concrete slab over an insulated floor, before being plastered throughout. The ceiling was also raised to create two spacious basement rooms as well as a bathroom, while a double-height glazed wall was installed across the rear to provide plenty of natural light into both the ground floor and basement.

A staircase was repositioned to allow better access to the basement, while external stairs also provide access to the flat, with a stepped terrace adding an additional element to the outdoor space.

Living in the home throughout the project proved challenging with four children. Julie and Claire slept

PICTURES

The new bathroom features large Porcelanosa tiles to make the space appear bigger. On the ground floor three rooms have been made into one to create a calm and homely space for a large family. The lounge features a giant door painted the same colour as the walls so that a private area can be created when required. The basement has been converted into a self-contained flat, with access to the garden.





on a mattress on the ground floor when the rear wall was removed, with no more than a tarpaulin separating them from the cold winter air. The couple hired a fully equipped, temporary kitchen from the Temporary Kitchen Company, which Julie describes as a lifesaver. "It even hosted a couple of the children's birthday parties and definitely wasn't a luxury as it meant we



could cook family meals. The cost was offset by the fact that it had a fully plumbed-in washing machine which saved us a fortune in launderette bills," she says.

"There were several low points," says Claire, an ASB manager in social housing. "We were faced with an unsoldered gas pipe and an unconnected wall which were discovered only when we'd started renovation work. We later discovered that on Christmas Eve 1944, bombs fell on this part of Manchester and houses on our street were badly damaged. This gradually worsened over time. Luckily, we found both of these issues when we could do something about them, but they added time and cost to the build."

All building work and subcontractors were organised by the building contractor, but when it came to the interiors Julie and Claire took over. "We were interested in mixing old and new throughout and came up with a term to describe the look we wanted – 'contemporary Victorian'. Pinterest was an invaluable resource for inspiration and finishing touches."

The central area containing the kitchen/diner is the hub of the family home, and although Julie and Claire had a tight budget, they were keen to make this a cosy yet stylish place. Without a dedicated interiors budget, Julie and Claire tried to balance quality with value for money, choosing a kitchen from online shop DIY Kitchens. They visited the showroom and came up with a design that would look effective without dominating the space.

Full-height wall cupboards contain a microwave and cooker, while a central island connects and separates the kitchen and dining area, with a hob positioned to face the living space. A light oak laminate throughout the ground floor unifies the different zones, including the living area. The kitchen also has a utility alcove, pull-out larders and a pull-out bin. "I love my kitchen," says Julie. "It was really economical but it looks high end and the quality is fantastic."

The couple chose reproduction cast iron radiators to heat their home, commissioning Manchester firm Castrads to advise them on positioning and radiator size. "We were initially doubtful about reproduction Victorian-style radiators, but our house has no cold spots and we enjoy a consistent temperature. They're also beautiful to look at."

"We spend lots of time in here with the children, and it feels really welcoming," says Claire. "It's a wonderful party space – it's really light and has lovely views out to the garden. Although it was hard on everyone during the build, my son said recently, 'Mum, it was so worth it!' And that's why we know we did the right thing."

The final word

What was the high point?

When the rear glass went in – it looked like a building site up until that point, and it was one of the last things to be done.

And the low point?

Finding a gas pipe that was not soldered together was worrying. Also one of the walls was not connected to the rest of the house, and had to be rebuilt, which cost more money and caused delays.

What was your biggest extravagance?

The cooker hood – it wasn't really expensive, but it was unnecessary really. We love it though!

And your best buy?

The radiators. They provide the historical influence we sought but with modern style and efficiency. Our house has a traditional front and contemporary rear, and they



really pull the house together visually. They are very efficient. They were quite expensive, but worth every penny.

What would you do differently?

It was madness living here with four kids, so if we ever did it again we might move out.

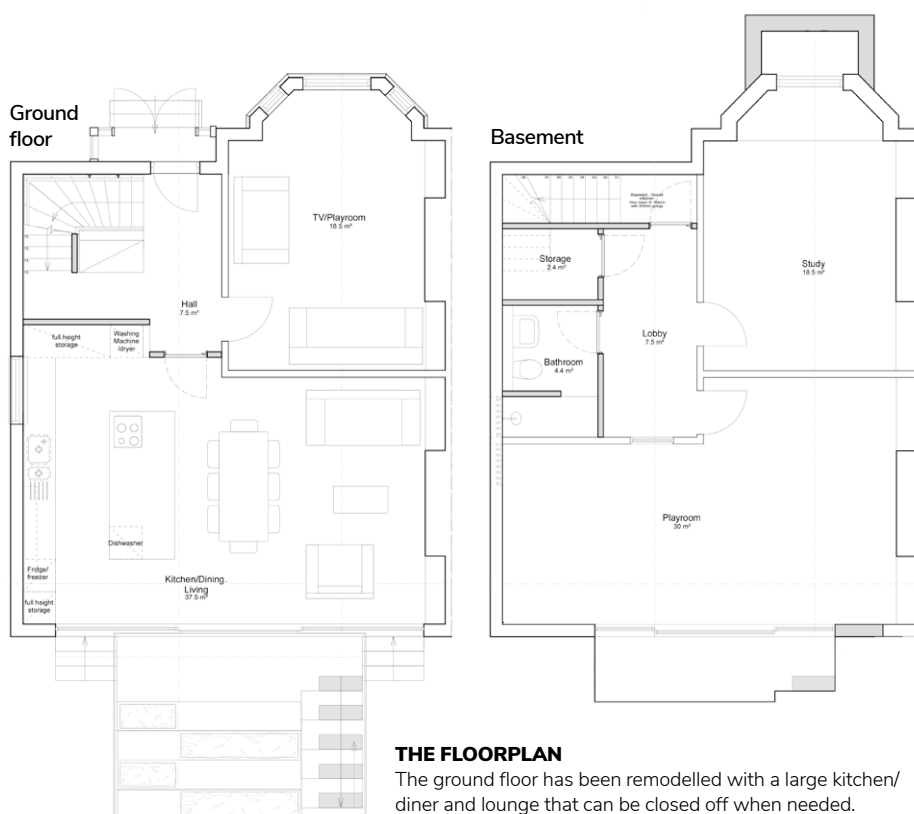
Is there anything you would change?

At the moment we only have one bathroom in the main house, and so when we re-plaster the first floor we intend to install an en suite into our bedroom.



THE BUILD

The house has been remodelled to provide open-plan rooms on the ground floor and a self-contained flat in the basement, which has been excavated, tanked, and plastered throughout.



THE FLOORPLAN

The ground floor has been remodelled with a large kitchen/diner and lounge that can be closed off when needed. Downstairs is a self-contained basement flat with its own entrance to the rear. It has a kitchen/diner and a lounge.

In detail

PROJECT

Main contractor South Manchester and Cheshire Basements: smcbasements.com

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Luca handleless kitchen

DIY Kitchens: diy-kitchens.com

Laminate flooring, sanitaryware and tiles

Porcelanosa: porcelanosa.com/uk/

Doors and windows

Altitude Aluminium: altitudealuminium.co.uk

Cast iron radiators

Castrads: castrads.com

Temporary kitchen

Temporary Kitchen Company: thetemporarykitchencompany.com

Appliances

CDA: cda.eu

Blinds

INTU Blinds: intublinds.co.uk

Furniture and lighting

Wayfair: wayfair.co.uk

Cooker hood

Elica: elica.co.uk

Silestone worktop

Dar Marble & Granite: dar-marble.co.uk

Pippa three-seater sofas and cocktail chairs

Living It Up: livingitup.co.uk

Langue chairs and dining table

NORR11: norr11.com

Johnson paints

Chorlton Trade Paints: chorltontradepaints.co.uk

Carpets

Urmston Carpets: urmstoncarpets.co.uk

Wood-burner

Dunsley Heat: dunsleyheat.co.uk

Basement table

RCC LTD: rcc-furniture.com