

# How a decade made a difference



## 1 Exquisite taste in north London

THE chance to build a new detached house in London is rare indeed, but it came for journalist Geraldine Bedell and her writer husband, Charles Leadbeater, when they found a small plot of scrubland in Highbury, north London. For the task of designing their new home they hired architects Joyce Owens and Ferhan Azman. The pair created an



exquisite courtyard house — a form that has fascinated designers for centuries — and made it contemporary and surprising by building the entire structure in solid concrete.

IN THE mid-90s, the most exciting new homes were only to be found in the US, Scandinavia or Australia, but more recently Londoners have learned to embrace the joys of free-flowing, well-designed spaces, making the most of natural light and blurring the boundaries between inside and out, while revelling in beautiful new materials.

Naturally, Homes & Property takes some credit for this turnaround — being one of the pioneering publications shining the spotlight on Britain's leading architects. And, continuing our mission to find and show off the very best in contemporary design, we have selected 10 of the cleverest recently completed one-off homes, each with outstanding qualities that point to how we may all be living in the future ...

## 2 Adding value

Hiring architects and builders may be costly, but good design can add value to a property. Renowned for luxurious interiors, Form Design Architecture has introduced clients to free-flowing spaces, exquisite

## Form's exquisite signature lighting in a London penthouse

lighting and beautiful finishes, and, occasionally, more frivolous delights: showers with fibre-optic lighting, pop-up TVs and teak bathtubs.

In one recent central London project, a penthouse was bought for £800,000, redesigned and refurbished

## Londoners have woken up to free-flowing modern house design. Fay Sweet chooses the best 10 new homes in the capital

### 3 Make your home 'sustainable'

Just think good-quality homes with great design and energy and water efficiency, plus excellent landscaping and access to local amenities and transport — phew — and you have sustainability.

The £60,000 house competition, set up by John Prescott and run by English Partnerships, has produced the sustainable SixtyK home, which proved popular when it was built and exhibited in the New London Architecture Gallery yard in central London this summer.

Designed by Sheppard Robson and created in association with housebuilder Crest Nicholson, this super-efficient prefab home features open-plan living space, lots of natural light, and an ingenious services wall to hide plumbing and wiring. The first scheme to feature these homes is being built near Milton Keynes. The house cost, naturally enough, £60,000 to build.

■ Sheppard Robson: 020 7504 1700; www.sheppardrobson.com

### 4 The brick house

As open building plots become increasingly difficult to find in London, ingenuity has been tested to the limits in making the most of tricky sites — including "invisible" houses, with no obvious exterior, slotted into tiny pockets of space.

The bookies' favourite for this year's Stirling Prize is thus the Brick House in west London by Caruso St John Architects. Shoehorned into an awkward-shaped site reached through a small archway, the house is designed as a sequence of dynamic, irregularly shaped rooms all lined in a buff-coloured brick left in its natural state. "One of the reasons for our choice of brick was to give the rooms a real presence and the house a sense of place," says architect Adam Caruso.

■ Caruso St John Architects: 020 7613 3161; www.carusostjohn.com



The £60,000 house was unveiled in London this summer



With no visible exterior, the shoehorned Brick House has a series of rooms lined with bricks left warm and bare

home is a sculptural object, with an intriguing "folded" roofscape, all wrapped in timber. The extension stretches out into the garden with a timber deck built around a handsome copper beech tree. Inside, the new open-plan kitchen, living and dining areas all enjoy great garden views.

But the firm's Michael Woodford warns: "Greater interest in architecture has led to a more educated client base and opportunities to create innovative and visionary projects. However, particularly in British volume house building, there is still a long way to go."

■ Alison Brooks Architects: 020 7267 9777; www.alisonbrooksarchitects.com

### 8 Country life with a London look

A decade ago the opportunity to design and build this house in the English countryside would not have existed. But in 1997, with the introduction of PPG7, also known as Gummer's Law (after the Tory MP John Gummer), new legislation allowed the possibility of building "houses of exceptional architectural merit in a countryside setting".

This lovely country house for Londoners, set in a 50-acre woodland at Darsham, Suffolk, is by rising stars Paulo Marto and Paul Acland of Paul + O Architects, recently named by Wallpaper magazine as one of the world's 25 most innovative practices.

"To many, the Aga-heated Victorian rectory is now seen, not as quaint and romantic, but uncomfortable, undesirable, and irresponsible," says Marto. "New regulations are forcing house design to be reconsidered, and Britain is once again looking to the future rather than hiding in its past."

■ Paul + O Architects: 020 7604 3818; www.paul-o-architects.com

### 9 Small but perfectly formed

The perennial challenge facing Londoners is how to make the most of every scrap of space in the home. Time and again, architects have demonstrated their impressive planning skills in this regard, and Simon Mitchell, of the architecture practice Sybarite, has achieved a feat of astonishing space engineering at his own rather modest Chelsea apartment.



Paul + O Architects made the most of relaxed planning laws to create this exquisite Suffolk country house

