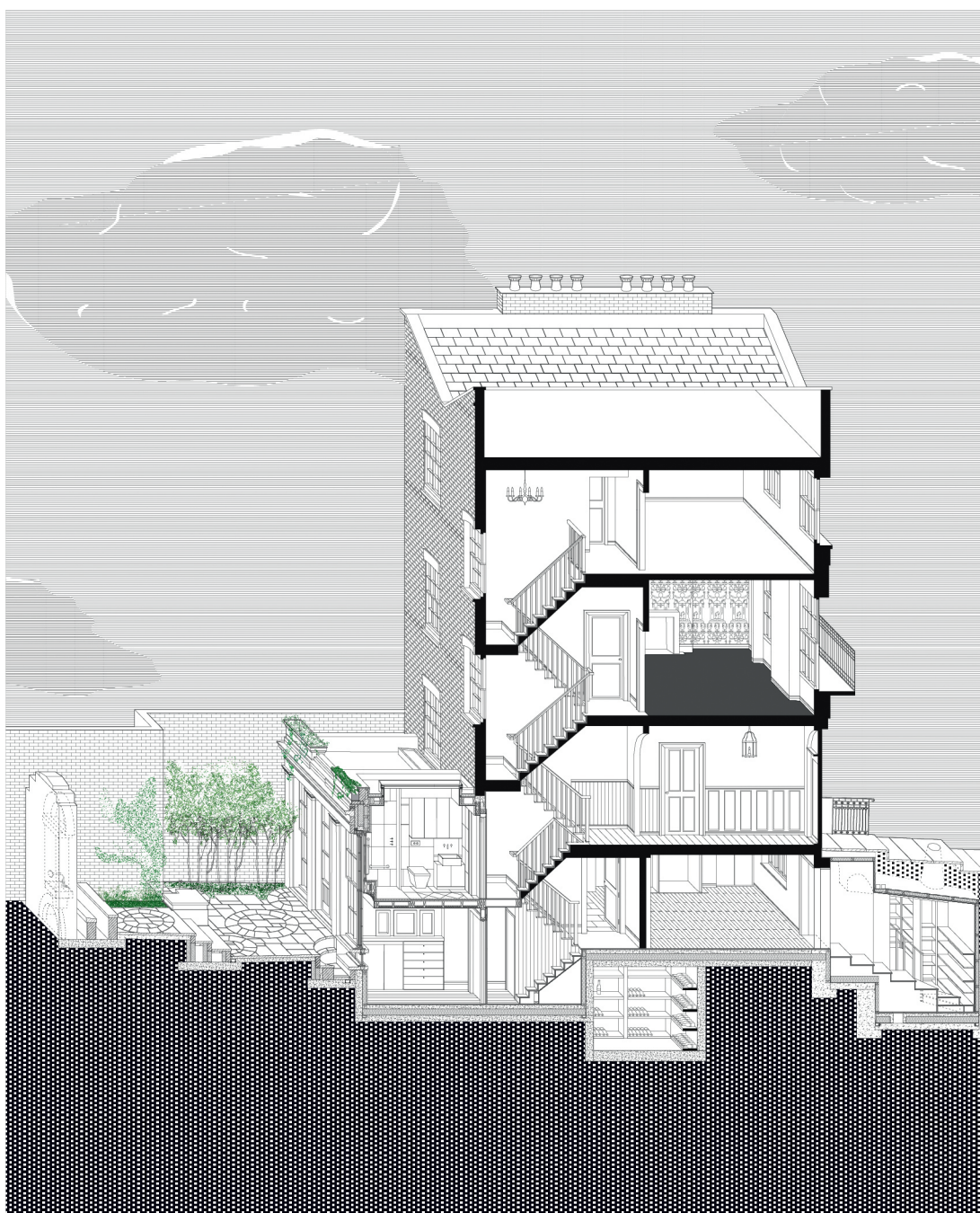


Embracing the neoclassical

Timothy Smith and Jonathan Taylor's Georgian Townhouse extension accentuates the original architectural style

Words: Isabelle Priest Photographs: Anthony Coleman

Below Perspective section of original house and the new extensions, in a similar style to contemporary Georgian drawings.



'We are not one of those practices that wishes we were all living in the 18th century,' explains Jonathan Taylor as we sit in the courtyard garden of architectural firm Timothy Smith and Jonathan Taylor's recently completed Georgian Townhouse project in Hoxton, London. The building is a typical late-Georgian, four-storey, 5.5m-wide terraced house, built in 1835, with an elegant fanlight window above the front door, a balconied piano nobile and a recessed lower ground floor that is generously set back from the street.

Smith and Taylor have renovated a significant proportion of the existing interior, added a rear extension at the lower level, excavated a sliver of basement and redesigned the garden. The clients, David and Christopher, but particularly David, are neoclassical architecture enthusiasts; original prints line the staircase walls, and one aspect of the brief was to create a room to store David's collection of drawings, which is now located in what is affectionately called the 'map room'.

It doesn't appear the clients ever asked for the redesign to be in a neoclassical style, but we're here in the newly Portland stone-repaved garden looking back at the house, and the extension has taken a distinctly classical composition. Two full-height timber sash windows are set between an arcade of four stone capital columns either side of a central pair of French doors. The architraves use the same brick as the extension, which matches the original building, and there is a carefully detailed fine stone frieze and cornice above.

Placed on the top are two lead planters which form a symmetrical relationship with the window bays, and add grandeur and weightiness to the arrangement. The plants are beginning to romantically topple down over the edge. Inside, you peek a drooping tented ceiling with a miniaturised circular rooflight at its centre and horizontal lightwells that set the ceiling away from the walls in a manner reminiscent of the Breakfast Room at Sir John Soane's Museum.

The rear facade is based on the choragic monument of Thrasylos in Athens

The rear facade itself, however, is based on the choragic monument of Thrasyllos, a memorial erected in 320-319 BCE on the artificial scarp of the south face of the Acropolis of Athens. The monument was a popular motif in Georgian architecture, forming part of the inspiration for the nearby Lloyd Baker Estate in Islington, built 1820-40.

The column capitals here are a direct copy, only cast not carved and the monument has two bays rather than three. The brick pediment and arches, stone lintel, basin and pool of the gently trickling fountain up the steps on the back wall of the garden behind us are loosely based on Edwin Lutyens' garden structures and war memorials of the 1920s and 30s – put together with confidence beside a muse more than 2,000 years older.



Above The garden room's drooping ceiling, inspired by the tent roof at the Charlottenhof Palace in Potsdam.

Below Back extensions are ubiquitous in London but not many are in the neoclassical style.

This is what starts our conversation about neoclassicism. Rear extensions to Georgian town houses are ubiquitous in London but few these days follow the neoclassical style. 'It's a valid language among many,' says Taylor. 'Neoclassicism is a rich seam of architectural history and thought.'

Smith and Taylor met during undergraduate degree at Edinburgh College of Art, but they only started looking with confidence at classicism when they lost their jobs during the recession.

'We picked up a project on Rosemary Street, says Taylor. 'It was a 1990s house that had a weirdly art-deco interior, but we decided to really go with it and take it seriously. At the time, well-respected architects seemed to be tentatively exploring the





classical language. Florian Beigel's Paju Book City had elements of classicism in it that had caused a hoo-ha; Tony Fretton's Red House and Caruso St John's Cover Versions exhibition at the V&A cited classical precedents. It wasn't timidity holding them back, but these indications gave us the confidence to use it and we thought: why would we admire these buildings and use them as precedents for everything except architectural expression?'

The directors teach a master's course at Kingston about the classical orders and their application to design projects – the only course like it in the UK. Although Taylor says they are reasonably loose on interpretation, 'the more we looked into it, the more we thought there isn't a good philosophical argument not to use it – modernism is, after all, 100 years old and the spirit of the age will put its hand on a building whether you like it or not.'

'I'd forgotten all this when we were looking for bathroom fittings,' laughs Christopher.

The practice's involvement in the project came about because the building was beginning to experience some difficulties. The clients had brought the house in 1981,

attracted by vestiges of original details they wanted to reinstate. They did their first restoration in 1989, which brought back the ornate friezes, and were told the damp-proof course they put in the basement would last 25 years. Sure enough, by 2015 they started to have problems again. The brief given to Smith and Taylor was to sort out the damp and existing half-depth rear extension, since something needed to be done and it would be nice to do it properly.

David also wanted an office to retire from full-time work to. As part of the initial work, Taylor proposed two alternative locations for a workspace: one in the former coal stores at the front of the plot and the other under an existing shower room at first upper landing level. The clients chose to do both and the project took off from there as the 'last refurbishment', making the house as fit as possible for what the clients call 'their impending old age'.

'The use of houses has switched round,' explains Taylor. 'Now people live at the back and bottom of these Georgian town houses so the rear needs a bit more formality – although this is a touch grander than we originally aimed for.'

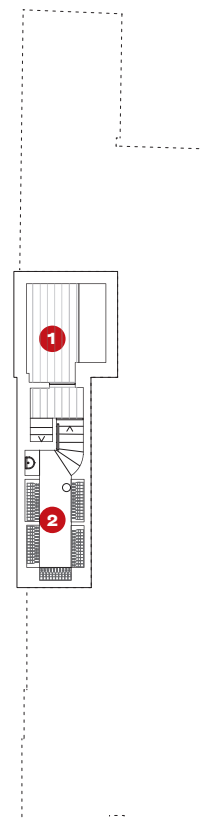


- 1 Cellar
- 2 Map room
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Dining room
- 5 Garden room
- 6 Coal store turned 'dungeon' office
- 7 Front courtyard
- 8 Rear garden
- 9 Fountain
- 10 Shower room
- 11 Library
- 12 Spare bedroom

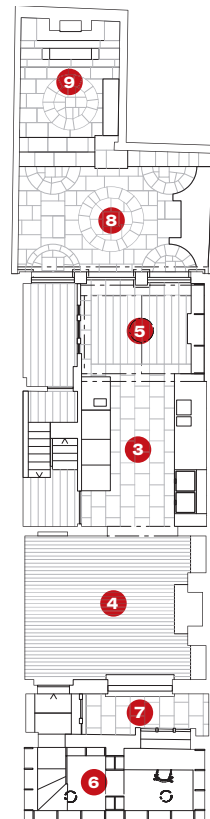
Top Looking through the newly relocated green and ochre kitchen, through the garden room to the fountain on the rear courtyard wall.

Left The steps down from the main basement into the former coal store, which have been joined together to make an office for one of the clients, also housing his collection of architectural history books.

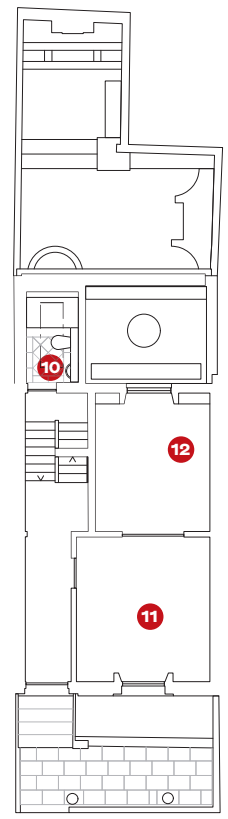
Lower basement plan



Basement and garden plan



First floor plan



Programmatically, the project was resolved quickly as the site is spatially tight and there are naturally a limited number of options for a grade II listed conservation area building. Hackney council would not permit a loft conversion in the butterfly roof, and full basement excavations were discouraged, although the architects managed to convince the local authority to permit a concrete vaulted roof wine cellar and cold store as a late addition.

The kitchen has moved from the former rear addition to the middle of the plan, beside the retained dining room, and the extension has been pushed further into the garden to create a new orangery-like garden room which connects to a courtyard that is a metre lower in the main section. The new map room slots beneath the shower room at half basement level, cleverly and discreetly splitting the right-hand sash window of the rear elevation into upper and lower rooms so that the lower floor lies 1.5m below ground level. A new semicircular dug-out external lightwell bay in the paving arrangement brings daylight into the space and adjusts the formality of the classical rear frontage.

Elsewhere, the master bedroom has been repainted in the salmon and green fashion of the writing room at the Charlottenhof Palace in Potsdam, woodwork repainted in the drawing room, wallpaper redone in the upper rear bedroom and staircase. The ceiling in the hallway has been repainted with its midnight blue and stars, but the basement changes are where the magic happens. The coal store is

now an office, opened out between the two original vaults to make a generous space and with a stair down to it past the front courtyard from the dining room. It's lined with shelving for books and CDs and painted a very light shade of pink but is nicknamed the 'dungeon' even though it's incredibly charming as a space and intensely practical too.

The same goes for the new map room, tucked beneath the revamped shower room (redone with green terrazzo tiles and Aston Matthews unfinished brass fittings). Here the walls are painted deep red and an antique 1840 architect's desk is the space's main object. You are half a level down and a glass panel in the wall connects you to the floor level of the garden room – look up and you see the round rooflight. Everything is fitted and kitted out to suit the clients to the last detail; a cupboard and drawers designed to fit Pevsner books three rows deep are bedded into the wall under the garden room. The excavated bay in front of the window gives that bit of extra height to the view of the fountain at the back of the garden.

And this is how this project is: compact and clever. It maximises floor area and uses by neatly and cleverly overlapping spaces. They are too dense to be original in what would have been essentially a speculatively built house, but they are charming enough to feel authentic in spirit and tone, and have that Soanian eccentric conversion element to them too. There certainly isn't any looming question that the style might not be appropriate. ●

Credits

Clients

Christopher and David
Architect Timothy Smith
and Jonathan Taylor

Structural engineer

Michael Barclay
Partnership

SAP consultant

Peninsula Energy
Compliance

Contractor

Studio Montague

Ground works

subcontractor and

waterproofing

Solid Basements

Window joinery

Estimus Windows

Internal joinery

Orange Core Joinery

Cast lead planters

Bulbeck Foundry

Cast stone copings

Acanthus Cast Stone

IN NUMBERS

153m²

Total GIFA

Above right Natty storage tucked under the garden room in the map room to store David's collection of drawings and Pevsner books.

Right The inner city garden, excavated and transformed by the Lutyens-inspired fountain on the back wall.

Left On trend but classic new terrazzo shower room with unpolished Aston Matthews brass fittings.

