

# Family matters

Julie and Neil Archer transformed a mid-century property to suit their children's needs

With its slate roof and black cladding, the single-storey extension offers a striking contrast to the brick-built fifties property. Full-height sliding doors link the indoor and outdoor spaces

## At a glance

**NAMES** Julie and Neil Archer  
**LOCATION** Hertfordshire  
**PROPERTY** Extension to a detached fifties house  
**BEDROOMS** 4 **BATHROOMS** 3  
**PROJECT STARTED** December 2014  
**PROJECT FINISHED** July 2015  
**SIZE OF HOUSE** 174sqm  
**PROJECT COST** £300,000, excluding VAT and fees

The importance of great architecture shouldn't be underestimated. It has the ability to transform not only buildings but people's lives, too; as proved by Julie and Neil Archer's innovative redesign and extension project. The dated fifties detached house they bought in 2014 has been completely remodelled, turning the awkward layout into an open-plan, light-filled space that caters for their family's very specific needs. 'Our 12-year-old son, Joseph, is severely disabled, so ensuring he could be involved in every part of family life was the driving force behind the project,' explains Julie.

The couple's previous home, a maisonette in St Albans, had plenty of space and character, but offered little in the way of practical design features. 'We moved there when Joseph was two, and as his condition has gradually deteriorated since then, life in the flat had become increasingly difficult,' explains Julie.

With Joseph starting a new school, the couple wanted to relocate and find a property that would better suit his needs, as well as the requirements of their two younger children, Louis, eight, and Ava, five. A search of the areas

near Joseph's school led them to a mid-century house, which could be remodelled to fit the family's brief.

Impressed by a redesigned house in the same village, Julie and Neil contacted the architects responsible for the project, Richard De Boise and Hanna Zminkowska of Zminkowska De Boise Architects. 'We felt an immediate connection with Richard and Hanna,' says Julie. 'They both have children of their own so they understood what we wanted, and we felt confident that they would come up with the ideal solution for adapting the property to make it work for our family.'

Julie and Neil's detailed brief included opening up the interior of the house to make it feel lighter, as well as maximising the views of the garden and surrounding fields. The ground floor also needed to be on one level with wide doorways to ensure the entire space would be wheelchair accessible, including the outdoor area. 'We explained to Richard and Hanna that although we wanted the house to cater for Joseph's disability, the adaptations needed to feel part of our home,' says Julie.

The couple's original idea for the property was to →



Located in the new extension, the streamlined kitchen layout was designed by the architects and completed by Tim Moss.

The overhead roof light is electronically operated, with sensors ensuring it automatically closes during inclement weather



**'Life has become so much easier since completing this house'**

replace a dated conservatory at one end of the home with a new extension that would house a bedroom and wet room for Joseph, but after drawing several schemes, the architects felt a better solution was to flip the design. 'It made more sense to turn one end of the existing ground floor into a bedroom suite and site the kitchen and dining areas in the new extension at the opposite end with views of the rear garden,' explains De Boise.

To minimise any potential issues with planning permission or conservation area approval, the footprint of the new extension is broadly in line with that of the old conservatory. Clad in western red cedar boards that have been stained in black Osmo oil, the extension is designed to be a modern take on traditional timber outbuildings seen throughout the local area.

With the entire house stripped out during the redesign, it was the ideal opportunity to improve the overall thermal performance of the property, too. All the internal walls were lined with insulated plasterboard and additional insulation was added to the loft, then the old PVCu windows were replaced with high-performance composite designs, with the internal timber frames adding material warmth to the interior spaces.

To improve the connection with the surrounding rural

landscape, the sills on the first-floor windows have all been lowered and an existing dormer window on the front facade has doubled in size so that it now provides stunning views of the nearby fields from the first-floor landing. In Joseph's bedroom, an old chimney breast was removed from the end wall to make way for a new full-height door, and the window overlooking the rear garden was replaced with floor-to-ceiling sliding doors, creating essential access to the decked area directly outside his room.

Approaching the house today, it's clear the practical changes that have been made to the house are the key to its success. A gently sloping path leads up to the office space in the redesigned garage as well as the wide oak front door, with a new canopy providing shelter for Joseph in his wheelchair. The modern dormer punches out from the roofline to make a bold statement, and the pale grey window frames create a subtle contrast to the red brickwork. To the side of the property, a narrow slice of the black-clad extension is visible, offering a subtle hint of the modern space behind the front door.

Inside, the layout has been opened up with the double-height entrance hall leading through to the redesigned family spaces. A comfortable living →

**above** Practical ceramic floor tiles in the kitchen and dining zones have been combined with an underfloor heating system

**above right** Doubling the size of the first-floor window has increased the natural light on the landing

**right** Turning a small cupboard area at the top of the stairs into a practical home office is an innovative use of space





Making the decking flush with the house allows Joseph to access the garden in his wheelchair



**above** A large window and canopy have transformed the front of the house

area with bespoke storage solutions flows into the new extension, where a cantilevered glazed corner provides an instant link with the outside space. 'The extension is my favourite part of the house,' says Julie. 'I always feel so connected to the garden.'

At the opposite end of the ground floor, Joseph's room benefits from double-aspect views of the mature garden, and when the wide door leading into his bedroom is left open, his room feels very connected to both the outside world and the main living spaces, helping him to feel part of every aspect of family life.

Upstairs, the architects found a way to create a small

office space for Julie by removing several cupboards on the landing. Fitted out with units and a desk made from inexpensive MDF, it's an innovative use of what was previously wasted space.

'While the challenges we face as a family obviously still remain, life has become much easier since completing this house,' says Julie. 'Neil believes the investment we made in the property has transformed our everyday lives, and I couldn't agree more. Not only is the house beautifully designed, but it also seems to put us in a better mood, as it's such a calm and relaxing space to spend time in.' **GD**

# Project details

Find out how Julie and Neil put a unique stamp on their practical property

## AT A GLANCE

**Names** Julie and Neil Archer  
**Location** Hertfordshire  
**Property** Fifties detached house  
**Bedrooms** 4 **Bathrooms** 3  
**Project started** December 2014  
**Project finished** July 2015  
**Size of house** 174sqm

## THE BUDGET

**Project cost** **£300,000**



## SUPPLIERS

### PROJECT TEAM

**Architect** Zrninkowska De Boise Architects (07916 533 513; zdbarchitects.com)  
**Structural engineer** AKS Ward (01462 420 668; aksward.com)  
**Archaeologist** Heritage Network (01462 685 991; heritagenetwork.co.uk)  
**Building contractor** CAMS (0800 043 1485; camsbuiding.com)

### STRUCTURE

**Glazing** Finline Aluminium (01934 429 922; finelinealuminium.co.uk); Sunsquare (01284 846 576; sunsquare.co.uk); Velfac (01536 313 552; velfac.co.uk) **Cladding** VM Zinc (01992 822 288; vmzinc.co.uk)

### FIXTURES & FITTINGS

**Kitchen** Tim Moss (020 8444 9911; timmoss.co.uk) **Engineered oak floorboards** Havwoods (01524 737 000; havwoods.co.uk) **Ceramic tiles** Johnson Tiles (01782 524 000; johnson-tiles.com) **Accessible hoist system** Care & Independence Systems (01869 327 999; disabilityequipment.com)  
**Carpet** John Lewis (0345 604 9049; johnlewis.com) **Lighting** Nordlux (nordlux.com)

### FURNITURE

**Sofa and dining chairs** Ligne Roset (020 7426 9670; ligne-roset-city.co.uk)

## GRAND IDEA

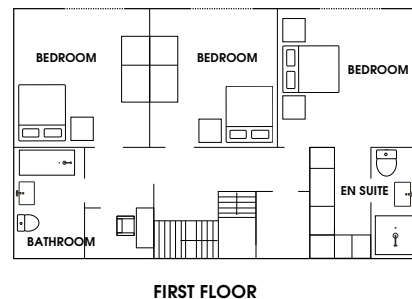
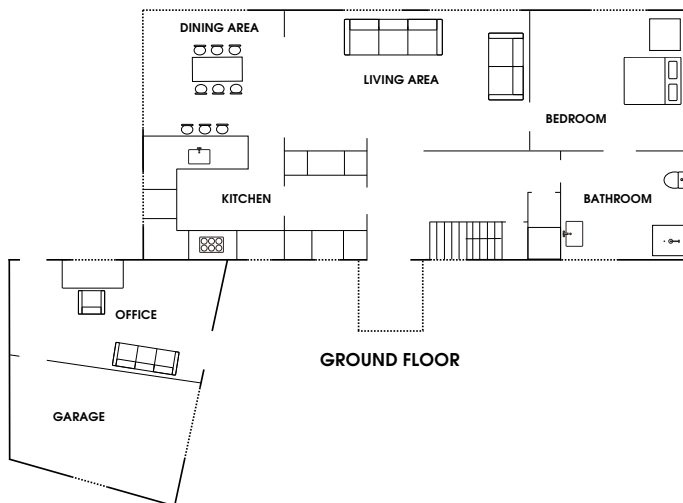
### Smart cladding

The exterior of the existing garage has been updated to give it a modern look. Batten cladding attached to one side of the building gives it the appearance of a fence rather than a solid structure.

The black section visually links it to the new extension. The cladding cost £120 per sqm, including the substructure, fixing and VAT. For something similar, try Ternex (01707 324 606; ternex.co.uk)



## FLOORPLAN



# Style finder

Pair sleek designs with splashes of colour to copy Julie and Neil's statement style



**IN DETAIL**

### Sliding doors

Full height sliding doors connect the new extension with the decked terrace, providing easy access to the garden for Julie and Neil's son, and allowing for uninterrupted views. IQ Glass can achieve a similar look, starting from around £1,250 per sqm for its 4+ slim-framed sliding glass doors. (01494 722 880; iqglassuk.com)

**1** Abstract art Foreign Shores canvas, £425, Jim Harris at FineArtSeen (01235 535 536; fineartseen.com)  
**2** Sleek angles Monti dining chair in leather in charcoal grey, £149, Danetti (020 3588 1380; danetti.com)  
**3** Natural finish Sophisticated extending dining table in oak, £399, Hampshire Furniture (01420 550 525; hampshirefurniture.co.uk)  
**4** Modern minimal Strip LED ceiling light in chrome, £50, Habitat (0344 499 4686; habitat.co.uk)  
**5** Crimson couch Togo two-seater sofa in red, £1,309, Ligne Roset (020 7323 1248; ligne-rosset.com)

**GET THE LOOK**

**MATERIAL FOCUS**



**1 Seeing red**  
Papavera plains fabric in poppy, £26 per m, Sanderson (0844 543 9500; sanderson-uk.com)



**2 Grey shade**  
Cool arbour absolute matt emulsion, £38 for 2.5L, Little Greene (0845 880 5855; littlegreene.com)



**3 Durable ceramic**  
Wood effect tiles in warm oak, £29.75 per sqm, Walls and Floors (01536 314 730; wallsandfloors.co.uk)