

Needing more space and a modern dwelling to suit their needs, **Richard and Tory Benson** opted to buy a detached mid-century house and transform it into the high-tech family home of their dreams

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PHOTOS **SIMON BURT PHOTOGRAPHY**

Future Perfect

Richard and Tory Benson had been looking to upsize to cater for their growing family. Location was key to their search. The couple wanted to stay in their preferred area of north London to raise their two daughters, as it's close to both transport links and the countryside to enjoy family walks.



However, they soon realised their only option in the area was to buy an existing property and substantially remodel it by adding a large extension to the rear and redesigning the interior layout.

“There weren’t many houses to suit us,” says Richard. “But this property had an amazing feel and we knew we could transform it into what we needed, which was a family home.” The pair felt ready to take on a big project and agreed that a renovation was the best way forward. “It was still a cheaper option than a move-in-ready house, and we knew we would’ve changed the property anyway.”

Challenges ahead

It took the family two years to move into their home after securing the house. The first year, the Bensons found themselves waiting for the property chain to move forward – they had to sell their dwelling and the previous owner had yet to find somewhere to buy.

Once the transfer was complete, however, several more months elapsed before works began. “The council was minded to refuse our project plans,” says Richard. The main issue arose due to the size of the proposed addition, since the property had already been extended in the past. Secondly, a neighbour was opposed to the idea of the Bensons extending and had asked other locals to object, too.



Expansive glazed sliding doors provide inspiring views of the garden as well as allowing plenty of natural light

Richard engaged consultants DP9 to review the case. The firm’s specialists helped the Bensons prepare extra documentation for the officers, prompting them to change their minds. However, due to the number of objections from the other residents, they were still called to committee. “We argued the case and secured consent, albeit with some concessions to keep the neighbours happy,” says Richard.

Moving forward

From the start, the scheme was very much a team effort. The pair hired Michael Bell of Pure Design to lead the project, along with

“This feels like our forever home, where our children will come back to”

Point 5 Kitchens to create storage throughout the dwelling and Griana Construction, who acted as the main contractor.

Michael and the Bensons made the best of the long delays with planning to improve the home’s layout and keep family at the heart of every decision. “I wanted to apply logic to the drawings,” says Richard, who gave a great deal of thought to how the home would be used by everyone on a day-to-day basis.

The substantial works that followed included adding a new 6m deep extension to the ground floor – which comprises the kitchen and family TV zone, as well as dining and sitting areas. Most striking of all, this space has 12m of glazing overlooking the vast garden.

The Bensons also created a new master bedroom with an ensuite, dressing room and kitchenette on the second floor, while the middle storey has four bedrooms and a laundry zone. The remainder of the ground floor is now divided into a home cinema, a study and a gym.

When making such massive changes, however, there’s always a chance of encountering issues with the structural fabric. In the newly extended open-plan family space, the removal of a wall made it necessary to fit a massive steel RSJ that affected heights across the area. The Benson’s solution was to create stepped ceilings with inset lighting in the different zones. It brought added benefits, too. “Leaving it flush would have made the area feel stark,” says Richard.

The couple chose Lightwave for the insets, a smart home system which is programmable via their phones and required only a simple swap out from the regular switch. “I love my gadgets,” says Richard. He also installed a Sonos wireless sound scheme throughout the ground floor, which can deliver music and TV via wifi. The home cinema – a family favourite – can be switched on or off remotely, too, thanks to the AV Lounge high-tech scheme. Heating and CCTV security is also managed with their phones. “Tory was worried that

FACT FILE

NAMES Richard & Victoria Benson
OCCUPATIONS Lawyer & personal trainer
LOCATION North London
TYPE OF PROJECT Renovation & extension
STYLE Contemporary
PROJECT ROUTE Designer & main contractor
HOUSE SIZE 510m²
HOUSE COST £1,995,000
BOUGHT 2015
PROJECT COST £587,700
PROJECT COST PER M² £1,152
TOTAL COST £2,582,700
BUILDING WORK COMMENCED February 2016
BUILDING WORK TOOK Seven months
CURRENT VALUE £3,000,000



Sliding storage was fitted under the stairs

it would be too complicated,” says Richard. “But I think it’s just stuff you would expect to see in a modern house.”

Well-planned zones

The care that went into designing the lighting and audio schemes is indicative of the Benson’s attention to detail throughout the project. Thinking ahead about how they’d be using the spaces, Richard and Tory chose to add a boot room with a shower where they can wash their dog’s paws to avoid muddy marks in the house.

WE LEARNED...

- COMMUNICATE WITH EVERYONE** who is involved in your scheme. This includes all contractors and your partner. To run things smoothly, make sure they talk to each other.
- DO NOT SETTLE** for the first quote. Shop around and ask many professionals for their prices and thoughts – you will be able to make a better choice. We went with firm that was familiar to us, as we knew they had a high standard of workmanship.
- THINK ABOUT THE SPACE** and how you’ll be using it on a daily basis before you start any works. Thorough planning helped us make the most of our home – not only in terms of which rooms we would need but also what atmosphere we wanted to create.





Formerly wasted space in a corridor between the cinema and the culinary zone became a small bespoke bar built by Point 5 Kitchen. The team also created the clever pull-out storage under the stairs on the ground floor for the family to keep their coats and shoes.

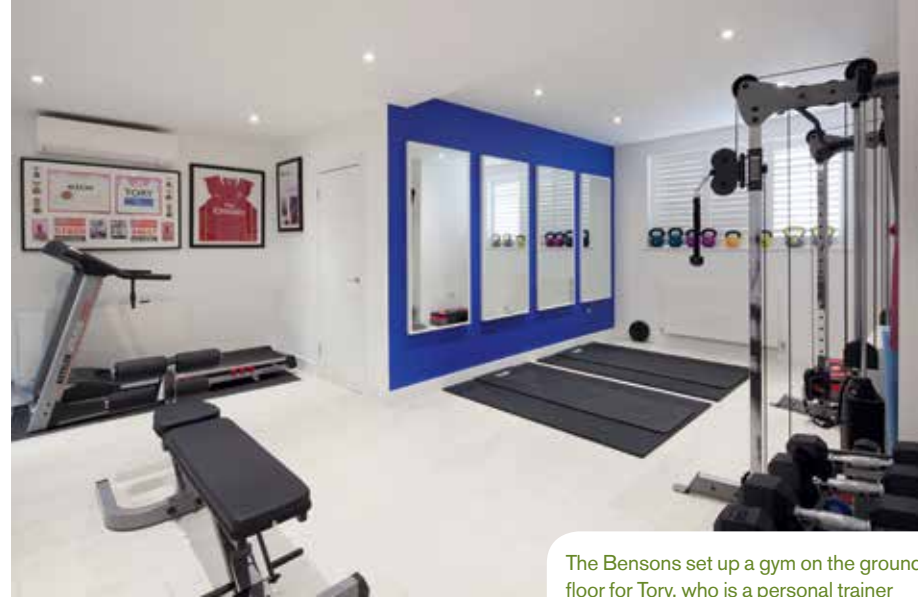
With all these changes, the Bensons have proved it is possible to get a home tailored to one's needs without building from scratch; it just requires extra thought, creativity and careful planning.

Similar processes went into the family's decision to repurpose the garage. The original was too small for contemporary vehicles, so they sacrificed it and divided the space into three zones. The front section is now used for storage of larger items and the middle was

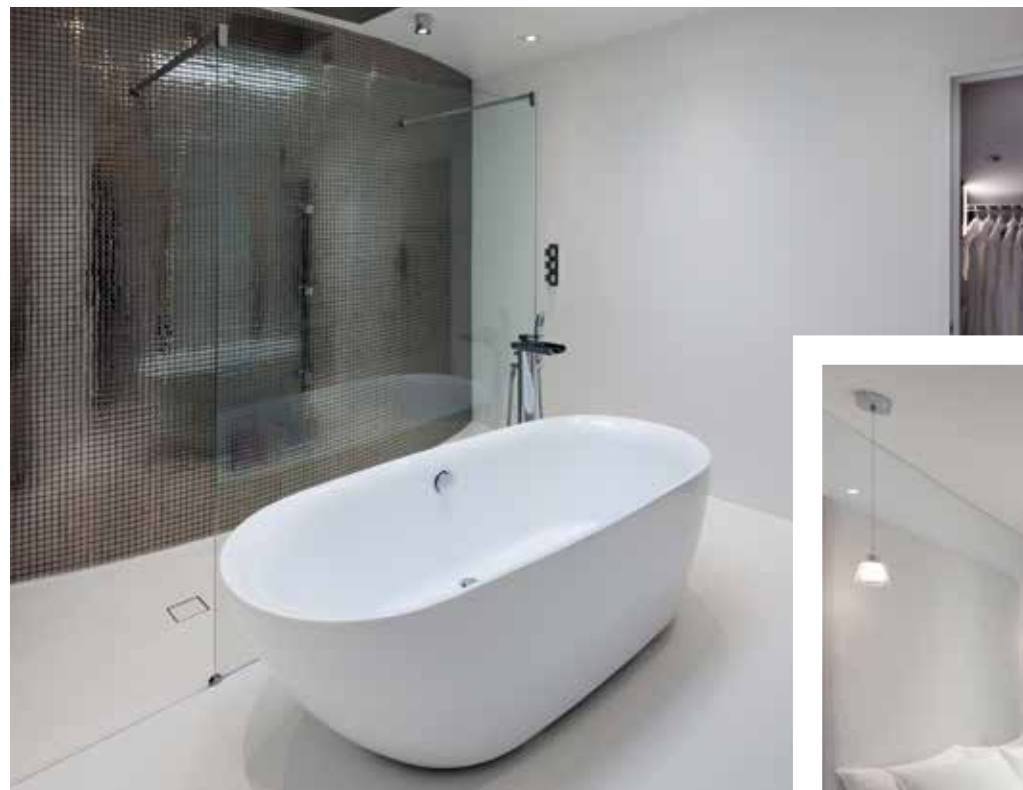
made into a utility room – accessible from the kitchen. The rear section houses the new central heating system by Heatmiser.

Made for success

The kitchen itself is central to the family-oriented design of the dwelling. Sleek cupboard-style doors conceal a walk-in larder, while the standout feature is a 3m long breakfast bar with LED lighting around the worktop edges. Both this and the upstand are made from Corian, a unique acrylic polymer blended with natural minerals that is hard, non-porous and easy to clean. "We've had it before," says Richard. "It's a material that will really last."



The Bensons set up a gym on the ground floor for Tory, who is a personal trainer



Tory was heavily involved in designing the culinary zone, along with Joe from Point 5 Kitchens, whose work throughout the house the couple describe as excellent. In fact, the Bensons chose all their contractors well. They called in for quotes from various experienced traders for the building work, but went with Goriana Construction, as they had used the company in the past.

Richard maintains that the key aspect to the project's success was communication – both between themselves and the contractors, as well as between the different trades. To aid this, the couple set up a WhatsApp group that enabled everyone to keep up to date with progress. An indication of how well this idea panned out is the lack of any serious delays in the seven month build schedule.

Staying on top of finances

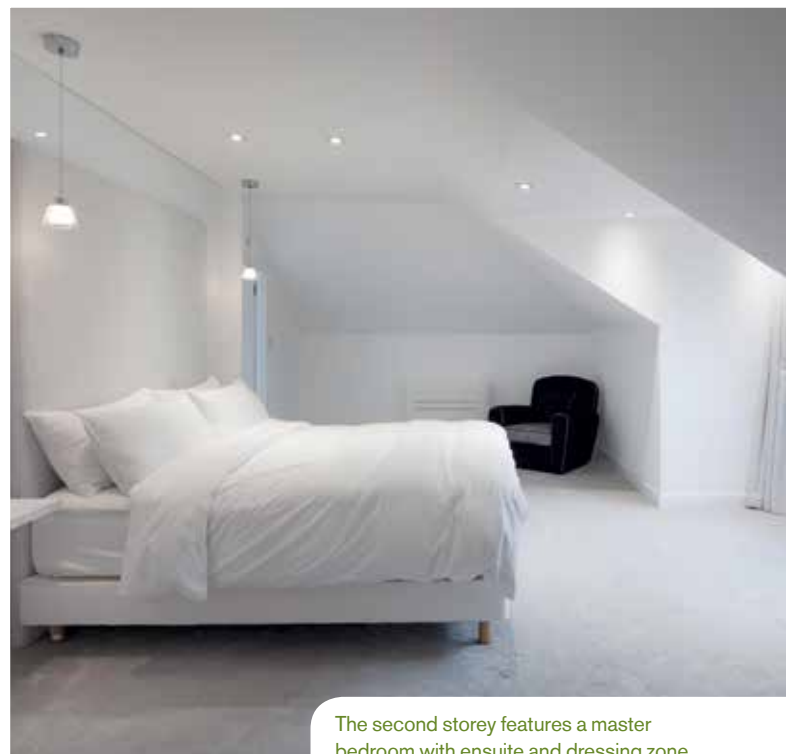
Although the scheme ran smoothly, Richard admits he did dig into his contingency. "I tried to apply the budget as rationally as possible," he says. This involved spending on good quality items where it mattered – such as going for poured resin floors throughout the ground floors, bathrooms, stairs and landings.

"I had tiles before," says Tory. "The grout gets really dirty and it never looks finished. I just love the one piece, pure clean lines of the

resin. It's so easy to clean and it feels soft and warm when you walk barefoot." Elsewhere, they chose the more affordable option of laminate flooring from Kronospan.

Another area where the couple saved money was the windows. They used ultra-slim, 22mm frame units for the sliding doors across the back of the new extension but decided to go for conventional replacement products elsewhere on the property. "The most difficult part of the project for me was keeping control of costs," says Richard. "There was a finite budget, but we're glad there were no awful compromises."

The glazing is something of a triumph, as it is the focus of the central family area. Richard and Tory resisted the idea of bifold doors, despite their popularity with self-builders and renovators, and chose sliders instead. "This is England, not LA," says Richard. "We needed plenty of light in the back of the extension and you can barely see the 22mm frames. They allow the maximum amount of natural light in and views out to the garden are unobstructed. We do a lot of entertaining there. Everyone loves it."



The second storey features a master bedroom with ensuite and dressing zone

Final thoughts

After a two-year wait from exchange to moving in, Richard and Tory finally have the family home they have always wanted. "Sometimes I can't quite believe it's my place," says Tory. During the works, the couple lived in rented accommodation nearby and only settled into their new dwelling once all works had finished.

Richard, who thoroughly appreciated the renovation process, says they have no plans for any more building work in the future. "I enjoyed taking a blank canvas and constructing a dwelling that's the right fit," he says. "This house was built for us to be a family. It feels like our forever home, where our children will come back to."



The AV Lounge system lets the family adjust the settings of the cinema room remotely

closer look

Seamless connection...

The master suite occupies the whole of the second floor, which was originally an open-plan living area and WC. The Bensons moved the stairs and divided the large zone into a bedroom, ensuite, dressing room, and a small kitchenette – built by Point 5 Kitchens.

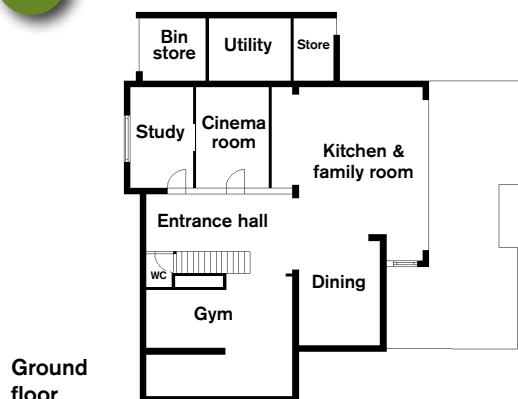
The storey's style is luxurious with no detail too small, including a super king size bed from The Four Seasons, as well as dressing room units with LEDs set into the upstands. Tory opted for pure white resin floors in the bathroom – which boasts a massive walk-through shower with a nickel tiled curved wall, his and hers sinks and a large bath with a rooflight above. The key to the comfortable suite is the layout, where each zone is accessible from one another.



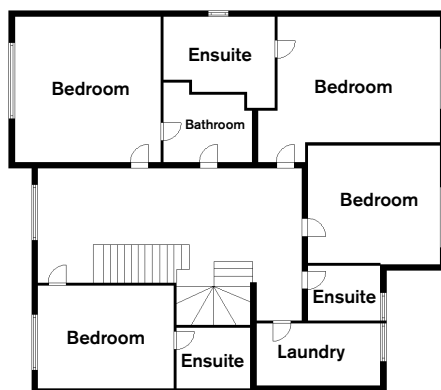
Sleek design



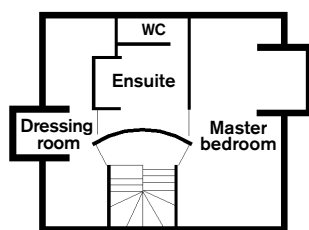
Floor plans



Ground floor



First floor



Second floor



House plans re-created using
Build It 3D Home Designer software.
www.buildit.co.uk/3dsoftware



TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

Elements	Cost m ²	Cost %	Total cost
Design & planning	£49	4%	£25,000
Building work	£480	42%	£245,000
Juliet balconies	£3	<1%	£1,500
Glazing (incl extension)	£90	8%	£46,000
Shutters	£11	1%	£5,500
Electric fittings	£24	2%	£12,000
Kitchen	£114	10%	£58,000
Bathroom & tiles	£44	4%	£22,500
Storage cupboards	£147	13%	£75,000
Flooring	£51	4%	£26,100
Front door & locks	£25	2%	£13,000
Security	£20	2%	£10,000
AV system	£43	4%	£22,000
Interiors	£28	2%	£14,100
Garden	£23	2%	£12,000

Grand total

£587,700

Useful contacts



LAYOUT DESIGN & INTERIORS **Pure Design UK** 020 8412 0135 **PLANNING CONSULTANT DP9** 020 7004 1700 www.dp9.co.uk **MAIN CONTRACTOR Grian Construction** 07584 057503 www.grianconstructionltd.co.uk **KITCHEN & STORAGE Point 5 Kitchens** 020 8883 5759 www.point5kitchens.co.uk **GLAZING IQ Glass** 01494 722880 www.iqglassuk.com **BATHROOM TILES Marabese Ceramics** 01234 324598 www.marabeseceramics.com **LAMINATE FLOORING Kronospan** 01691 773361 www.kronospan-express.com **CCTV & ALARM Ranger Security** 0800 141 2224 www.rangesecuritysystems.co.uk **LIGHTING Lightwave** 023 8000 3320 www.lightwaveuk.com **SOUND SYSTEM Sonos** www.sonos.com **AV SYSTEM AV Lounge** 020 8204 8565 www.avlounge.co.uk **HEATING APP HeatMiser Neo** 01254 669090 www.heatmiser.com **KING SIZE BED The Four Seasons** www.fourseasons.com