

‘Our run-down, one-bedroom flat is now a modern two-bedroom house’



Reached by open-tread stairs, the sitting room is a light, relaxing space that enjoys views out through a skylight and rear glass wall

Hidden behind the traditional frontage of Filippo Ginanni and Maura Grazzani's period terraced house are white, minimalist, light-filled spaces with walls of glass



BEFORE

▲ The entire ground floor was a neglected workshop and garage – but with potential for conversion into living accommodation
 ◀ Changes to the façade have seamlessly matched the house to its neighbours

WHO LIVES HERE

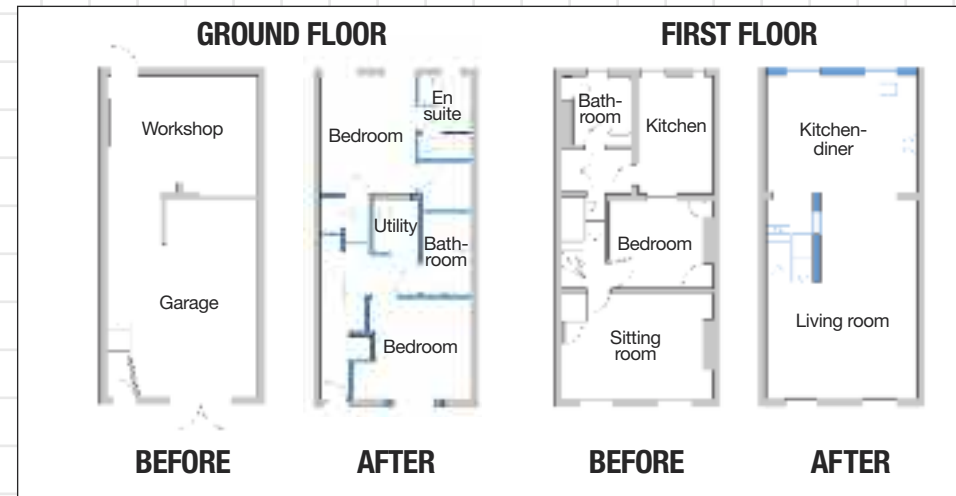
Owners: Filippo Ginanni and Maura Grazzani
Professions: Filippo and Maura both work in banking in the City of London
Property: Two-bedroom Victorian terraced house – previously a one-bedroom flat
Location: Notting Hill, London
Lived here since: The house was bought in October 2006



Project profile

COMPLETE REMODELLING AND CONVERSION
Build route: Architect, building contractor
Build dates: Sept 2007 to March 2008
Valuation at start of project (2006): £765,000
Cost of project: £247,000
New valuation (2008): £1.4m
Added value: £388,000

COST BREAKDOWN
Building work and materials: £200,000
Kitchen and appliances: £20,000
Sanitaryware: £12,000
Glass balustrades: £9,000
Rear glass panels: £6,000



How the design works

- Former garage and workshop on ground floor converted into: master bedroom, with en suite and walk-in wardrobe; guest bedroom; family bathroom; and utility room
- Built-in storage included throughout
- Tiny first-floor kitchen extended into former bathroom and hallway to form spacious kitchen-diner
- Old bedroom and sitting room combined to form new living room with TV area
- Glass panel inserted between kitchen and living room to allow light to pass through the building
- New roof terrace accessed by staircase from living room, overlooked by panel of glazing and roof light
- New open-tread staircases fitted with glass balustrades
- One wall of sitting room partly removed to create opening that enables views of staircase
- New timber windows fitted to match the originals

The Flexform sofa in the main living room provides the centrepiece to the all-white scheme

'We sourced everything in Italy. Travelling over to buy things probably shaved £15,000 off the budget'

American walnut flooring throughout the house has also been perfectly aligned with the external decking on the roof terrace

When Milan-born Filippo Ginanni discovered that the flat right next door to his rented London house was coming onto the market, he recognised that this could be his chance to get onto the property ladder and remain living in the bustling neighbourhood he had grown to love.

Portobello Road, in the heart of west London's vibrant Notting Hill area, is a highly desirable address – partly thanks to the proximity of the famous antiques market and the collection of fashionable boutiques, cafés

and restaurants of Notting Hill Gate – and Filippo was aware that competition would be fierce for the one-bedroom flat, especially as it came with a garage and workshop on the ground floor. 'I love this area and didn't want to miss out,' he recalls. 'Although the flat itself was shabby and cramped, with the bedroom sandwiched between the kitchen and sitting room, I could immediately see the potential to double the living space by converting the garage and workshop areas downstairs – particularly as there's also a parking space to the rear of the house.'

Filippo and his partner, Maura Grazzani, had strong views and ideas about the kind of home they wanted to create – right down to the type of light switches. The couple spent time producing drawings to illustrate their ideas and then approached 15 different architects to quote for the project. 'At that stage, we had very little idea of the cost,' admits Filippo, 'and the quotes that came back were all over the place. It was Luke Tozer of Pitman Tozer Architects who produced the most detailed schedule and the prices he quoted were very close to what we actually

ended up spending. We explained to him that the last thing we wanted was a dull house.'

Initially, Filippo and Maura had considered positioning one bedroom on the ground floor and another on the first, but Luke suggested rationalising the layout – effectively flipping the accommodation to create a reverse-level home, by converting the garage and workshop into two bedrooms and two bathrooms, with the

kitchen and living room upstairs. 'My parents then commented that we needed a separate utility room,' says Filippo, 'because in Italy it's unheard of to have your washing machine in the kitchen. They also came up with the idea of fitting concealed storage cupboards and wardrobes, so that every last millimetre of space has been put to good use.'

A planning application was made for the garage and rear workshop, as it was thought it

might be a former commercial space, now to be converted into residential. And as this is a conservation area, the front façade of the Victorian terrace had to match its neighbours in order to comply. A new timber window replaces the old garage doors, with the remaining opening blocked up and rendered, then painted a warm blue. The house is now bounded by a low garden wall and railings.

The rear of the building is a different story, however, and here the upper part of the original brick wall and the lower slope of the roof have been removed to make way for ►



A white gloss and stainless-steel Valcucine kitchen from Barzaghi Store is matched with an extending dining table from B&B Italia

'Glass plays a really important part in the design. We can see right through the house from front to back'



The kitchen-diner is separated from the raised sitting room by a glass screen from DR Services of London



More DR glass balustrades, on the internal staircases, ensure natural light can penetrate the entire building

a large panel of glazing and a glass skylight beside the new decked roof terrace. This useful outdoor space serves as the perfect spot to sit and enjoy a drink, and is reached by a contemporary open-tread staircase that has been fitted with glass balustrades to avoid creating an enclosed stairwell. Light is thus able to permeate down through the building.

'Glass plays a really important part in the whole design,' says Maura, 'and inserting a glazed wall to form a balustrade between

the kitchen and the raised living room means that we can now see right through the house from front to back.'

Not only were Filippo and Maura extremely pleased with their architect's ideas, but they were also impressed by their chosen building contractor, who was selected via a tender process and proved to be reliable and hard-working, despite a few unforeseen problems. 'In the end, we needed to replace the entire roof as part of the refurbishment, even though

the old one wasn't in bad shape,' explains Filippo. 'Raising the ceiling height meant sacrificing the original loft space, but it creates a fantastic vaulted effect that makes the house feel so much larger.'

Living next door during the build – renting an almost identical house – helped Filippo and Maura to visualise their new home as it formed, although the constant noise did begin to get them down. 'There would be banging from early in the morning all day and I couldn't

even complain because the builders were working for me,' laughs Filippo. Internally, the entire building was stripped out and reconstructed, to avoid the need to patch together old and new elements. So, chimneys were removed and sections of the party walls rebuilt, and the house has been completely rewired and newly plumbed.

On the ground floor, the new master bedroom has a stylish en-suite shower room and a luxurious walk-in wardrobe, concealed ▶



Once a workshop, the stylish master bedroom opens into a walk-in wardrobe fitted with full-height doors



Travertine tiles and Italian sanitaryware from Flaminia Ceramics, including a marble bath, were chosen for the ground-floor bathrooms

behind full-height doors of spray-painted MDF. There is a guest bedroom, a family-size bathroom and a separate utility, with additional cupboards providing valuable storage space. Upstairs, the stunning white kitchen/dining room has been fitted with a high-gloss Italian kitchen – Valcucine from Barzaghi Store – featuring a central island unit with stainless-steel worktops. A wine fridge has been incorporated, although Filippo regrets that he wasn't able to include a dedicated wine cellar in the downstairs hallway as originally planned, due to structural concerns – and the hefty price tag.

'We both enjoy cooking and entertaining, so it was important to have a good-sized table,' says Maura of the extendible white

lacquered wooden table, which has been teamed with moulded plastic Verner Panton chairs from Vitra Ltd. The glass balustrade means that anyone cooking in the kitchen is able to chat to guests up in the living room, where the soaring ceiling, white walls and glass create an airy space that's also ideal for reading and listening to music. Furniture has been kept to a minimum, with an off-white sofa, a white leather chair and footstool from Flexform, and modernist Italian Flos light fittings. 'In fact, we sourced absolutely everything in Italy,' says Filippo. 'from the kitchen and bathrooms to the travertine tiles, wardrobes, beds and sofa. Travelling over to buy things probably shaved about £15,000 off the overall budget and meant we could have

exactly what we wanted.' The only item made in the UK is the waste-disposal unit in the kitchen – a feature Filippo wanted to include after time spent living in the US.

Unsurprisingly for one of London's most sought-after residential areas, maximising space has been a major consideration throughout the project and Maura and Filippo were determined to stick to plain white walls, which contrast beautifully with the rich brown of the flooring in American walnut. 'We didn't want to create all this extra living space and then crowd it with too many possessions,' Filippo explains. 'Living in such a pared-down home is very relaxing and it's great to be able to see what's going on in other parts of the house, thanks to all the glass.'

Overall, Filippo and Maura have spent £250,000 reinventing the property and are planning to remain living here for the foreseeable future. 'Even though house prices are dropping, we would still make quite a substantial profit if we ever decided to sell,' says Filippo. 'But for now, the house is exactly what we need and living on all these different levels definitely works for us.' 🏠

Stripping back to the structure

- With a major renovation project, it may be worth stripping the building all the way back to the original brickwork, removing all plasterwork, ceilings and skirting, the architrave and possibly the floorboards.
- Going 'back to brick' allows a property to be fully treated for damp and fungal rot. It can also reveal any hidden structural defects.

- Original plaster mouldings and details will be lost, but this won't be an issue if you are going for a contemporary minimal look.
- Taking the building back to a 'skeletal' state allows for first-fix plumbing, heating, electrics and other services to be run like a new build, helping to keep down costs and ensure quality control.

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