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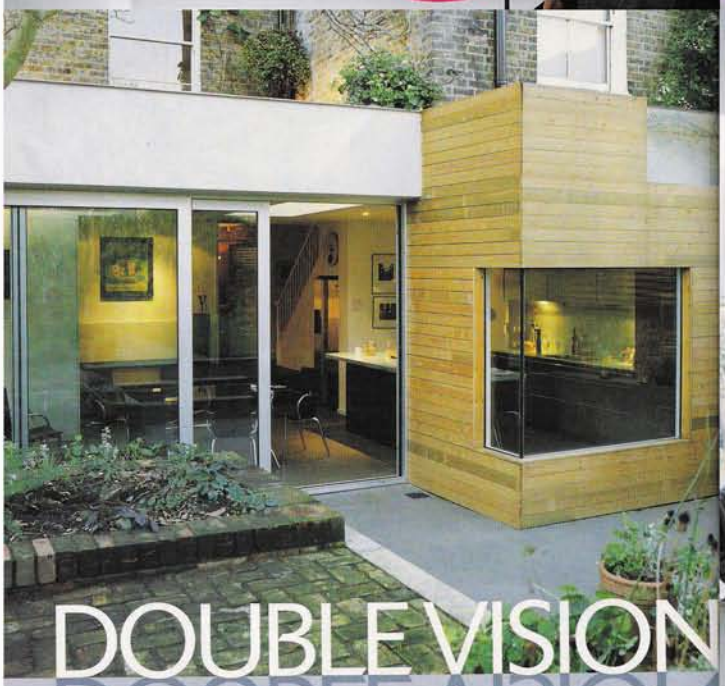

DOUBLE VISION

When Elaine and Clive outgrew their Victorian terrace, what did they do? Bought next door and turned two houses into one home, with double helpings of ingenuity and style

Words Tessa Williams Photography Paul Massey Styling Martin Johnson

When Clive Brill and Elaine Bedell ran out of space in their terraced house in east London, they simply took a sledgehammer to their neighbour's wall and smashed their way through. But hold the police sirens and men in white coats: it was, in fact, Clive and Elaine's wall. They'd just bought the house next door and embarked on a six-month-long project to transform the two smallish Victorian houses into one generously proportioned family home.

The couple and their children, Joe, now 11, and Florence, nine, had reached a stage where the house was overflowing with toys, books and memorabilia. They had lots of beautiful furniture and family treasures, but kept tripping over PlayStations and doll's houses to reach them. 'We'd been searching for a bigger place, but couldn't find anywhere we liked in the area,' remembers Elaine, who is a business bod at the Royal Shakespeare Company, while Clive is a theatre and film producer. 'When we heard next door was for sale, we looked

THIS PICTURE The kitchen and living area was enlarged by the addition of a modern extension. A long bank of low-level drawers in the kitchen provides stacks of storage without blocking out the light. For a ...ended cooker hood, try Smeg. RIGHT, TOP The chairs are by Philippe Starck and the sofa is by B&B Italia. Try The Chair Company for a glass table and The Conran Shop for a chopping board

LEFT AND ABOVE The real star of Clive and Elaine's double fab house is the light modern lower-ground kitchen/ living/dining area. There's plenty of room to lounge, loads of storage and gorgeous sliding glass doors that lead onto the garden. The decking-clad ...

Yourstyle

THIS PICTURE A bank of mirrored cupboards makes the bathroom feel double the size. Elaine and Clive both love luxurious baths, and this one, from CP Hart, was the deepest modern style they could find. BELOW LEFT Clive and Elaine's vintage-style bed – for similar, try The Iron Bed Company.

home truths Elaine, any future plans for the house? When the children grow up, we'd like to give them their half to the house. I think we'd like to keep our kitchen-dining though, but too lovely to split up again. We'll have to fight about that nearer the time!

Favourite colour in the house? The grey in the sliding room. We searched long and hard to get the perfect shade and ended up setting on a Farrell Earth one. Solutions Elaine – but only after to create the decorating paint the room three times.

Perfect evening in? Clive is a bonus cook, so we've been to have a big family meal. Then round them off with a movie, all lounging on the sofa.

Any pet interiors fates? Elaine, bad comers. Clive: Fastened Battersea Hero.

'When the walls came down, there was suddenly so much more light. We couldn't believe it was our home'

of the two houses, is like something out of the va-va-voom Citroën advert: giant sliding glass doors lead onto the garden; the gleaming Poggenpohl kitchen is laid out to feel like part of the living space; and, crucially, the design includes plenty of luxurious space for the family to spread out, chat and play. The glass doors magically disappear into a recess when you slide them back, so the room instantly feels like an outdoor terrace when the weather's good. 'The feeling of being part of the garden is just unbeatable,' beams Clive, unable to conceal his pride in his beautiful indoor/outdoor space that was only a blueprint the year before last.

On the ground floor, part of the supporting wall between the houses has been retained, with a cosy, book-lined area on one side and a snug TV zone on the other. The rest of the wall has been knocked down to turn two rooms into a single, airy space with light flooding in from four windows. 'When the walls came down, there was suddenly so much more light,' says Elaine. 'When we first saw it, it knocked us for six. We couldn't believe it was our home.'

Upstairs, more clever tricks make the original small rooms fit in with the generously proportioned spaces downstairs. The dinky bathroom, for instance, has a wall of mirrored cupboards to double the sense of space. And in the master bedroom, two rooms have been knocked into one to create distinct sleeping and dressing areas.

The look seems effortless, but every detail has been lovingly fussed over for maximum effect. In a city where even the smallest house seems to be divided into at least two poky flats, this is a brilliant celebration of space – an undisputed case of big is beautiful. □