

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Architect Richard Owers gave this Twenties bakery in Cambridge a new lease of life, creating a modern home while acknowledging the building's culinary past

Words Abi Grogan Photography Logan MacDougall Pope

AT A GLANCE

Names Richard and
Susanne Owers

Ages 47 and 39

Location Cambridge

Property Refurbishment and
extension of industrial buildings

Bedrooms 3 **Bathrooms** 2

Project started January 2011

Project completed May 2011

Size of house 145sqm

Total build cost £111,000

this picture A lime splashback brings a welcome pop of colour to the predominantly white, minimal kitchen



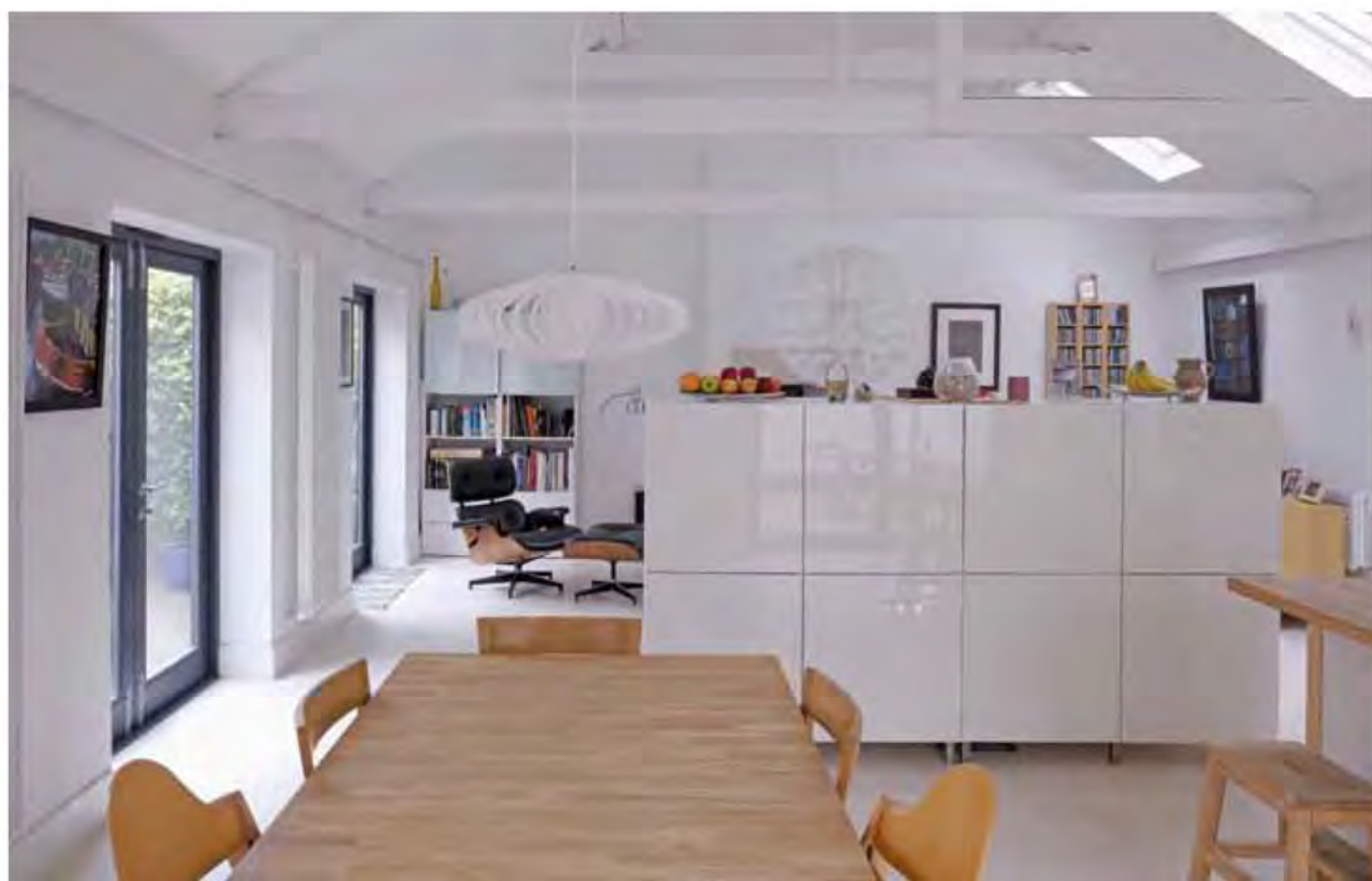
this picture Large sliding doors link the kitchen and dining area with the walled courtyard garden

'It gives me a lot of satisfaction just sitting and enjoying the space'



above A roomy sofa and sheepskin rugs place comfort at the heart of the living area

left This high-gloss storage island has a dual use – keeping the open-plan space tidy and dividing the living area from the kitchen and dining zones



Eight years ago, architect Richard Owers and his wife Susanne were Londoners in the truest sense of the word. They lived in a converted Victorian flat in Walworth and owned a flourishing architecture practice in King's Cross. But as their family grew, the Owers decided to move from the city to Cambridge to be closer to good schools for their children, Freddie, now 12 and Matilda, eight.

For Richard, the location also had family ties. 'My uncle was an architect here. He designed the University's contemporary art gallery, Kettle's Yard, so I spent a lot of time in this part of the country as a child.'

The couple rented a property in the city while they searched for the perfect place to build their dream house, and when Richard went to view a badly converted cluster of dilapidated buildings as part of a business venture, he realised he'd stumbled across an unexpected opportunity. 'When my business partner said there was little value in the plot for him, I decided right there that I'd love to convert the existing structures into my future home.'

The family's initial plan to build a new house on an empty plot was abandoned in favour of restoring the ramshackle bakery and connecting it with the adjacent detached red-brick cottage, both of which were in very poor condition. Although

the Owers didn't set out to build an eco-house, renovating an older property rather than building from scratch meant their project ended up being greener than they'd anticipated. 'I wanted to take an approach that is often overlooked in sustainable architecture – how to adapt in a creative and cost-effective way,' says Richard. 'I wanted to demonstrate that buildings with little architectural value can be rescued through good design.'

Richard's plans to refurbish the Twenties bakery involved gutting the original interior structure, insulating and re-roofing it, and installing double glazing; all measures that ensure the building warms up quickly and retains heat.

After planning permission was granted Richard prepared a design brief, although the only person he had to consult with was himself. 'It was completely different working on my own personal project rather than a client's,' he says. 'I was expecting it to be much harder, but aside from the fact that I had to fit it around the day job, I would never have wanted someone else to design my house. It gives me a lot of pleasure and satisfaction just sitting and enjoying the space.'

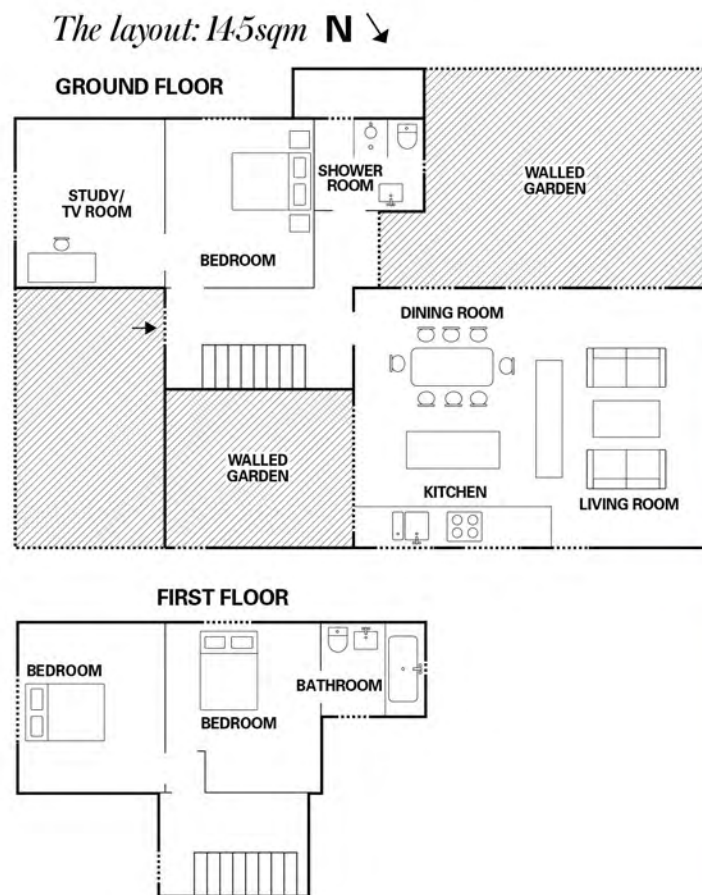
As the plot is situated behind a row of local shops, the couple's biggest challenge was maintaining privacy for their young family, so Richard factored this in alongside the need for light. 'It was important to get the roof glazing right to ensure high levels of natural sunlight filtered through into →



this picture To retain the bakery's character, the original sign from the building's exterior has been remounted in the living room



this picture Susanne gave Richard this replica Eames lounge and ottoman for his fortieth birthday



this picture A nook at the top of the stairs on the first floor serves as a study area for the children

the house without compromising on privacy,' he says. 'We have two skylights above the sofa and one above the landing.'

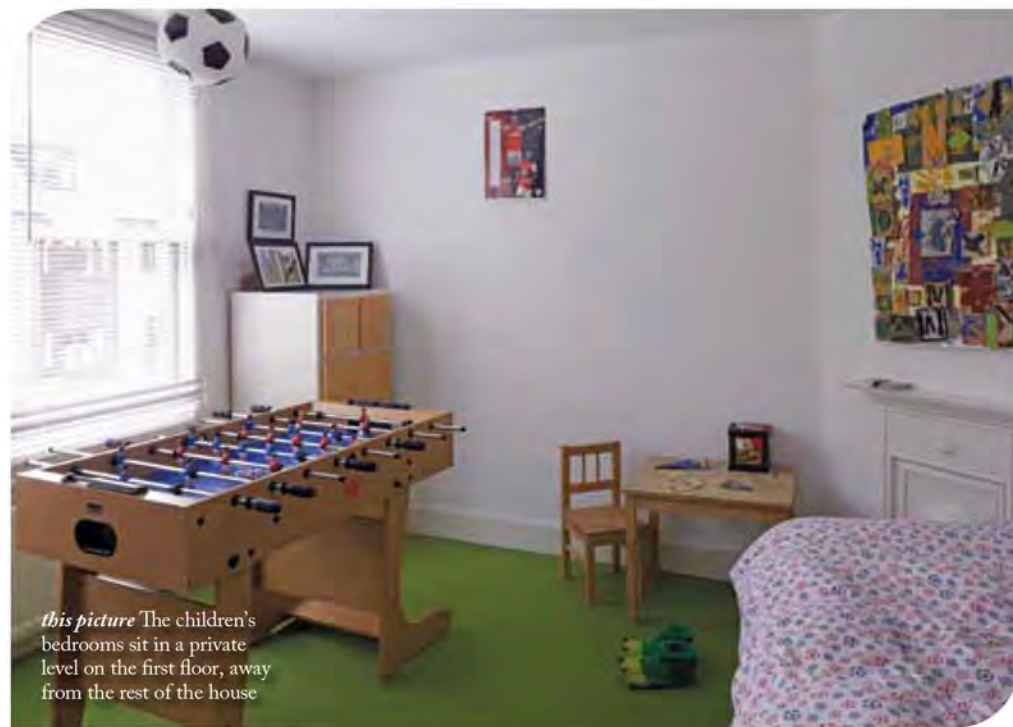
Richard hired a reliable developer with whom he'd worked before, who was so convinced by Richard's vision that he agreed to start building before funding had officially been secured. 'I was lucky that I had a builder I could trust completely, but it didn't stop me visiting the site every day to see how things were progressing.'

The builder's instinct and enthusiasm, not to mention hard work, were rewarded when, after a mere four months of construction, the family was able to move into its new home.

Richard's fondness for natural materials is evident in the completed building's mix of wood, brick and smooth plaster. He's also included heritage features from the bakery, such as the original signage, which has been repositioned above the fireplace, and the original brickwork. 'Keeping the structure exposed internally was key to giving the interior some character and visual warmth,' he explains. 'There's a strong play of black-stained timber against brickwork and the beauty of these materials is that they are cost-effective but they create a big impact.'

Visitors enter the house via a timber box, which links the two original buildings. This additional space has also allowed the couple to replace the old, narrow staircase with a wider, more open one, which makes the entrance area seem more spacious and allows better access to the children's bedrooms on the first floor. Richard has installed a computer on the landing outside Matilda and Freddie's rooms to give the children a more social space for studying and to allow him and Susanne to monitor how long the kids spend using the internet.

On the ground floor are Richard and Susanne's bedroom and bathroom and the study, which was originally intended →



this picture The children's bedrooms sit in a private level on the first floor, away from the rest of the house



this picture Richard and Susanne's bedroom showcases their taste for pared-back and simple interior design



this picture A black timber box serves as an entrance hall for the renovated bakery

as a fourth bedroom, but evolved into a second TV room. Back through the entrance hall is the open-plan kitchen, dining and living area; a half-height storage system separates the cooking zone from the living room – the couple chose this as a less intrusive division than a full-height wall. The two large sofas were Richard's choice: 'I was used to living in a relatively small space in London, so I remember doing the drawings for our potential living room and it being a real thrill that we would have the freedom to walk all the way around a pair of large sofas in our new home.'

The living room blends effortlessly into the kitchen, which is thanks to the symmetry and simplicity of the space. The kitchen has a palette of mostly white, with bright accents in the green goat's wool carpet and primary hued bar stools. A replica Eames chair, a present from Susanne to Richard on his fortieth birthday, sits next to the sofa. In keeping with Richard's love of textures, all the hard surfaces are either painted plaster or a natural material, all of which the Owers sourced and designed themselves. 'I rarely work with interior designers,' says Richard, 'because I think every wall has two sides, and an architect can be responsible for all of it.'

To avoid being overlooked by the car park next to the house, the east-facing courtyard, accessed via sliding doors leading out from the kitchen, is enclosed by white-painted walls. 'It has the feeling of a living room, carpeted in white pebbles with a planted edge and a Tibetan cherry tree for shade,' says Richard. The continuation of the kitchen's white theme creates a seamless transition between indoors and out.

The Owers may have had to wait a few years to get their dream home, but the result, Richard says, is worth it. 'I feel quite content when I'm sitting in my favourite spot on the left-hand seat of our sofa with a view of both courtyards. I think we've done a good job blending contemporary interiors with historical accents.' GD

Money matters

Preliminary work £6,000 **Groundwork** £16,000 **Structural elements** £18,500 **Timber cladding** £4,000 **Glazing** £25,000 **Plumbing and electrics** £10,500 **Joinery** £2,500 **Kitchen and bathroom** £15,000 **Flooring** £7,500 **Professional fees** £6,000 **Total build cost** £111,000 **Build cost per sqm** £765

Suppliers

PROJECT TEAM

Architect NRAP Architects (01223 464 455; nrp.co.uk) **Structural engineer** Andrew Firebrace Partnership (01223 811 572; afpconsult.co.uk) **Builder** Lon-1st Construction (no longer trading)

STRUCTURE

Timber Travis Perkins (travisperkins.co.uk) **Single-ply roofing** Sarnafil (01707 394 444; gbr.sarnafil.sika.com)

ECO FEATURES

Insulation Celotex (01473 822 093; celotex.co.uk)

FIXTURES & FITTINGS

Light fittings Ikea (020 3645 0000; ikea.co.uk) **Roof lights** Velux (01592 778 225; velux.co.uk) **Bathroom fittings** Ideal Standard (01482 346 461; ideal-standard.co.uk) **Shower** Bathstore (0800 023 2323; bathstore.com) **Kitchen sink** Blanco (blanco.co.uk) **Kitchen tap** Aqva (0116 251 6487; aqva.co.uk) **Kitchen cabinets** Ikea (as before) **Radiators** Stelrad (01709 578 950; stelrad.com) **Carpet** Tretford (01827 831 400; tretford.com)

FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES

Rug John Lewis (0345 604 9049; johnlewis.com) **Sofa** Ikea (as before) **Bar stools** Habitat (0344 499 4686; habitat.co.uk)

STYLE FINDER

Experiment with colour to imitate Richard and Susanne's retro style
Compiled by Kayla Garland



▲ **Bold lines** Pure cabinet in matt lacquer in snow white (H100xW192xD45cm), £2,841, Chaplins (020 8421 1779; chaplins.co.uk)



▲ **Hot seat** Special Bombo high stool in polycarbonate in red (H84xW44xD37cm), £588, Magis at Made in Design (020 7692 4001; madeindesign.co.uk)



▲ **Crafted yarn** Artisan carpet in malachite green, £73.02 per sqm, Bolon at Flooring Concepts (0844 561 0918; flooring-concepts.co.uk)



▲ **Modern twist** Flexi neck floor lamp in metal in red gloss (H156xDiameter23cm), £25, Iconic Lights (0161 837 6092; iconiclights.co.uk)



▲ **Eco surface** Caramel side pressed worktop in bamboo, £80 per sqm, Moso Bamboo Surfaces (01793 208 030; mosobamboosurfaces.co.uk)