



In brief
PROJECT Three-storey new build
LOCATION Surrey
PLOT £772,000
SPENT £700,000
WORTH £1.7m+

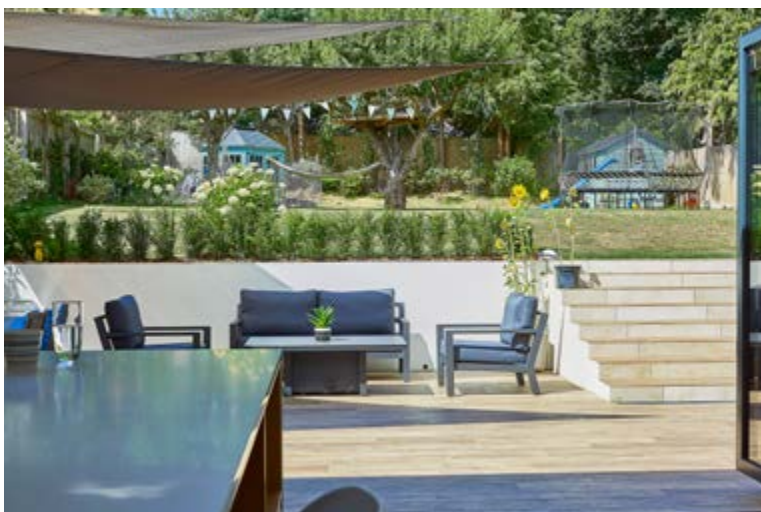




Hunkered down

Joanne and Dominic O'Connor's new three-storey home is sunken into the plot to create the impression of a much lower building when viewed from the street.

STORY: **DEBBIE JEFFERY** PICTURES: **NICK HUGGINS**



EXTERIOR

The front is designed so that the top floor is invisible from the street. At the rear is an unusual pop-out dormer window, with a flat roof above the kitchen/diner.



When Joanne and Dominic O'Connor decided to move to a new house, they didn't have far to look. The couple had relocated from London to Farnham when their eldest son was six months old, buying a house which the previous owner had enlarged. "It was a bungalow, which had been extended upwards into the eaves over several years, so we inherited a layout which didn't really work for us," explains Joanne. "Dominic always had the desire to build his own house, where he didn't need to spend his spare time fixing things, so when our next-door neighbour came to tell us that his 1960s bungalow would be coming onto the market, Dominic convinced me to buy it."

The compact brick bungalow had a dormer window and an integral garage and Joanne and Dominic initially considered extending upwards with a new first floor, as several properties in the road had already been enlarged in this way. Ultimately, though, the couple felt that inheriting the existing layout would curb potential for creating a really exciting home for themselves and their sons – Rory, now 7, and Rudi, 4.

"Structurally, we could end up with problems down the line so after many discussions with our architect, Kate Stoddart, we decided to build a replacement house on the plot," says Dominic, a global technology sales director. "Our estate agent recommended his own builder, who in turn suggested our architect."

Kate Stoddart is a chartered architect based in Farnham, Surrey, specialising in high-quality, bespoke domestic architecture. As a mother of two, she recognises that a home is for living in first and foremost, coupling contemporary architectural design with the practicalities

“Replacing the bungalow, gave us restricted planning permission for the finished height of the front elevation.”

of family life, while focusing on light, form and space. “Our brief was to maximise the plot, with plenty of light, open-plan living and a good flow,” says Joanne, an operations director for a recruitment firm. “We both work from home so needed two offices, and we wanted a dedicated yoga studio. Most importantly, the house had to be flexible and adapt with our needs.”

Based on a rough cost analysis, Kate pitched the concept of a total new build, stressing the fact that, with no VAT to pay, the couple would have a bigger budget. “Replacing the bungalow, which has two other bungalows as neighbours, gave us restricted planning permission for the finished height of the front elevation,” explains Kate. “The new house had to appear to be two storeys high, but this would limit the space the growing family needed.

“The solution was to lower the ground-floor level by 600mm, allowing us to achieve three floors of accommodation with good headroom. As such, the rear elevation shows the truer size of the house, with a cosy sunken patio, while maintaining a front elevation height to meet planning approval.”

Designed so that the top floor is invisible from the street, the rendered blockwork house features an unusual pop-out dormer window to the rear, coupled with a roof light. Above the kitchen/diner is a flat roof, allowing another roof light to be installed over the dining area.

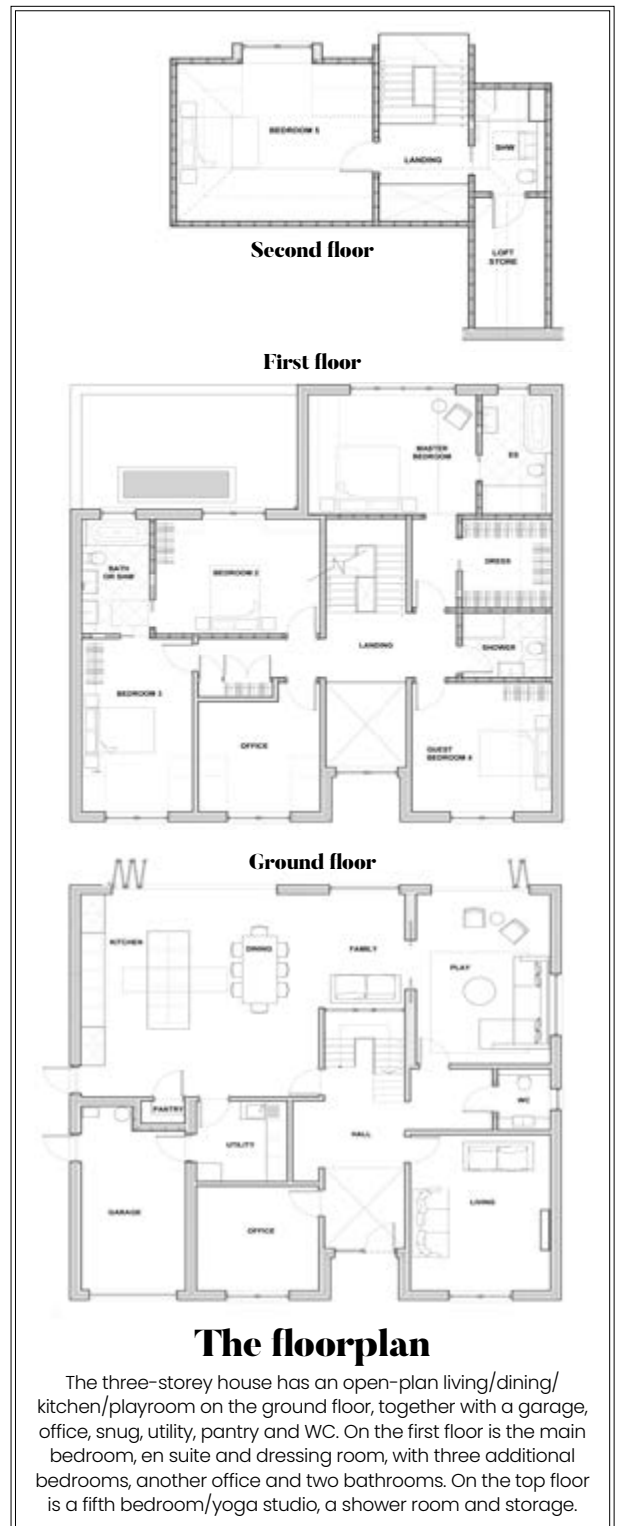
Internally, the ground-floor layout enables views from the front door right through to the rear garden, and as the family already lived on the street they knew where the sun rose and set, ensuring the floorplan was designed to maximise natural light throughout the day.

“Kate has completed so many projects in our area that she knows what the planners like,” explains Dominic. “This saved time, as she could guide us towards a design which would be approved first time, without major amendments.”



THE BUILD

Demolishing the existing bungalow and excavating the site enabled a spacious three-storey family home to be constructed within the planners’ height restrictions. Sinking the house down into the plot involved extensive earth removal and the construction of retaining walls. The project took 18 months to complete.





JOANNE'S TOP TIPS...

"It's ideal to find a builder and architect who have previously worked well together. We had no stress at all during the project."



Work started on site in October 2017, with the building contractor, Marcus Mckenzie of Eight Building, managing the entire project. "Marcus and his team were amazing, considered and friendly - guiding us through the project," says Joanne. "He has a network of highly skilled trades, who produced a high standard finish in a timely manner while sticking to budget. It was really important to us to have a contractor that we could gel with, as we needed to work very closely with him for 18 months."

The existing bungalow was demolished and the site cleared before concrete strip foundations could be excavated. Creating a sunken terrace and dropping the house down into the plot involved extensive earth removal and the construction of retaining walls.

The kitchen features glass doors, which open directly onto the sunken patio, with aluminium windows, a

LIVING AREA

An opening connects the living area and neighbouring playroom. Elsewhere, extra tall internal doors create a sense of space.





slate roof, and through-coloured render ensuring that the new house will remain low maintenance in the future. "It cost almost £4,000 to have the exterior of our house next door painted so we were determined to pay a little more for the self-coloured render and not have to worry about it again," Joanne explains.

"We sold our old house and moved into rented accommodation for a year during the build. It was a quarter of a mile from our plot so we could visit every day and walk the children to school. Work on site was delayed slightly by cold weather but on the whole it was a really smooth build."

Underfloor heating has been installed on the ground floor and in the bathrooms, with radiators on the upper

INDOOR/ OUTDOOR LIVING

The ground floor is mainly open plan, with the same timber-effect porcelain floor tiles laid indoors and out, providing a visual link between house and garden.

"We played around with the location of the cabinets in the kitchen to get the best possible layout, as this is where we spend most of our time."

In detail

PROJECT

Architect Kate Stoddart Architect: katestoddart.co.uk

Builder Eight Building Ltd: eightbuilding.com

Driveway and landscaping Sequoia Landscapes Ltd: sequoialandscapesltd.co.uk

STRUCTURE

Windows and doors Truglaze: truglaze.co.uk

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Sanitaryware CP Hart: cphart.co.uk

Kitchen Farnham Furnishers: farnhamfurnishers.co.uk

Tiles David Scott Tiles: davidscotttiles.com

Underfloor heating, radiators

Ark Heating Solutions: arkheatingsolutions.co.uk

MVHR air filtration system

Vent-Axia: vent-axia.com

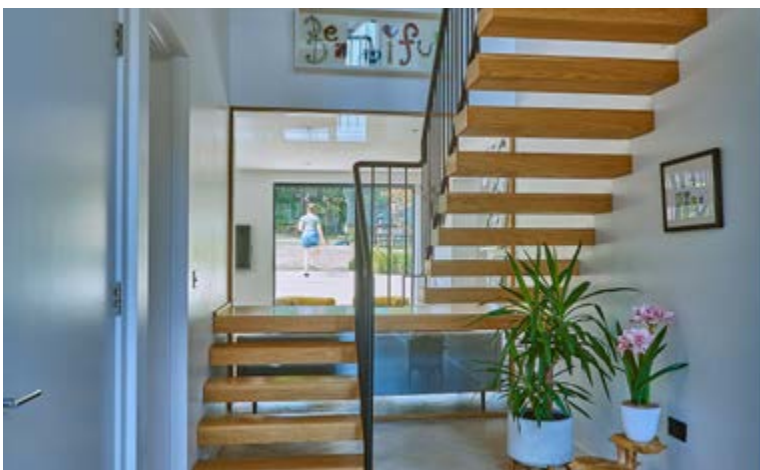
Video security Ring: ring.com



“We could never have achieved such specific detailing by adapting the old bungalow... now we have exactly what we had imagined.”

STAIRS

A local blacksmith made and installed metal banisters for the bespoke oak staircase, which winds up three storeys. Fire-retardant glass was required for the large window beside the stairs.

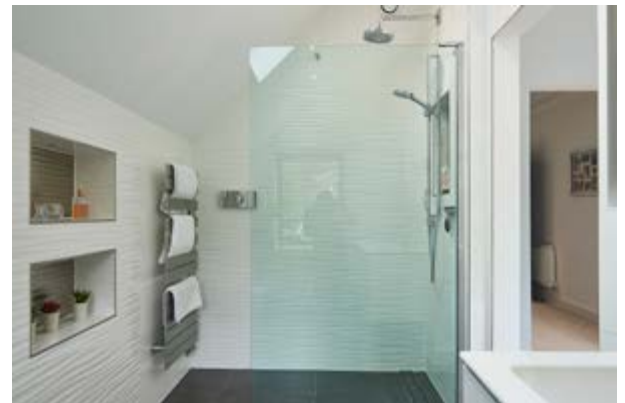


two levels. A mechanical ventilation and heat recovery system extracts damp air from the kitchens and bathrooms.

“The system keeps the house feeling fresh all day long,” says Joanne, who has a keen interest in interior design, so took the lead when it came to fitting out the house. “In the middle of the build I did actually change the layout. Originally, the utility room was accessed from the hallway but we realised we’d forgotten to include a cupboard for coats and shoes and I also wanted a pantry for extra food storage. Moving the utility door into the kitchen allowed us to include a large walk-in cupboard in the hall and we stole some garage space to add the pantry. It did cost more money but this was minimal for the added benefits.”

The bespoke open-tread staircase is an impressive feature, creating instant impact from the front door and allowing a beautiful view through the house and out into the garden. “We decided against having sliding doors between the kitchen and playroom, so this is now all open plan and we also have a home office and a separate sitting room to the front of the ground floor,” says Joanne. “We played around with the location of the cabinets in the kitchen to get the best possible layout, as this is where we spend most of our time.”

It was Dominic who took charge of the technology for the house, installing security cameras and floodlights, which are connected to the doorbell and allow the property to be monitored remotely via mobile phones. Cat-6 cabling was also fitted, with a communications cupboard in the utility room. The family has installed PIR lighting in all bathrooms, cupboards and the hallway, as well



FIRST FLOOR

The two children's bedrooms share a corner Jack and Jill bathroom on the first floor. Space-saving glass sliding doors connect the main bedroom to the en suite bathroom and dressing room.



as up the stairs. Every detail has been carefully considered, and the private garden has also been completely landscaped following the extensive excavation work.

"Now, when we open the bifold doors in the summer, we can walk straight outside onto the terrace," says Joanne, who chose the same timber-effect porcelain tiles inside and out for an uninterrupted floor finish.

"It did feel strange demolishing an existing property to make way for our own design, but we could never have achieved such specific detailing by adapting the old bungalow. There would always have been something which wasn't quite right for us, whereas now we have exactly what we had imagined."

SECOND FLOOR

The fifth bedroom is also a yoga studio.



"It was really important to have a contractor that we could gel with."

Final word

What was the high point of the project?

Installing a laundry chute, with a hatch which the boys enjoy using, connecting the airing cupboard to the utility room on the ground floor. It was our architect's idea and is so practical.

...and the low point?

There were only minor low points – just a few delays which were mainly caused by bad weather.

Your best buy?

Our lighting was cost effective, with some of the fittings sourced from high street stores like Next.



Biggest extravagances?

The resin drive, our bespoke staircase and the kitchen, but the retaining walls were what pushed us over the original budget. We also splurged an additional £2,000 to have matt black switches and sockets throughout.

