



Dwell+ Exclusive

A Bright and Shining Addition Connects a '70s Townhouse to Its Garden

A sunken room offers a clever solution to a large, problematic drop at the back of this UK home.

Text by
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When a young couple moved into a 1970s end-of-terrace townhouse in central St Albans, a commuter town less than 20 minutes from central London, they set to work creating their ideal family home. More than a decade later—and now with two children—they have finally brought that vision to life with a makeover by Feneley Studio.





The exterior of the extension is clad in brickwork with a gray hue. The corner window is framed in copper bronze, and it was installed by craftsmen who travelled down from the Midcounties daily.

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: exterior, flat roofline, brick siding material, glass siding material, house building type

The brief was to extend the ground floor, overcome the change in level across the site, and create a welcoming entrance hall with storage, a large kitchen for entertaining, and a "snug" that could be used to enjoy the garden. "We treated this as an 'in-between' space, which was key to the design," says architect Simon Feneley.



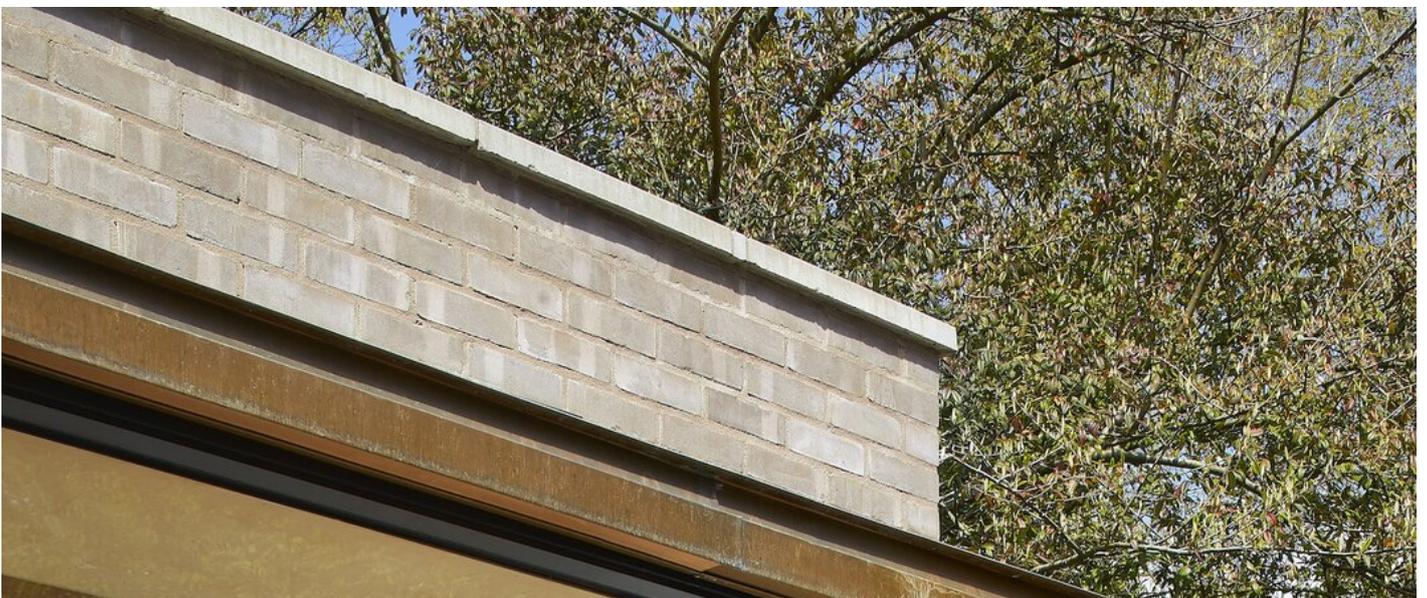


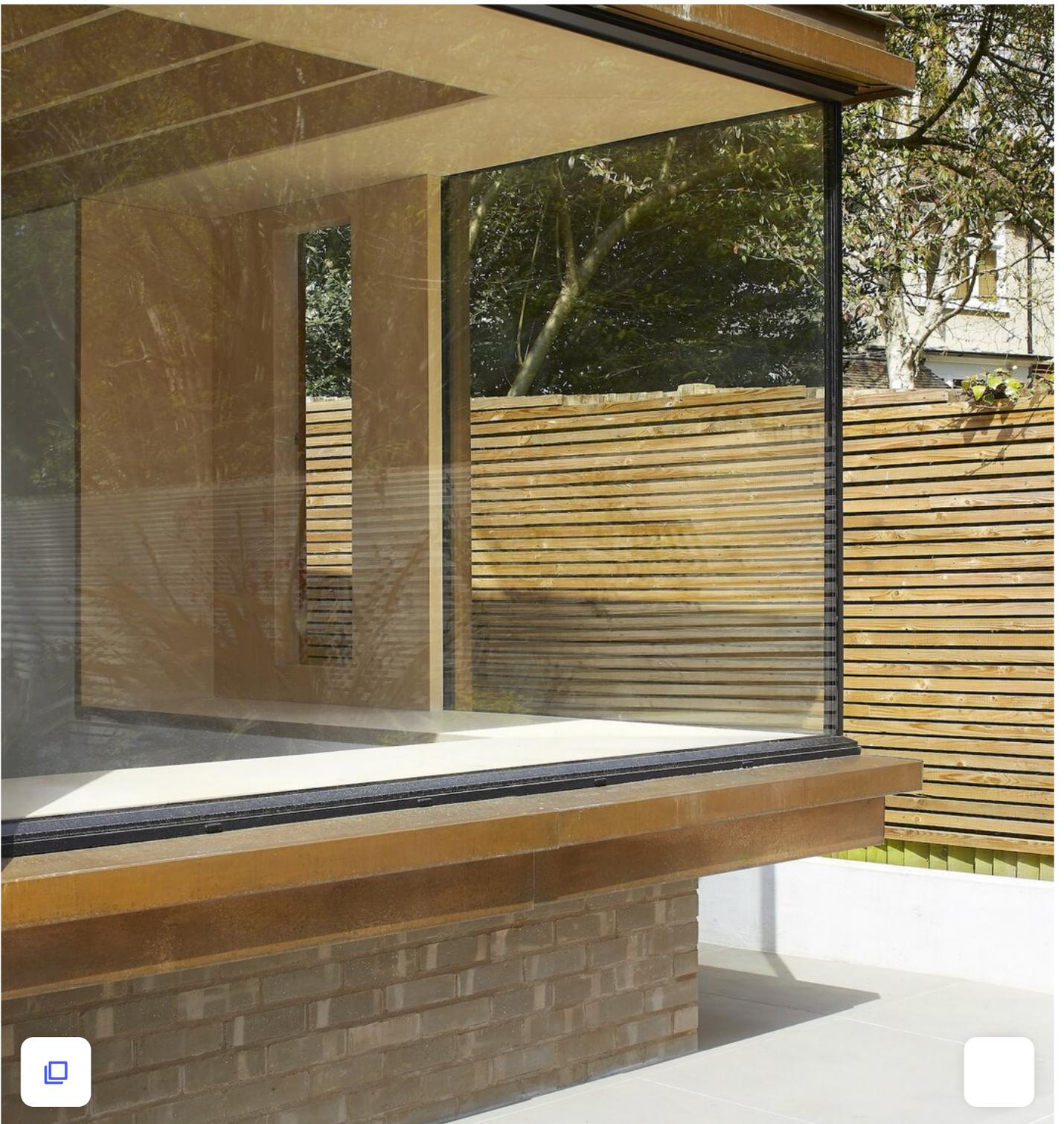
The clients work in marketing and exhibitions, and have a thorough knowledge of design. "Their passion for all aspects of design immediately attracted us to work with them," says architect Simon Feneley. "The home was well furnished with classic pieces—such as the Flos Arco lamp—that became discussion points throughout the project. They share our ethos of quality over quantity, and it was a joy to work with a client with such knowledge and vision."

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: living room, sofa, coffee tables, wall lighting, concrete floors, lamps

"We wanted to modernize the house to make a family home that connected with the outdoor area that we didn't utilize that much," say the clients. "We also wanted to optimize the space on the ground floor and put in more storage in order to 'hide' the day-to-day of the two kids we have."





"We knew we needed the skills of a carpenter with this project, as aspects of the design—such as the cantilevered corners—required accuracy to the nearest 3mm," says architect Simon Feneley. "We met continuously to discuss details as drawn and improve them on-site as a collaboration."

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: [outdoor](#), [back yard](#)

The three-story house sits on a site that naturally slopes to the rear, with a dramatic change in level of roughly five feet over a short distance. While the couple

had spent years beautifully furnishing their home with classic pieces and organizing the interior layout, the large drop of the site created a disconnect between the living space and the rear garden. It was this issue that the design team set out to address.



The corner window offers an off-center view of the garden, while the window seat provides an elevated perch. "The window seat cantilevers the main line of the house in both directions, emphasizing the effortless nature of the corner itself," says architect Simon Feneley. "With no corner post, the structure was detailed with the structural engineer to achieve a feeling of lightness and to keep all timber sections as slender as possible."

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: living room, chair, coffee tables, lamps, wall lighting, concrete floors, sofa

The solution was an extension that explored the corner of the home, taking advantage of the generous five-foot-wide side access. A corner window floods the interior with morning light and helps to reduce what the architect calls "the tunnel effect" created when an extension only has windows at the end. "We wanted the architecture to draw on different lights throughout the day," says Feneley. "Daylight and the control of light is fundamental to our work."





Birch ply wraps around the window seat, providing a natural seal that engages with both the room and garden. The corner window is frameless with a bonded, steeped glass corner, and an insulated side vent provides fresh air. "There are so many elements I love," says the client. "The corner window, the oriel window, and cladding. The finish on the silver birch ply in particular makes my heart sing—it is so organic and tactile. You can see the love that has gone into the build and finish."

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: windows, wood

A series of vertical and horizontal slot windows draw light into the hallway and kitchen, and a dramatic frameless corner window is the centerpiece of the design. The garden is reached through slender sliding doors that open to three steps leading down to the terrace.





Birch ply is available in two sheet sizes—the 3,050 millimeter sheet size was used to set the size of the roof and, in turn, this dictated the width of the roof light. The 18 x 250 millimeter deep joists are set at precise 397 millimeter centers, creating an unusually slender section.

Photography by Hufton & Crow

[Photo Categories: living room, lamps, wall lighting, sofa, coffee tables, concrete floors](#)



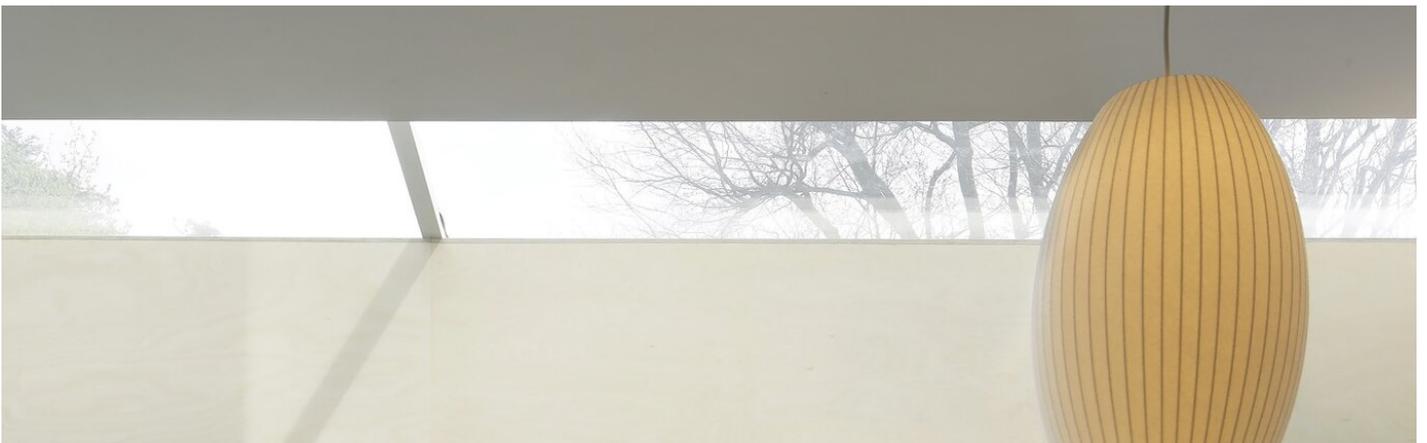


The walls are simply finished in gypsum plaster and painted white. This emphasizes the dramatic play of light and shadow throughout the day.

Photography by Hufton & Crow

A large roof light positioned directly above the three steps that separate the kitchen/dining area from the living space forms a point of connection between the extension and the existing home. "It provides excellent daylight into the heart of the plan and provides skyward views of the treetops as you move through the dining space," says Feneley.

It also acts as a "hinge" between the staggered levels of the extension, which were informed by planning restrictions on height.





The sliding door is a slim-frame aluminum piece finished in matte black. Outside, the patio is finished with a light-gray porcelain stone for ease of maintenance. In the dining area, two classic George Nelson pendant lights illuminate the working zones of the kitchen prep spaces.

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: dining room, pendant lighting, bench, table, ceiling lighting, concrete floors





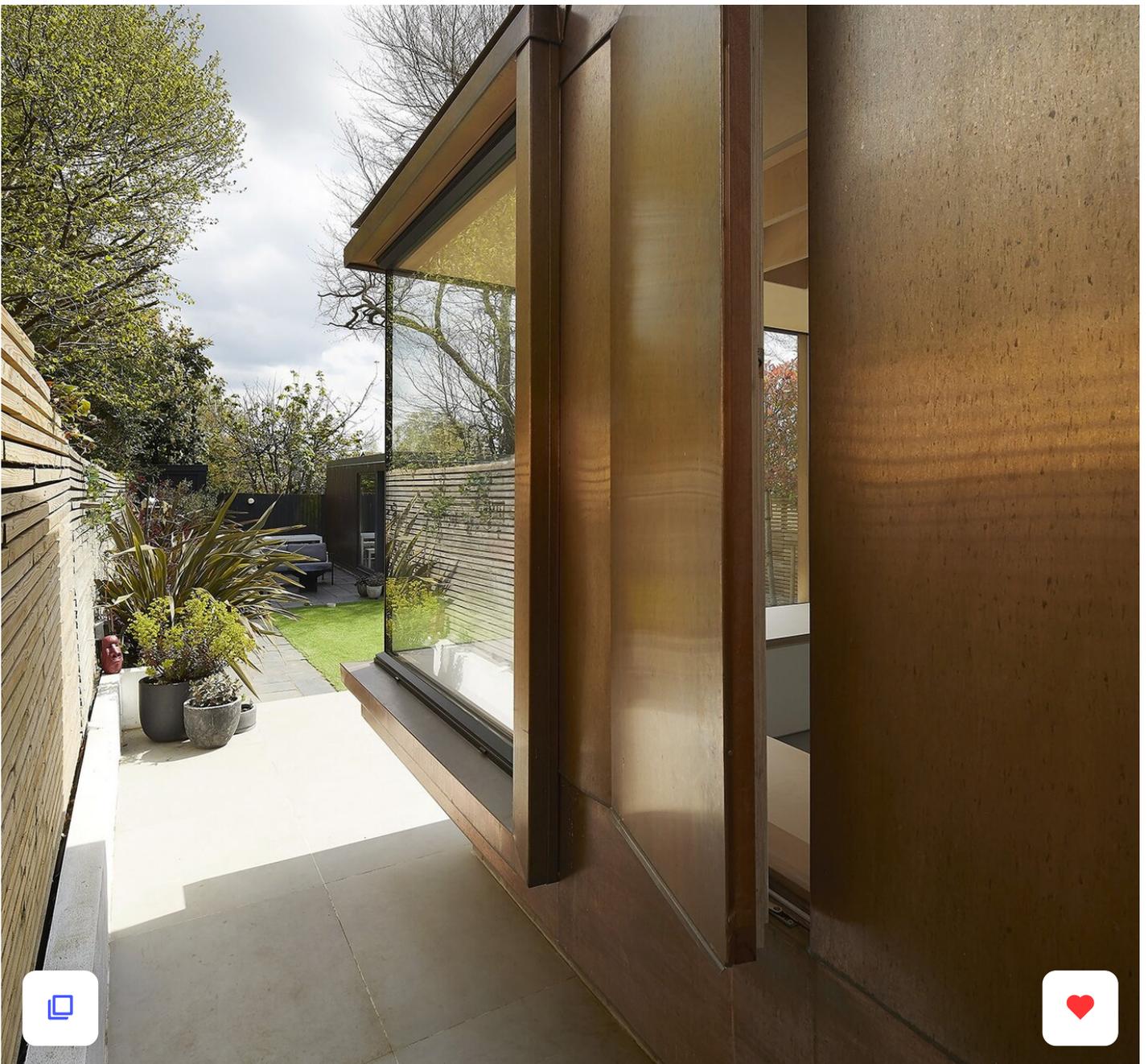
Due to the height restriction, the decision was made to expose the roof joists—which had the added benefit of providing rhythm and increased height to the underside of the birch ply deck. "We designed the exposed roof joists with the structural engineer," says architect Simon Feneley. "We sought slender sections and loved the idea of the house extension having a complete birch ply lid. The result is a ceiling that seemingly floats above the walls."

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: [living room](#), [sofa](#), [ceiling lighting](#), [coffee tables](#), [concrete floors](#), [wall lighting](#), [lamps](#)

The space within the corner window is an "in-between" space that seemingly hovers between the house and garden. "It offers the best of both worlds, yet brings them together," says Feneley. "The finesse of the birch ply with the glimpse of the bronze cladding that folds back is a joy."





The extension is clad in bronze, and the corner window is cantilevered out over the drop to the garden. This gives the extension a sense of weightlessness that sits in pleasing juxtaposition to the materiality.

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: [outdoor](#), [back yard](#), [raised planters](#), [grass](#), [side yard](#), [trees](#)





The bronze cladding around the corner window will weather over time. "Its natural patina is a thing of beauty, and it works so well with the reflecting light of the large glass panels," says architect Simon Feneley.

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: [windows](#), [metal](#)

During construction, a number of unforeseen challenges arose, particularly as the project was completed during lockdown, and the residents chose to live on the top floors while the ground floor was being redeveloped. "It was messy, and we had to move in and out at various stages," recalls the client. "I'd be happy to never see another camping stove or small fridge for as long as I live."

The existing floor also needed to be completely replaced, which added significant cost and time. Despite these challenges—and added costs—the client never compromised on the design, and worked closely with the builder and craftsmen to ensure all details were realized as intended.



The high-quality kitchen by Bulthaup was one of the most expensive elements of the extension. This was balanced out by the more affordable plywood finishes. "When you use a material like plywood to its full potential, the rewards far outweigh the alternatives," says architect Simon Feneley.

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: dining room table chair wall lighting bench ceiling lighting concrete floors pendant lighting



An oak bench hangs from the back of the kitchen island as part of the dining area.
Additional seating is by Carl Hansen & Son

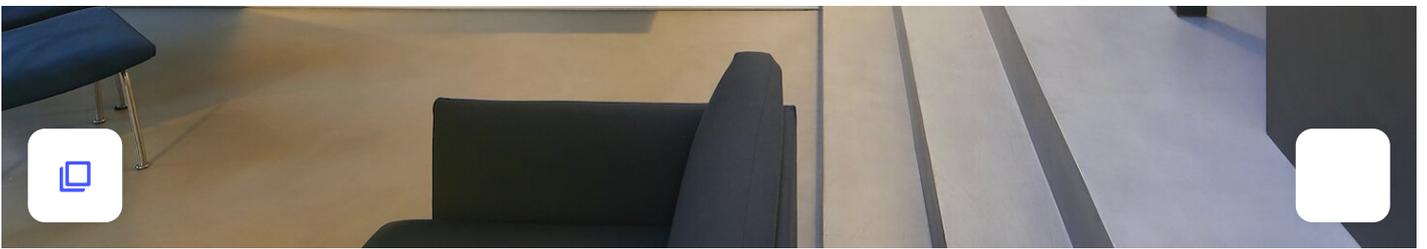
Additional seating is by Carl Hansen & Sons.

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: kitchen, metal counters

"The extension is one of the most rewarding pieces of design we've ever delivered—and the no-compromise approach from the client has added to the wonderful results," says Feneley. "The interior is stunning. It's modest in size and finishes, yet the feeling of the space is difficult to describe. It just feels 'so right.' Sitting beneath the ply joists, looking back into the space is more rewarding to us than the view out. Everything came together, and more. It's probably the closest to perfection we've achieved to date!"





The floor is a three-millimeter microcement finish applied to both new and existing floor substrates to achieve a fluid aesthetic. It gives a similar appearance to a traditional concrete floor, but the installation was less disruptive and more cost effective. The microcement also avoids the limiting bay pour widths of a traditional polished concrete floor.

Photography by Hufton & Crow

Photo Categories: [living room](#), [ceiling lighting](#), [pendant lighting](#), [sofa](#), [concrete floors](#), [wall lighting](#), [shelves](#)

This sentiment is shared by the clients. "The extension brings us utter joy," they say. "The reaction people have when they first walk into the space makes us incredibly proud. Simon was sympathetic to the existing elements of the house that we wanted to retain, and it's the gift that keeps giving."



A concept sketch of Corringham Court by Feneley Studio shows how the extension addresses the drop from the living area to the rear garden.

Feneley Studio



Sections of Corringham Court by Feneley Studio

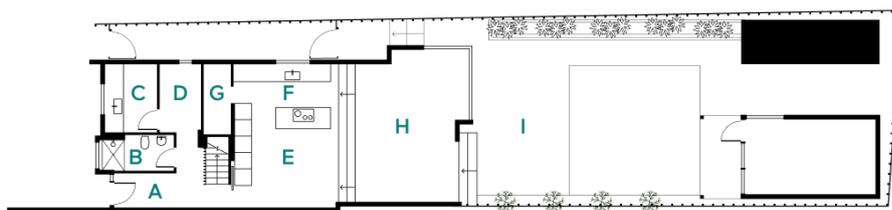
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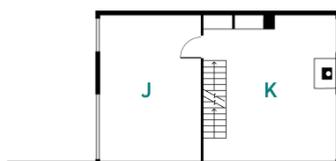
Corringham Court

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ARCHITECT [Feneley Studio](#)
LOCATION [St. Albans, England](#)



- A Entry
- B Bathroom
- C Utility Room
- D Closet
- E Dining Area
- F Kitchen
- G Pantry
- H Living Area
- I Garden
- J Study
- K Lounge



Floor Plan of Corringham Court by Feneley Studio

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Project Credits:

Architect of Record: Feneley Studio / @feneleystudio

Main contractor: Blue Brick & Steel

Structural Engineer: Constant Structural Design

Quantity Surveyor: Richard Collis

Approved Building Inspector: Quadrant Building Control

Kitchen Installation: Bulthaup St Albans

Photography: Hufton & Crow / @huftonandcrow

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