

No 64

The houses down our road were built in the 1930's and are a kitsch mixture of art deco bungalows and mock Tudor semis. We moved in in the eighties and our house has grown with the family. We have extended the kitchen, moved up into the loft and added a conservatory.

When we first moved in our neighbour was Mr Kirk who had bought number 64 when it was new and other houses in the road were still being built. He had been living there for over fifty years. His wife had passed away some time before. He showed me a framed photograph once. It was a picture of him and his wife at his works dinner dance. He, resplendent in bow tie, dinner jacket and cummerbund; she, tight lipped, broad bosomed and corseted in a stiff evening gown, fur stole and faux pearls. Her hair was lacquered into a pin curled helmet, her eyes invisible and inscrutable behind the camera flash reflected in the lenses of her winged spectacles. Neighbours said that he used to bully her. It was hard to believe.

Mr Kirk's pride and joy was his garden – the front one only. He saw no point spending energy on the back garden which no one could see and where there were no passers-by to harangue. He was generous with his opinions and dispensed gardening advice whether you wanted it or not. He was against most things (trade unions, Europe, gay marriage). In his view gardens should not be relaxed swathes of informal planting and colour, but serried ranks of bedding plants, close clipped lawns and bonsai'd shrubs. When he died the house stood empty while distant cousins argued over his will.

The house was eventually bought by a professional couple, distinguished only by their strange taste in decor – a mixture of the baroque style and a seventies inspired colour palette (muddy orange, purple and brown).

Next in was Mad Max – a diminutive divorcee with a temper on her like a Tasmanian devil. The house was not big enough for her outbursts, and rows with her boyfriend often spiralled into the street, Max screaming like a banshee, her six-foot rugby playing boyfriend wheedling and pleading behind her. My kids used to pull up chairs to the window and sit munching on bags of crisps watching the next dramatic instalment. The grand finale came when the boyfriend (who had presented himself as a childless bachelor) was found to be married with six children. Max moved up north to be nearer her parents who, by the way, she had never got on with either.

The current owners have an ancient asthmatic pug who wheezes and wails up and down the garden tormented by a young chocolate Labrador pup who is clearly the heir apparent. Mr Kirk's garden has been gravelled over to provide parking for two monster trucks, the pride and joy of Malcolm who lavishes as much time and effort on them as Mr Kirk did on his petunias.