

# 'We risked a bold design for our 70s townhouse'

Double-height glass and a mezzanine level brought the dingy ground floor of their much-loved London townhouse back into play for Suyin Du Bois and her husband André

Words **JANE CRITTENDEN**  
Photography **JIM STEPHENSON**



## Dining area

Suyin relaxes on West Elm's Oatmeal chair in this light-filled space. The long flex and ceiling hook of Muuto's Ambit dining pendant from Heal's gives the couple the freedom to move the table and Toronto Moss dining chairs from John Lewis & Partners around their new space should they want to





← **Open-plan living**  
With a nod to the 1970s architecture in the front door and original open-tread staircase, updated with Farrow & Ball's Mole's Breath, opening up the ground floor has created a seamless kitchen-dining room. A bank of painted floor-to-ceiling storage blends into the walls that have been painted in Cornforth White, while a poured resin floor by Chasing Space has underfloor heating beneath



## Step inside...

### Meet the owners

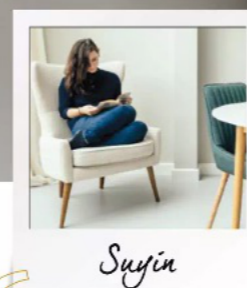
Suyin Du Bois, a tech start-up consultant, and husband André Lotz, an NHS programme manager, live here

### House details

A three-storey, three-bedroom 1970s townhouse in south-west London

### When they bought it

2014



“The architecture is the talking point, so we didn't want to crowd it out with bold shades”

**U**nderwhelmed by the previous properties that they had viewed, Suyin Du Bois and her husband André Lotz had no idea what to expect when they first walked inside the 1970s townhouse that had caught their attention. ‘The architecture was very different compared to the Victorian houses we'd seen, and at first, the ground

floor was dark and disappointing,’ Suyin recalls. ‘But when I followed André upstairs to the main living space, he turned around and smiled – and I knew this house was going to be special.’

Light filled the elevated open-plan kitchen-living-dining room, while the second floor had a huge double bedroom and separate bathroom. ‘We were blown away by the big windows and the room →

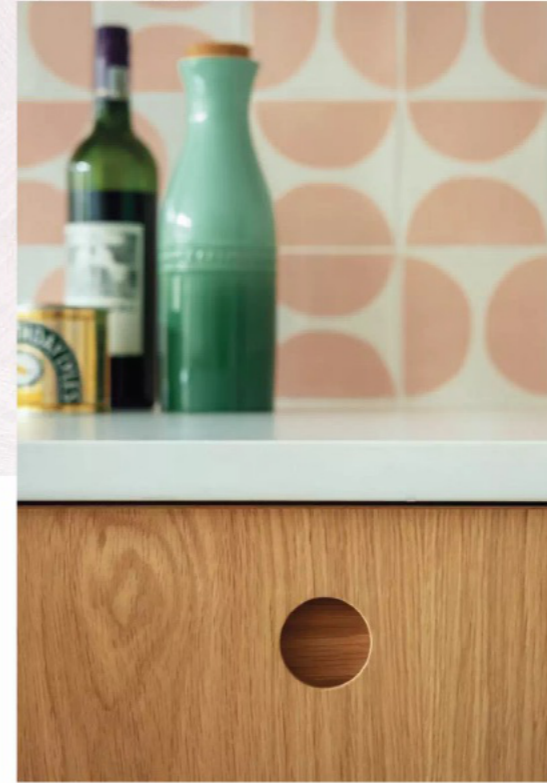
### ↑ Seating options

Simple bar stools from John Lewis & Partners complement the wood cabinetry, while the couple chose a grey sofa from Sit & Sleep

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### Kitchen

The architect-designed kitchen mixes oak and painted cupboards, finished with simple circular cut-outs as handles for a bespoke-furniture feel. The wall units are neat and symmetrical, concealing the extractor above the hob, while the soft white quartz worktops are Unistone's Bianco Assoluto with a brushed Letano finish from The Marble Store

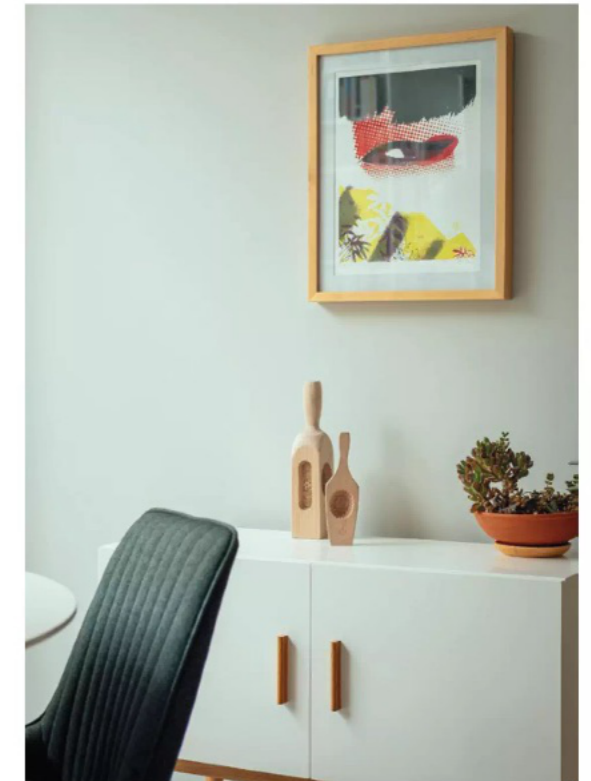


↑ **Design details** Suyin chose Arc Blossom tiles by Decorum Tiles for a 1970s vibe, but in a contemporary pale pink shade to reflect the crossover of the original architecture and new design  
→ Circular handles with an oak inlay complement the aesthetic  
→ The white cupboard at the end of the worktop hides small appliances and has contrasting oak handles to match the kitchen

proportions,' says André. 'Even the original 1970s décor with its shag-pile carpets and pampas green bathroom had a charm about it.'

When the couple moved in, they decided to do very little to the property while they saved for a big renovation project, simply upgrading the bathroom with a shower and decorating their bedroom. It was while living in the house as it was that Suyin and André discovered they rarely used the ground floor, which had an integrated garage, a cupboard-sized shower and loo, and a dark, cold room with sliding doors to the garden. 'We had a sofa bed and desk in here but it wasn't very pleasant,' explains André. 'We were wasting space, and as this was our only outside access, we weren't using the garden much either.'

To gain design inspiration, they looked at plans for neighbouring properties on the online planning portal. Since the ground floor stepped back from the first floor by just over a metre, their next-door neighbours had extended to bring the →



## AUTUMN HOMES



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### ↑ Double-height space

The mezzanine living room has the all-important connection to the kitchen that was at the core of the couple's design brief to architects Nimtim. Flos Glo Ball lights from Atomic Interiors offer a pared-back light source



floors in line with one another. The couple considered doing the same to relocate the kitchen-diner, but were torn. 'We didn't want to lose the wow factor of the bright, open-plan first floor, nor create a disconnect by keeping the living room here and not use it,' André explains. 'The alternative was to keep everything the same and build a corridor to avoid accessing the garden through a study or bedroom. But the house isn't very wide, and we felt we'd make the space too narrow.'

Stuck on how to move forward, the couple sought advice from Nimtim Architects, as they liked their contemporary design work. 'Tim O'Callaghan was genuinely enthusiastic,

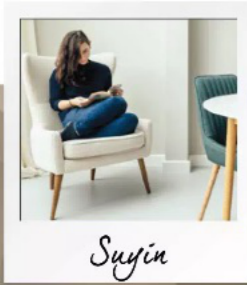
and respected that the renovation was a big deal for us,' says André. 'He was also very patient – we spent two years on the design process – and took on board Suyin's thoughts on a double-height space, which she thought was a bit crazy but they were happy to run with.'

Architect Tim came back with some inspirational designs, including a bold solution for the couple's dilemma: to extend the ground floor like next door – and cut back 1.5 metres of the first floor too. 'Our neighbours thought we were crazy to lose space but we've flipped it around,' Suyin explains. 'We removed the internal garage to make a big kitchen-diner, but more →



### Bookshelves

One of Suyin's favourite features, this eye-catching floor-to-ceiling bookcase – made bespoke by the builders – enhances the volume of the double-height room and links the two living spaces



Suyin

“The double-height curtain wall of glass draws light deep into the house, bringing the ground floor back to life”



importantly, we have an amazing double-height curtain wall of glass. This connects with the living room mezzanine above and draws light deep into the house – so the whole ground floor has come back to life. The project cost more than the couple's budget but the dynamic design was too good to pass up. 'We knew we'd be disappointed if we didn't go all in, and we're so glad we took the plunge,' says André.

The new kitchen-diner opens onto the garden while the elevated living room retains its views. Moving the downstairs shower room widens the hall and what's left of the old garage is now the new cloakroom and storage. A landing separates the first-floor living room and main en suite bedroom, while on the top floor, the bathroom and two bedrooms remain the same.

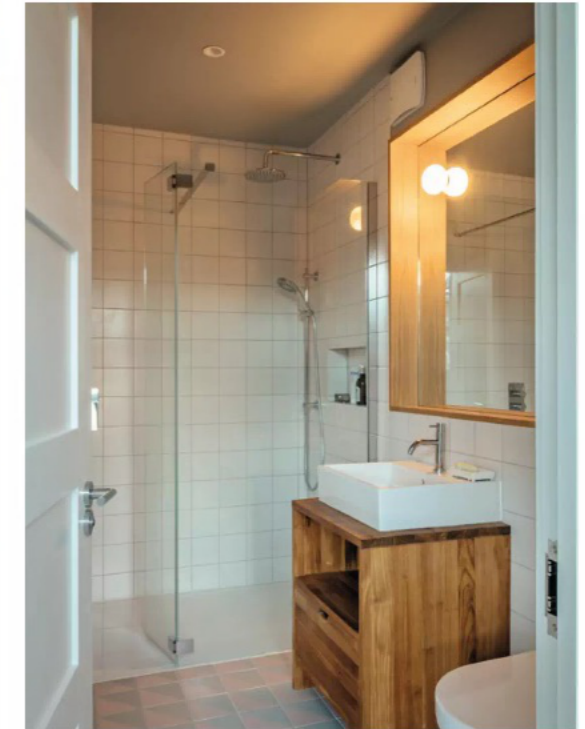
When it came to the interiors, Suyin and André were keen to enhance the light and new layout. 'The architecture is the talking point, and we didn't want to crowd this out with bold colours,' says Suyin. 'So we went for simplicity with an understated neutral scheme, bringing in a Farrow & Ball colour consultant to put together a family of greys for us.'

Choosing tiles was another big decision, particularly for the kitchen splashback. 'It's a big, obvious wall, and although I liked the idea of pattern somewhere, I was nervous about having it here,' admits Suyin. 'We loved the geometric 1970s feel of the Arc tiles though, and chose pink as a modern take on the era.'

An oak and painted kitchen with cut-out circular handles looks more like furniture than fitted cupboards, while the →

**↑ Living room**  
Now on the new mezzanine floor above the kitchen-diner, the living room has fabulous views across the garden, and the floors have been carpeted for a more cosy feel

**↗ En suite**  
Farrow & Ball's Pavilion Gray has been used alongside a simple arrangement of white square shower tiles from Walls and Floors. A wood vanity from Tikamoon and Geometrica's Half Decor floor tiles from Domus offer a nod to the natural materials used elsewhere



**↑ Main bedroom** Where the old kitchen used to be, this space benefits from plenty of natural light through the unusual original 1970s door and window openings, which have been upgraded. Walls painted in Farrow & Ball's Mizzle continue the grey palette, and the pendant light is from John Lewis & Partners



#### ← Rear façade

Extending the ground floor in line with the back of the house and taking the first floor back to a mezzanine created the opportunity for double-height glazing by Northolt Glass for an abundance of light. Aluminium framework in RAL shade Pebble Grey completes the contemporary look

appliances are hidden, and ovens are understated. 'I didn't want the space to look too much like a kitchen, so mixing finishes works,' says Suyin. 'For continuity we carried the grey palette, wood and pink tiles upstairs where we also have a hallway utility cupboard for the washing machine and dryer.'

Since finishing their project, the couple haven't looked back, and are delighted with their home. 'We just love how

Nimtim's design reinvented the open-plan look we both love with all the light, but at the same time have completely transformed the ground floor,' says Suyin.

'My favourite place to sit in the morning is definitely by the window. My gaze can't help but travel up the double-height space to take in the shelving and views outside. Our home is now truly beautiful.' 🍷