

WORDS
JANE CRITTENDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY
JAMES FRENCH

Past, present and future perfect

Clever design ideas and smart tech have turned this period property into a home that can be adapted as the children grow



Ben and Gaby can relax now that the renovation work is complete. Ben designed the two picture windows at the far end of the living room to complement the narrow width and black finish of the Aga woodburner that stands between them

IN BRIEF

LOCATION Shoreham-by-Sea,
West Sussex
TYPE OF PROPERTY
1930s semi-detached house
BEDROOMS 4
PROJECT STARTED May 2018
PROJECT FINISHED
November 2018
SIZE 270sqm
BUILD COST £157,292
CURRENT PROPERTY VALUE
Approx £800,000

The chance discovery by four-year-old Hope Hillman that she could talk to her father, TV presenter Ben Hillman, via a security camera in the porch of their family home encouraged him to factor smart design into his renovation plans for their semi-detached house. 'I often film on location and Hope's discovery made me think about remote project management while I'm away,' says Ben, who presents Channel 4's *A Place In The Sun*. 'It also prompted me to look into smart heating and lighting.'

Technology had played a role in Ben and his wife Gaby's plans from the moment he found the 1930s house on a property website during breaks between filming in Costa Rica. 'I could envisage the home we could create by looking at the floor plans online,' he recalls. 'There were enough bedrooms so my idea was to remodel the ground floor with a wraparound extension. Google Maps made it clear this wouldn't adversely affect the garden.'

This is Ben and Gaby's second renovation in seven years, and their first as parents. The couple have two daughters – Hope and Honor, who is three. Their first

project was a penthouse, which Ben created for the space above the flat they owned. 'It worked brilliantly for us as a couple,' he says. 'But we needed more room and a garden and wanted a period property that we could adapt for our family.'

By the time they moved to their new home in July 2016, he had already sketched out his revised layout for the ground floor.

The kitchen is in the middle of the extension, with an open-plan living area on the garden side and corner windows that open the space up to the terrace outside. The living room remains in place, at the front of the house, and is where Ben and Gaby relax when the children are in bed. Internal aluminium-framed glazed doors have also been put in to link it to the kitchen and the garden beyond.

The garage is Ben's workshop and a combined utility, cloakroom and playroom has been built on a patch of space behind that. 'The playroom sits by the kitchen and has an opening rather than a door so that the space remains connected,' Ben explains. »



Aluminium-framed windows and doors reflect the property's 1930s heritage



Bold colours highlight the monochrome scheme. Skirting boards throughout the ground floor are painted black to co-ordinate with the aluminium-framed windows and doors

The kitchen is in the middle of the extension, with an open-plan living area and corner windows that open the space up to the terrace



ABOVE The kitchen units, designed by Ben, are painted in Teal Tone by Benjamin Moore. The shade is a nod to nearby Brighton City Airport's Art Deco building. The three metre long wraparound island is made from Calacatta quartz, with a Strip Silver LED ceiling light from Habitat above

Having had his ideas turned into detailed drawings by an architectural designer and submitted to the local planning office in December 2016, Ben's application went through within eight weeks. Work on the house didn't begin until just over a year later as he struggled to find a contractor. 'I'd had a bad time with builders on our last project, so this time I had a watertight tender document drawn up,' he explains. 'In hindsight, I think it was too detailed for a project this size.'

A personal recommendation led the couple to Mark Bucknall, owner of Urban Builders, which is based in Hove. 'I could see they were spot on with the finishes and Mark was keen to try out new ideas, including making the concrete shelf in the living room,' Ben says. The firm was already committed to other projects but Gaby and Ben were happy to wait six months until the firm came available.

In May 2018, the family moved into a flat while building work began. Ben had to work away from home but by setting up a collection of smart cameras on site, he followed progress closely. 'I could chat to the building team, which was very reassuring. Although I'm not sure what they thought of my Big Brother approach.' »



ABOVE The side-extension playroom is an adaptable space that can be turned into a study, guest bedroom or, in the future, a teenage den



Internal aluminium-framed glazed doors have been put in to link the living room to the kitchen and garden beyond

FLOOR PLANS



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR

LEFT A storage wall was built around the chimney breast using kitchen carcass shelving inside and sheets of walnut-veneered MDF made into doors. A grid of Philips Hue smart downlighters set into the ceiling above the Ercol table can be set to daylight mode for this, the darkest part of the ground floor. The pendant lights are Secto 4200 from Secto Design



Walls painted in Valspar's Deep Shadow have a cocooning effect in the living room, while the simplicity of the polished concrete shelf provides a sleek contrast



ABOVE Wood panelling in the entrance hall is new, as are the parquet-style vinyl tiles chosen to complement the original stair handrail. Porcelain tiles at the kitchen threshold mark the new part of the house

The team worked methodically and then in September, a break in Ben's work schedule allowed him to take over the remainder of the project, including the design and installation of the kitchen and the storage, and sourcing the plumber and the electrician.

At the same time, he oversaw the installation of smart downlighters, which can be adjusted to create different moods in the extension and on the stairs. An underfloor heating system and smoke alarms were also put in, with all the systems connected to an intuitive and programmable thermostat. 'It remembers the temperature settings in each downstairs zone,' he explains.

In November 2018, the family moved in to their remodelled home. 'It works even better than I imagined it would,' says Ben. 'And it's great to have a connected home that's designed discreetly so that it doesn't spoil the character of the house.' **GD**

Smart downlighters can be adjusted to create different moods in the extension and on the stairs



RIGHT A simple white scheme keeps the bathroom looking bright, while Ben and Gaby are saving up to make bigger changes later on



As in the kitchen and entrance hall, tongue-and-groove panelling has been used for the bedroom storage design, which eliminates the need for bedside tables. The wall lights above the shelf are Hector Medium Dome by Original BTC

'It's great to have a connected home that's designed discreetly, so that it doesn't spoil the character of the house'



A corner dining set frames the new terrace, which steps up to the lawned garden

SUPPLIERS

PROJECT TEAM

Design Ben Hillman (benhillman.co.uk)

Building contractor Urban Builders (urbanbuilders.co.uk)

Structural engineer Mitchinson Macken (mitchinsonmacken.co.uk)

STRUCTURE

Steelwork Neil's Steels (neilssteels.co.uk)

Aluminium-framed doors and windows Shaws of Brighton (shawsofbrighton.co.uk)

Roof lights The Rooflight Company (therooflightcompany.co.uk)

FIXTURES & FITTINGS

Kitchen and bespoke storage Designed and built by Ben Hillman (as before)

Kitchen carcasses

DIY Kitchens (diy-kitchens.com)

Calacatta quartz kitchen worksurfaces

Margosil (margosil.co.uk)

Smart lighting Philips Hue (www2.meethue.com); LightwaveRF (lightwaverf.com)

Yale Conexis L1 smart locks Yale (yale.co.uk)

Lighting Secto Design (sectodesign.fi);

Random Lights (randomlights.com);

Made (made.com); Habitat (habitat.co.uk);

Original BTC (originalbtc.com)

Underfloor heating

Wunda (wundafloorheating.co.uk)

Smart heating and security controls

Nest (nest.com)

Vinyl floor tiles Ocean Flooring

(oceanflooring.co.uk)

Porcelain tiles Master Tiles

(mastertiles.co.uk)

Concrete fireplace shelf

Designed by Ben (as before); built by Urban Builders (as before)

Pavers Harsham Stone (harshamstone.co.uk)

Paint Benjamin Moore (benjaminmoore.com);

Valspar (valsparpaint.co.uk)

FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES

Whistler bar stools

John Lewis (johnlewis.com)

Ercol dining table and leather sofas Barker and Stonehouse (barkerandstonehouse.co.uk)

Wishbone dining chairs

Cult Furniture (cultfurniture.com)

Rubens wingback armchair

Made (made.com)

Jake corner sofa Love Your Home (love-your-home.co.uk)

Woodburner Aga (agastoves.co.uk)

Outdoor dining set The Garden Furniture Centre (gardenfurniturecentre.co.uk)