



IN BRIEF

Cost £350,000 in 2013

Spent £400,000

Worth £1m+





“What I love most is that the house hasn’t lost its unique identity – it’s still very much the rebel on the street.”

Rebel REBEL

John Little has remodelled a tired 1950s house in Eastbourne to create an edgy and unique home clad in black.

STORY: DEBBIE JEFFERY **PHOTOGRAPHY:** MARTIN SWATTON

Exteriors

The house in its original state (inset) and after the remodel. Grey painted brickwork, black painted larch cladding, grey aluminium windows and a newly slated roof give the house its dramatic look. A steel-framed carport was built on the front drive, which enabled the existing garage to be converted. A vast deck with built-in furniture and a steel and timber brise soleil has been constructed to the rear of the house.

John Little had passed by his current home on numerous occasions before he eventually bought it in 2013. It stands mid-way between his previous flat and his parents’ house, where he had grown up, and John always noticed the property as it stood out from other more conventional houses on the street.

“The central integral garage was the most prominent feature, and above this there was a basketball hoop,” says John, a financial consultant. “It always reminded me of a fun American-style home, with its white timber weatherboarding, and was definitely out of the ordinary.”

To add to the building’s intrigue, Peter Grant, the manager of Led Zeppelin, the Yardbirds, and Bad Company, was a former owner. Clearly the property had enjoyed an interesting history.

“I loved my first-floor flat where I’d been for 10 years, and hadn’t really been thinking of moving, but when I saw that the house was for sale I knew I wanted to live there,” John continues. “It stands in what is probably the most desirable and expensive road in Eastbourne, but over time the price came down until I was able to make an offer.” ➔





IN DETAIL

PROJECT

Designer Martin Swatton: martinswatton.com

Structural engineer Roger Bunney: earsheppard.co.uk

Contractor Will Loch Construction: willlochconstruction.com

Garden Greenleaf Maintenance: 01323 486757

STRUCTURE

Windows and doors Bowalker Windows: bowalkerwindows.co.uk

Thrutone roof tiles Marley Eternit: marleyeternit.co.uk

British larch cladding Vastern Timber: vastern.co.uk

Ipe decking Roundwood: roundwood.com

Anthracite concrete terrace slabs Schellevis: schellevis.nl

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Kitchen, taps Verrall and Parks:

verrallandparks.co.uk

260mm engineered oak floorboards

Roundwood: roundwood.com

Glass shower screens Threewaysglass Ltd:

threewaysglass.co.uk

Light switches and sockets

Vimar: vimar.com/en/int/

FSB Jasper Morrison internal door levers

Allgood: allgood.co.uk

Rubber flooring The Colour Flooring

Company Ltd: colourflooring.co.uk

Teak for shower trays etc

Wenban-Mmith Ltd: wenbans.com

Froelig wood pellet boiler

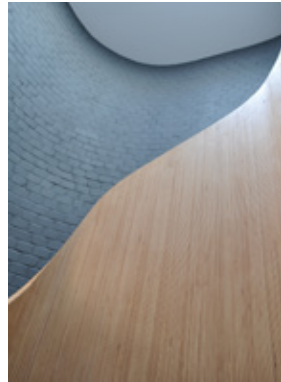
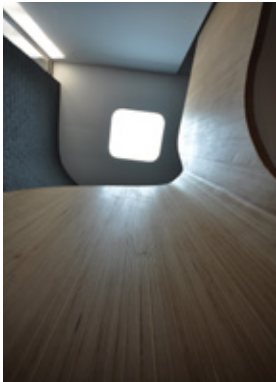
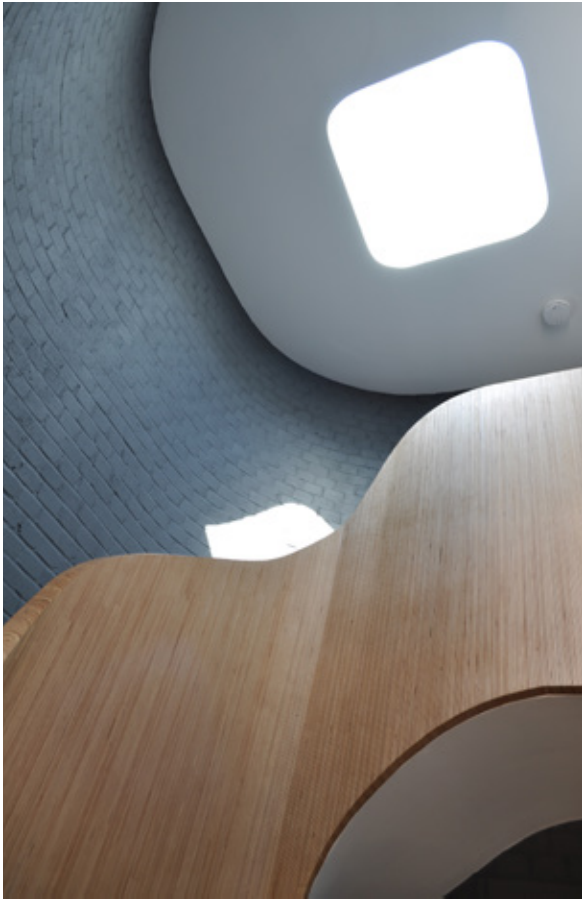
Equal T: equal-t.co.uk

Internal doors Westward Joinery:

westwardjoinery.co.uk

Wall tiles Tiverton Tile & Trade Centre:

01884 253471



The staircase was previously a rather dull black metal structure, which has been replaced with a bespoke curved timber balustrade

The brick-built house stands on a large and private plot, surrounded by trees, and the original structure had been extended with flat-roofed additions to the rear and both sides. Originally built in the mid 1950s as a double garage with a flat above for the chauffeur to the main house next door, the building was sold to an architect in the 1970s, who completed the conversion to a larger house.

Interiors were equally quirky, with the integral garage taking pride of place, and a long kitchen running down one side. There was a large, fairly dark rear sitting room, one ground-floor bedroom and four further bedrooms upstairs.

"It needed a lot of work and I knew from the start that the layout could be better designed," says John. "I'd seen a very distinctive contemporary project around the corner by local designer Martin Swatton, and remembered reading about his own amazing bungalow transformation in Eastbourne. Instinctively I knew that he would be the right person for the job."

Martin met John on site and listened carefully to his brief. The integral garage needed to go, and a more open-plan layout created on the ground floor.

Staircase

The staircase was made from individual pieces of ply, laminated to form the curving shape, and is a striking feature against the dark grey painted brickwork of the rear wall.

Martin's solution was to design a stylish stand-alone carport, and convert the existing garage into a spacious kitchen to the front of the house, leading into the living area at the rear. This opens onto a vast south-facing deck through new sliding glass doors, creating an exciting connection to the garden.

The former kitchen could then become a versatile self-contained studio for guests or John's daughter Darcie, 14, who goes to school in the same road and was extremely patient with John during the project. A utility room would take the place of the small ground-floor bedroom, and upstairs a new curved family bathroom was designed above the flat roof of the entrance hall.

Reconfiguring the narrow first-floor landing, and converting the large master en suite into two en suite bathrooms and a dressing room, made sense of the first-floor layout. Apart from the new bathroom the overall size of the house has not increased, but the layout has been sensitively reorganised so that it now looks and feels like a completely different property.

"When Martin showed me his detailed presentation drawings I was stunned to see that ➔



much of the house was clad in black timber,” says John. “It was such a strong statement, and at first I wondered about playing safe with grey instead, but Martin was confident the dramatic colour would work, and I’m so glad I trusted his judgement.”

Planning consent was granted for the proposed alterations, including the new carport and extensive rear terrace. “Oak trees line the boundaries and have tree preservation orders, so there were issues about protecting the roots during the building work,” says John, who continued living in his flat at the start of the build. “Overall there were no real problems though, and Martin’s original design remained intact.”

A contractor completed the initial demolition and main structure, and a specialist contractor – suggested by Martin Swatton – was commissioned to undertake much of the finishing works, including the larch external cladding and bespoke staircase. A separate contractor was responsible for excavating the garden, in addition to constructing the specially engineered terrace and steps that span the root protection area of the oaks trees.

Walls were demolished, structural steelwork inserted and the property has been re-roofed with fibre cement slate for the main pitched roof, with an EPDM rubber roof on the single-storey sitting room, and fibreglass on the smaller flat roofs.

“The chimney and supporting structure were removed to create more space in the master bedroom and en suite,” says John. “Removal of the chimney left a large hole, so this made it an easier decision to go with Martin’s suggestion of replacing the concrete roof tiles with the much cleaner look of the fibre cement slate.”

Caption

blah blah blah
blah blah blah



FLOORPLAN

Converting the integral garage into a kitchen freed up the former kitchen to become a versatile studio. A new family bathroom was constructed on the first floor and the utility room was previously a ground floor bedroom.



JOHN'S TOP TIPS

"Find a good designer you like, who will oversee the project for you, and wait for a reputable builder who comes recommended. When you find knowledgeable people who care it makes a huge difference."

All uPVC windows have been replaced with light grey aluminium-framed units, and the garage door opening at the front of the house is now fully glazed. Large sliding glass doors were installed in the rear sitting room, and a brise soleil has been erected on the deck, designed to provide shade to the glass in summer. Made from a steel frame with timber slats, this structure is an imposing addition and one of Martin Swatton's trademarks – casting filtered shadows onto the terrace and creating a distinctive outdoor living space.

The same company who supplied all of the windows and doors also provided electrically-operated rooflights which are prominent features in the bathroom and between the sitting room and the new kitchen, with a fixed rooflight above the staircase.

This staircase was previously a rather dour black metal structure, which has been replaced with a bespoke curved timber balustrade, rising up against a backdrop of the curved, grey-painted brick wall.

Curves are also prominent in the new timber-framed family bathroom on the first floor, which has been painted a strong blue colour to create a dramatic contrast to the neutral colours of the walls and floor. Strong colours have also been introduced in other rooms with panels and rubber flooring.

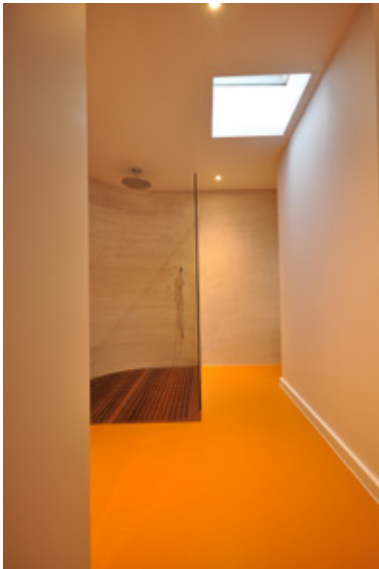


The kitchen

Converting the integral garage into an open-plan kitchen, with a grey rubber floor over underfloor heating, has transformed the ground floor layout.

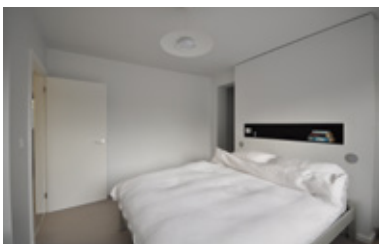
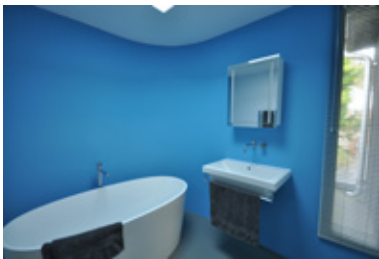
Martin Swatton provided creative support throughout the project, and went into great detail with the finishes – helping John to select fixtures and fittings, right down to choosing contemporary items of furniture. John's girlfriend, Gurj, is based in London but also became involved in the later stages of the project and was an enormous help and support, as her background in fashion and modelling gave her a keen eye for finishes.

Work started on site in March 2014 and was completed eight months later. "I moved into the house during the summer, when there was still no driveway or carport," says John. "Seeing the exterior of the house clad in larch, finished in black water-based barn paint was a real high point – especially as I'd helped to paint the seemingly never-ending ➔



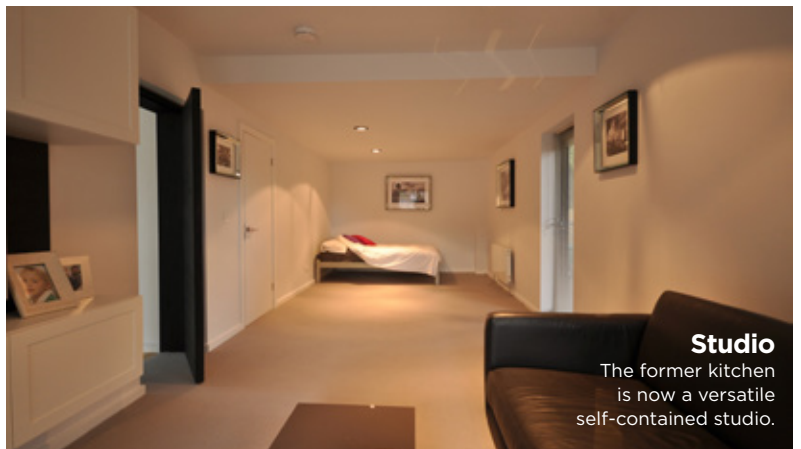
Sitting room

The sitting room was revamped with a wall of sliding glass doors, and a slot roof-light between this and the new kitchen. Trench heating was installed in addition to standard radiators.



Bedrooms & bathrooms

Lime rubber flooring has been laid in the master en suite to complement the teak shower base and sink support. A curved family bathroom incorporates an illuminated feature rooflight over the bath. The bedrooms have been redesigned in a simple, contemporary style.



Studio

The former kitchen is now a versatile self-contained studio.



stacks of timber boarding before it was fixed in place. It was a bit like unwrapping a present in reverse.”

External works to the front of the house involved excavating huge amounts of soil, levelling the driveway and sculpting banks, before the steel-framed carport could be constructed. This incorporates bike and bin storage space, and has been finished in slatted black timber to complement the main house and new fencing.

“I could never have come up with the ideas which Martin Swatton suggested, and his attention to detail was incredible – he literally oversaw every last light fitting and vintage-style handle,” John remarks.

“The result is stunning, and it’s such an amazing place to live. I work from home, and can waste hours sitting outside on the totally private deck, just enjoying the peace and quiet. It’s quite a change from life in a first floor flat, and something I appreciate every day. What I love most is that the house hasn’t lost its unique identity – it’s still very much the rebel on the street.”



My self build EXPERIENCE

What was the high point?

The house has turned out far better than I had ever imagined – every stage was a real high point as it all came together.

...and the low point? As it wasn't a standard build, and nothing was particularly easy.

Your best buy? My favourite feature is the terrace, which was expensive and highly engineered, but is somewhere I love to spend time.

...and the biggest extravagance? Everything has been completed to a very high standard – the stainless steel kitchen worktops were handmade in Austria and light fittings came from Italy. Even the rooflights have rings of artificial light around them.

