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Projects



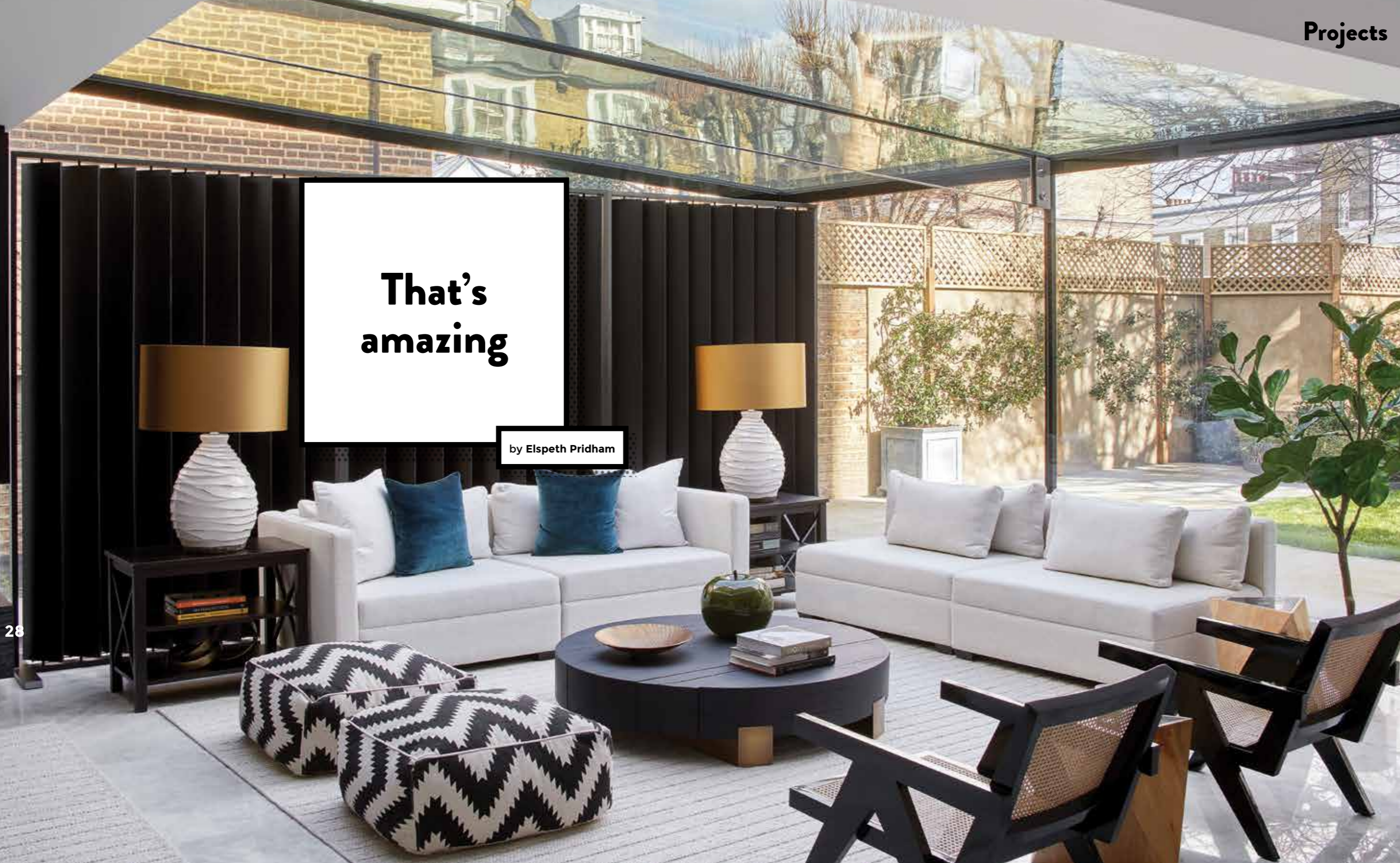
People



Professional

for residential design professionals





**Architect Rodrigo Moreno Masey talks to Elspeth Pridham about his transformation of a double fronted Victorian house in London**

**Q. What was the brief from the property developer for this project?**  
**A.** The developer, who knows and trusts us, asked that we give him the most amazing house possible while staying within the constraints established by the budget as well as local planning regulations. We had to start the process by deciding which bits to extend, do we add a pool? Does it need a lift? How many bedrooms should it have? All those conversations, because we had to decide what 'amazing' was. In the end we held a mirror up to the developer and said 'your brief looks like this. This is what we are delivering for you.'



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**Q. What was your starting point?**  
**A.** We were very clear that the sense of connection and pace was the starting point, because it creates such a huge impression. The vertical element of the building and the connection from front to back - the entrance hall, that staircase, that view up and through the house and the connection down to the pool. The house seems to go on forever.

**Q. Did you face any particular challenges?**  
**A.** The excavation of such a large basement under an existing house is technically incredibly difficult. We worked with W11 Construction and at one point were

excavating two and a half stories while propping almost the entire house up over the top of the hole. If you can imagine a cartoon of a little house on sticks sitting over a hole the entire size of the plot, it was like that.

But the chance to create that sense of volume, the opportunity to have a pool, to have the daylight throughout, balances up the complexity with the pay off.

Working with neighbours, the local authority, working through planning all of those things are also challenging because, understandably, there will always be resistance to a development of this style. The controls that govern the development of basements in conservation areas are also very strict. You have to propose, compromise and push in order to get through the right scheme. This project took three years.

**Q. Walk me through the property**  
**A.** At the back of the house there is a full-width kitchen-sitting-dining space leading

into the glass box which folds back and away so you have a full connection to the garden. Making the outdoors part of the living space was important - you read the kitchen and the garden beyond as one space.

In the hallway there is a formal living room on one side and a formal dining room on the other. Tucked in between the dining area and the kitchen is a whole bunch of service space, including a dumb waiter, that allows the house to function.

The stairs take you up to the bedrooms, but also down to a mezzanine piano bar and the family area with billiard room, double-height green wall and TV snug with foldaway acoustic doors. There is a pool, yoga studio and treatment area, plus a gym, sauna and steam room all glass fronted to feel open and connected. At the lowest level there is a split-level study/library with a little spiral staircase taking you up to a minaret of artefacts and books. We extended the height of the bays at the



**Left:** The kitchen-sitting-dining space which leads into the garden.  
**Above:** The glass box folds back and away.  
**Below:** A central staircase links all the floors.



front of the house down two storeys to provide ample natural light.

**Q. What makes a good basement extension?**  
**A.** Basements are expensive endeavours. You either build one for storage or you really embrace it and make it an integral part of the home. But it has to be appropriate. That is the big challenge with these extensions, whether they are contemporary or historical - it is about finding the appropriateness so it feels like the same house.

**Q. Your material choices are relatively unassuming - why is that?**  
**A.** Our studio ethos is to do simple things, honestly and to a very high standard. This includes choosing materials that are beautiful in themselves and putting them together in a simple, elegant composition that is not too fussy or over designed. You are left to appreciate the black metal, the glass, the dark timber, the curved staircase. ▶

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## Projects



Above: The spiral staircase in the library.

Right: The double-height green wall seen from the basement.

Below: The sauna and steam room are both glass fronted.



## Projects



Above: The formal living room. Below: A blue and grey palette for the bedrooms. Below right: Twin entry for an ensuite shower.



**Q. Who is responsible for the interior styling of the property?**

**A.** Spinnochia Freund - and the overall vision for the building was a contemporary reinterpretation of Art Deco, taking that slightly geometric, industrial aesthetic to move the house away from the Victorian. The palette is simple - beautiful stone, timber and black metal detailing, then sumptuous furniture and lighting.

It is very much a collaboration between the interior designer and the architect that makes the result look effortless. We have to understand from the beginning what is going where and how the space will be used so that if a sofa is positioned here, what is its connection to the TV or the bar? In my view, the interior designer should be involved from

the beginning on a project of this scale - they are an integral part of the team.

**Q. What are you most proud of in this project?**

**A.** I love the staircase. I love the vertical connection and the horizontal connection and the flow of the house, it is just right. We went through a whole series of versions of what that central core might look and feel like and how it would operate - so that is the real triumph. When people ask me 'how do you start a house?' I always say start with the staircase, because if it is in the wrong place you are never going to get there.

This house has numerous levels, all with a different character. To have one single object that connects them all together is poetic.

**Q. Is the finished house amazing?**

**A.** I think we have delivered on that brief, although I think amazing is a limited description - it makes the project sound like a one liner. I think the house is also joyful. As you move through it you find different moments of joy in the architecture, the interior, the views.

How might the family that live here fill the space and connect with each other? No matter how big the house is, you always have to start with the people who inhabit it. In order to give a house soul you have to create the opportunity in the building for people to live. To read a book, play with children, spend family time or entertain. By creating those moments, you give a house that joyfulness. 📍