

WEEK END

Guess who? The stars in disguise*

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Jim Crace's
journey to
the self

Investigation:
the Spanish
oil cover-up

Pets in prison

Modern
interiors in
an old home

Zoe Ball

Julie Burchill

IN WITH THE NEW

Just because you live in a period home doesn't mean you want an Aga and chintz. Dominic Bradbury visits a house where the ultra-modern sits well within Victorian walls. Pictures by Mark Luscombe-Whyte

There's a real trick to fusing the old and the new: grafting shiny, modern extensions on to period houses or randomly sinking new designer furniture into unsuspecting Victorian terraces and cottages.

Des and Liz Gunewardena thought hard about this problem when they extended and modernised their three-storey Victorian house in south London. "What we found when we first moved to the house was that, like a lot of families, the rooms we spent the most time in were the least pleasant areas of the house," says Des, chief executive of Conran Holdings, which includes the Conran Shop, plus Terence Conran's restaurant and design empire. "That's why we decided to reorganise the main living areas of the house to have a contemporary kitchen and then to integrate that with our adjoining rooms, where we also wanted to have a modern look. Then, on top of that, we wanted to make sure it all worked well with the period elements of the house."

So, to one side of the entrance hallway there stands a formal sitting room and dining room, but to the other there is now a sequence of increasingly modern rooms, leading to the open-plan kitchen and eating area. "When you enter the house, the hall betrays nothing of what's happening over in the kitchen," says the architect Christopher Ash, of Project Orange. "That's intentional, so you have these stylistic half-way areas that are part of the original fabric of the house, but where the detailing is quite minimal and the furnishing quite contemporary."

Given that the house is a listed building, there were restrictions on how far Ash could go in his design for the new kitchen, which is housed in an existing one-storey annex, plus →



home space



Period pairs: A Philippe Starck bath on stripped original boards marries old and new (bottom). Architect Christopher Ash (below, right) gutted the house — and ditched the Aga in the kitchen



“FROM THE STREET, IT LOOKS AS IF NOTHING HAS CHANGED”

a small extension largely of glass added to the rear. The facade couldn't be touched, so from the street it actually looks as though nothing has changed. But inside the transformation is dramatic. "It's very different — there was this grotty old kitchen at the side, with a big green Aga," says Ash. "The initial idea was to refurbish the kitchen and then add a conservatory on to it. Yet it seemed to make sense not to treat those two things as separate entities." A conservatory was ruled out in favour of a semi-glazed area around the dining table, plus banks of skylights in the roof.

Upstairs, Des and Liz installed a new bathroom, including a Starck bath, and experimented again with the combination of past and present. "Because of the nature of the architecture, the look of the original house would have been very heavy, masculine and austere — red velvet, damask drapes, that sort of thing," says Ash. "But now it's very airy and fresh, which is not that easy in Victorian buildings like this." ●

Project Orange: 020-7689 3456.

