

GRAND DESIGNS



Magaz

DREAM HOMES FOR THE REAL WORLD / JUNE 2007 / £3.30



THE BIG PICTURE
CHOOSING THE ULTIMATE
HOME CINEMA

KEVIN McCLOUD
WHY EVERYONE BENEFITS
FROM A GRAND DESIGN

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THE GLAMOROUS
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FOR SUMMER

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ESCAPE DRY LAND
FOR A HOUSEBOAT

Summer lovin'

Gorgeous homes to let the sunshine in



Intro

- ★ **Cover stories**
- 015 Editor + Contributors
- 016 Letters
- ★ 019 Kevin McCloud on why grand designs are for everyone

021 Upfront

- 021 Essential update *Things not to be missed this month*
- 023 Shop Our pick of the latest looks to brighten up your home
- 026 Design icon As the Royal Festival Hall gets ready to reopen its doors, we take a look at the fascinating history of this iconic building
- 037 News & reviews Inspiring reads and products for June
- 039 Mouthing off Dale Vince, founder of Ecotricity, on ways we can all make our homes more environmentally friendly
- 040 Grand Master Project Orange are known for their slick urban pads, so it's something of a surprise to discover they chose to take on the complexities of building in a picture-perfect Suffolk village



043 Style

- 051 **Trend** Give your home a decorative touch with these ornithological designs
- 055 **Talent spot** Delicate porcelain forms the basis of designer Miyoko Onishi's work
- 057 **Shopping** If you're after fine dining, make sure you snap up this chic tableware
- ★ 065 **Insider guide** Whether you're a fan of gas or charcoal, you'll find all your essential barbecue info is right here
- 072 **Perfect 10** Keep your kitchen clutter-free with these stylish storage tins



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PHOTOGRAPHY MEL YATES

Dynamic duo

Architects Project Orange are known for their sleek, high-end projects, so it's no surprise they've lavished the same attention on their modern home in a very traditional Suffolk village

Christopher Ash and James Soane don't like to put a name to their style, politely saying that they prefer to create 'a collection of possibilities and choices'. True enough. Their work is broad. One day they're working on a hotel in Morocco, the next, one in India, and the following week they might be doing a restaurant in south London. But something that does run through their work is a large helping of glamour. If you're in the market for a chic and sleek loft conversion, these two will be top of your list.

They formed Project Orange in 1997, having both worked for other architects. Both had been involved in high-profile hotel designs while working for Conran & Partners – Christopher delivered the Fitzwilliam Hotel in Dublin, while James led the conversion



James (on left) and Christopher in the library at the front of their new-build Suffolk home. This spacious room also houses Christopher's piano

Upfront Grand Master *Project Orange*

who Architects Project Orange, founded in 1997 by Christopher Ash and James Soane live east London and Lavenham in Suffolk
background Christopher trained at Cambridge and has worked for notable architect practices, including Michael Squire, Conran & Partners and Paul Hyett, a former RIBA President. James received an MA at Cambridge and has also worked for Conran & Partners, where he was made a director in 1999
famous for An ever-expanding portfolio of high-end residential, hotel, office and retail work



Upfront Grand Master Project Orange



left A combination of lime render and local brick means the exterior of the property blends in with its very traditional surroundings **below** Installing underfloor heating from Osma (osmaufh.co.uk) allowed

James and Christopher to create the pared-down, uncluttered interior they were after **below right** Windows and doors throughout the property were made by Oakwood Joinery Limited (01787 880 600)

of the Great Eastern next to London's Liverpool Street station. Their experience in this field has clearly given them an army of contacts, and led to their international hotel projects.

But when they set up alone, they began with a very different kind of work. Like many small practices, their early projects were residential, including a fit-out of a loft space in a rented warehouse for themselves. Done on a tiny budget of £5,000, and used as a venue by furniture giant, Aram, for an exhibition on Alvar Aalto furniture, it created a stir. 'We had lots of people asking us to do their conversion for five grand!' says Christopher. Chichi bachelor pads and boutique apartments followed in their numbers. That's not to say that their influences are limited, nor that they're one-trick ponies. Projects range from using sumptuous chandeliers in the bedrooms of refurbished houses, to wild neon in the Vegas-style Indian takeaway, Delhi Delhi, in Battersea, through to more demure projects such as the Imperial War Museum cafe. 'Everything is a response to the surroundings,' says Christopher. 'All our projects are very locally grounded and appropriate to their context.'

Given their portfolio, it's no surprise that these two urbanites have a slick, urban pad in London. But what's more of a surprise is that they've just built a new home in Lavenham, Suffolk. Lavenham is picture



perfect, jaw-droppingly so. Streets are filled with medieval, timber-framed buildings, built when the town thrived during the Tudor monarchy from the wool trade, meaning that by the 1520s it was one of the richest parts of the country. Today, virtually the entire place is listed. Which means getting planning consent for anything is nigh on impossible, never mind a new-build house.

So how did they end up here? Christopher had holidayed in the town as a child and suggested going back for a short break. Thoroughly charmed by its architecture, they bought a weekend home in 1999 and became fascinated with the idea of building their own home. Finding the site__

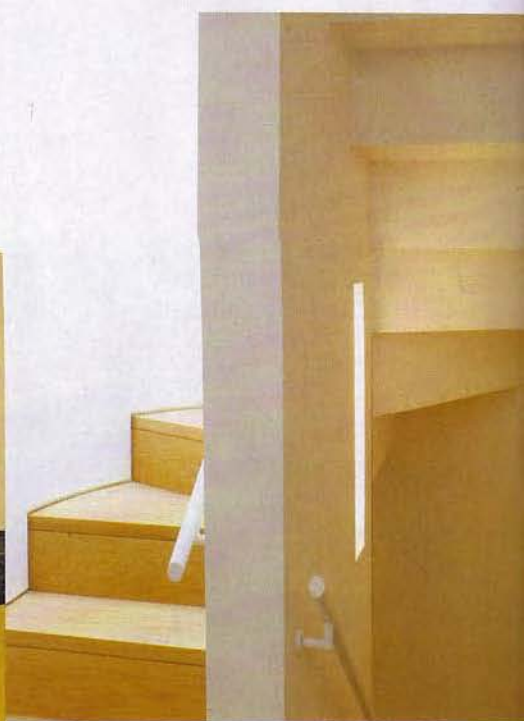
*'We were
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Upfront Grand Master *Project Orange*

below Sleek kitchen units run along the wall at one end of the main living space. The bricks for the flooring were sourced from Banbury Bricks (0845 230 0941; banburybricks.co.uk)

right A beautifully crafted staircase winds its way up to two bedrooms and an office **opposite page** There are plenty of subtle, contemporary touches, such as the huge window in the master bedroom and the marble bath in the luxurious en suite



was pure chance. Overhearing a neighbour at their local pub talking about a plot that was part of her garden was the beginning. 'She'd come back to renew the planning consent she'd secured 15 years ago on the site,' says James. It was the perfect opportunity.

Now all they had to do was grapple with the conundrum of how to design a home that was sympathetic to the surrounding Tudor buildings – all wattle, daub and wonky timber – while at the same time create a house that was resolutely contemporary. And of course, gain planning permission. This was an even bigger challenge than before, as restrictions had become increasingly draconian since the plot first received consent. After trying – and failing – to expand the size of the house, they eventually admitted defeat and designed a building that fitted into the silhouette of the original proposal. 'We were told that this was a site not of special interest, nor national importance, but international importance,' James recounts, with a wry smile. The challenge had been set.

This was clearly not the place for a flash, urban pad. The pair rose to the challenge admirably, with a contemporary response that sits neatly next to such lauded historic buildings. 'We went on a journey,' says James. 'We were open to new opportunities. Why not explore the vernacular language of local buildings in our project?'



The house's clean lines, as well as the sheer size of the windows, let you know exactly which century it belongs to

The house is designed so that its roof height matches its neighbour further up the hill, and the roof pitch echoes the town's existing architecture, which is brimming with pointy rooflines. Although constructed from a modern steel and timber frame, the house is finished in a combination of traditional lime render and local brick, while the doors and window frames are made from oak that has been treated with boiled linseed oil and will grey with age – materials that were chosen to chime with those already used in the town.

They brought in the experts, too, working with a local builder who had extensive experience of renovating houses in the town. 'He understood traditional types of construction,' says Christopher, 'territory that we didn't really know a lot about. It became a collaborative process.'

The choice of materials, the excellent quality of workmanship and the design gives the building a pared-down, uncluttered feel, which manages to retain an almost Scandinavian sense of warmth – Christopher in particular cites Finnish architect, Alvar

Aalto, as an influence. While you're never allowed to forget its context, the house's clean lines, as well as the sheer size of the windows, let you know exactly which century it belongs to.

Local materials didn't just remain on the outside, but appear on the inside, too. This house responds and embraces its locality in every respect. The ground floor is split-level, and is dominated by an open-plan living room, with a whitewashed brick fireplace, and kitchen that uses a similar palette of materials to the exterior. The softwood beams in the ceiling are integral to the structure of the building – rather than just being whimsical afterthoughts – and are clearly visible, as are the joists that hold up the kitchen. The floor, meanwhile, is made from brick and conceals the heating system, hence the lack of radiators. —



Upfront Grand Master *Project Orange*

below In contrast to their London home, the Lavenham house has a softer, more rustic feel to it, thanks to the use of neutral colour schemes and traditional materials, as in the comfortable second bedroom

Up the winding staircase are two spacious bedrooms and, when fitted out, an office on the top floor within the gables, perfect for the pair to work from. 'It will be a fantastic garrett,' smiles James.

The furniture and fittings, meanwhile, come from an eclectic range of sources. The cane chairs were found in a local antiques shop, the antique table lying against the wall is a family heirloom, other pieces were bought in a modern furniture warehouse sale, and the textiles on the cushions in the

kitchen came from eBay. 'It should all feel like a very comfortable bringing together,' says Christopher.

The finished house has a rustic feel, Christopher agrees. 'Yes, there's a soft, modern, rustic feel – it's contemporary but it still feels like a country property. And it allows our London flat to be a little more urban and sophisticated, and satisfy our wish for two different environments.'

But there are touches of luxe, such as the en suite in the master bedroom. With a marble bath and walk-in shower, it feels incredibly luxurious and clearly harks back to their hotel work, but is softened by more personal touches, such as the rococo-inspired mirror. Importantly, the house succeeds in feeling neither like a show home or, indeed, a hotel. 'I think it was very important that it was a house that you wanted to live in and be in,' explains James.

And, to my mind, this gets to the core of Project Orange. Never afraid to change their style or reveal their influences, they make each and every project respond to its unique set of conditions, and fit like a glove. Attempting to build a contemporary house somewhere like Lavenham could have proven disastrous. In fact, they've made it look rather straightforward. ★

Project Orange [020 7689 3456;
projectorange.com]



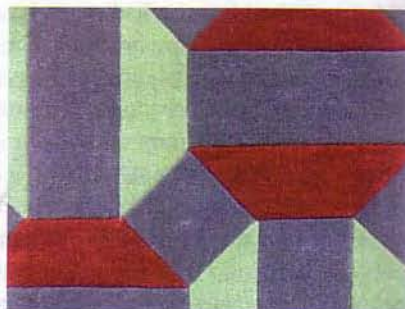
THE CRUCIAL THREE: Project Orange's headlining work



A new building providing a mix of retail units and 24 apartments in Sheffield



Red and orange tiles used in the restaurant of the Park Hotel, Mumbai, India



Specially designed carpet for their latest project, a new hotel in St Petersburg, Russia