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SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

FROM THE OUTSIDE IT'S A COMPACT, WOODEN BOX-LIKE BUILDING. YET OWNERS JOE DOLCE AND JONATHAN BURNHAM HAVE MANAGED TO CREATE A SIMPLE-YET-STUNNING SPACIOUS INTERIOR FOR THEIR WEEKEND GETAWAY

WORDS **LUKE TEBBUTT** PHOTOGRAPHY **RAIMUND KOCH**

W

hen Joe Dolce and his partner, Jonathan Burnham, first rented this compact wooden box in the Hamptons from a friend, it was love at first sight. Surrounded by trees and walking distance from the beach, it was ideal for escaping Manhattan, and became a kind-of second home.

'It was small – just 1,400 square feet (130sqm) – but it had lots of outdoor space, and a grand sweep in the front room, which is 16 feet (4.8m) high,' says Joe. 'And I love modernist architecture. It was an authentic gem in the woods.'

But being in love isn't always easy. For starters, you have to learn to love what's on the inside, and work with the imperfections. Joe and Jonathan loved the simplicity of the house – its kitchen opening on to a striking double-height living room, which sends light flooding into the study and bedroom upstairs – but they knew it had issues. It had barely been touched since it was built in 1967, apart from a clunky staircase that replaced the original spiral stairs, and now ate up valuable space in the living room. So when their friend sold the house to them a few years later, they were ready to embark on the architectural equivalent of therapy: renovation.

First, Joe and Jonathan decided to shift the external wall across by a few feet – just enough to make room for a new staircase and reclaim space in the living room for a dining area. As a bonus, it also allowed them to bring in extra light with a rooflight above the stairwell, and enlarge the poky bathroom that sat behind the stairs.

'A lot of architects want to turn a small thing into a big thing, and we didn't want to do that,' says Joe. 'We liked the size, and didn't want a big second house that we would have to maintain.'

Next they got to work on the kitchen, which was barely on speaking terms with the patio outside. A wooden door separated the two, so Joe and Jonathan broke down the barrier with a sliding glass door that opens fully on to the patio, which has been enlarged a little and has a workspace extending out from the kitchen. They also replaced the cabinets with new ones from Ikea, which are teamed with a polished blue sandstone worktop and a glass splashback. The cabinets cost \$2,000 (£1,200) – about \$20,000 (£12,000) less than a bespoke kitchen would have cost – and have become what Joe calls 'an accidental showpiece' that guests always comment on, in one of the best-loved parts of the house.

'It's funny, we have a much larger kitchen in New York – probably three times as big – but I much prefer cooking in this small kitchen,' he says. 'It's really compact and__

The painting in the living room, by British artist Tom Hammick, is nailed to the wall and had to remain in place for the duration of the renovation

protected by a tight-fitting plastic cover. Joe and Jonathan's next step is to replace the existing fireplace with a woodburning stove



'I LOVE MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE. IT WAS AN AUTHENTIC GEM IN THE WOODS'



above Most of the furnishings were bought from second-hand shops – the dining chairs are by American designer Paul McCobb; the sofa has been reupholstered in Sunbrella fabric available from dickson-constant.com **above right** The glossy Ikea kitchen has become something of a talking point; bluestone floor tiles continue out to the terrace

you can be indoors and outdoors. It's changed from being a really dark room into a very functional room.' But the real key to this love story's success is the fact that Joe and Jonathan didn't try to change the house, preferring to work with what they had. To maintain its character they reused all the old cypress wood in the new parts of the house. The old outdoor decking has been used for the new stairs, and the original external wall was gingerly dismantled, stored and cut to make the slatted screen that now encloses the staircase. Joe and Jonathan even hired the original architect, Harry Bates, and his architectural practice partner, Paul Masi ('the most innovative

architects on Long Island,' says Joe) to do the work. 'We went in with a surgeon's blade and made sure that what we cut out and put back in would blend seamlessly with what was there,' explains Masi. 'We really feared that we would change the character and the spirit of the house if we modernised it too much.' Indeed, the modern touches are minimal: new double-glazed aluminium-framed glazing for all operable sliding doors and windows, new bathrooms, new taps, a few new light sockets and new oak flooring in the living room to bring the floor level with the new sandstone tiles in the kitchen.---





WOOD CLADDING

The cypress cladding used in Joe and Jonathan's house is common in the US, but not in the UK, where the most common cladding woods are western red cedar, larch (European or Siberian), iroko, douglas fir, sweet chestnut and oak. Larch is an economical option and oak is most expensive. All weather to a similar silvery colour.

Species are divided into softwoods and hardwoods. Softwoods include western red cedar, larch, douglas fir, thermowood (which is heat-treated for durability), and pine (the cheapest, but unlike other woods it needs to be treated). Softwoods are typically more affordable, better for painting on, and can be nailed to walls.

Hardwoods include sweet chestnut, iroko and oak, and are typically attached to walls with screws. Tropical hardwoods such as iroko, itauba and cumaru are not necessarily more expensive, but if you are thinking about the environment, you should consider the miles they have travelled. Their advantage is that it's easier to get long, clear lengths.

The Timber Research and Development Association (TRADA - 01494 569 600; trada.co.uk) has useful online guides to different wood species, as well as a book, *External Timber Cladding*, which costs £40.

left Joe and Jonathan's house is one of the few in the area on a hill - from the bedroom there's a fabulous view through the treetops. Jielde lamps by Jean-Louis Dorecq feature throughout the house (from £269 for a floor lamp, available in a range of colours at Aram) **above** The locally sourced bluestone, with a rougher finish than for the kitchen worktops, has been used to create a stylish bath surround

The irony of such restrained work is that the budget became the opposite, doubling from \$150,000 (£90,000) to around \$300,000 (£180,000). The double glazing alone cost around \$50,000 (£30,000) because what were standard sizes in 1967 now had to be made bespoke. Paul Masi is keen to point out that, despite this, it was still a relatively inexpensive build, considering the painstaking work that was done on all parts of the structure.

In return, Joe and Jonathan have a house that now works as well as it looks, with more light and a better flow between indoor and outdoor spaces. 'Even my 89-year-old mother loves the house, and she has no feeling for modern architecture,' says Joe.

The woman who originally commissioned the house is also a fan, after a recent visit. 'Nowadays most people would just tear down that house and build something

that's more suburban. So she was very excited that the right people bought that house, and continued the life of it,' says Paul Masi.

And Joe still speaks about the house as excitedly as the day he first saw it. In the future, he would like to see the house listed for its architectural importance. 'I'm not sure modernism is valued as highly here as it should be. What I would like to happen is to have the house preserved and recognised for its value. It's a small house that strikes you big,' he says. 'And that's the power of great design. It's not about size. Everything about the house is modest, but it evokes an extraordinary feeling.'

In the Hamptons - an area not known for restraint when it comes to house size - you could say Joe and Jonathan gave theirs an inch, and it took a mile.

CONVERSION RATE \$1=£0.60, AUGUST 2009

TIMELINE

SEPTEMBER 2003	JUNE 2004	SEPTEMBER 2004	JUNE 2005	SEPTEMBER 2005	DECEMBER 2005	JANUARY 2006	JUNE 2006
Bought house	Plans approved	Building work started	External structure complete	New windows and sliding doors complete	Bathrooms complete	Kitchen complete	Final completion date

'IT'S A SMALL HOUSE THAT STRIKES YOU BIG. THAT'S THE POWER OF GREAT DESIGN'



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CYPRESS CLADDING

FOR SIMILAR, TRY WESTERN RED CEDAR EXPORT ASSOCIATION

(01252 522 545; wrcea.org)

BESPOKE ALUMINIUM SLIDING DOORS

FOR SIMILAR, TRY I-D SYSTEMS

(01603 408 804; i-d-systems.co.uk)

CEDAR DECKING

TRY DECK SUPPLY

(01895 271 300; decksupply.co.uk)

OAK FLOORING

TRY BROADLEAF TIMBER

(01269 851 910; broadleaftimber.com)

BATHROOM TAPS

KOHLER

(0870 850 5551; kohler.co.uk)

BATH

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(0845 500 7787; duravit.co.uk)

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(07899 668 869;

pink-flamingos.co.uk)

JIELDE FLOOR LAMPS

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(020 7557 7557; aram.co.uk)

left The furniture on the raised deck - try gloster.com for similar - has weathered to the same soft silvery sheen as the house, blending perfectly with the encircling woods