

HITS THE SLOT

Frame House is tucked between a traditional residence and a new apartment block in Borough, and is designed with scope to add to its four storeys to create additional space



SLIM CHANCE

Squeezing a functional contemporary home into a narrow urban plot can be a tall order. Three recent projects – in London, Sydney and Toronto – rise to the challenge

Piecemeal regeneration is an inevitable characteristic of both dense city and sprawling suburb. Blocks are born, blocks die, houses come and go, sites spring up and entire neighbourhoods undergo gradual character changes. For architects with forward-thinking clients and time on their hands, the infill spaces that fall between the gaps offer almost unlimited potential, providing that a bit of lateral thinking is applied. These three new houses demonstrate how forgotten pockets of modern cities, from London to Sydney, have benefited from fresh approaches to infill dwelling.

01. Frame House, London
by Carl Turner Architects

Slotting a new structure into a narrow south London site was both a challenge and an opportunity for architect and contractor Carl Turner. The restrictive site, sandwiched between an existing dwelling and a newly constructed apartment building, offered a fantastic location in the heart of Borough, as well as an opportunity for some complex space planning and well-crafted finishes.

The Frame House is slender and rises up four storeys, culminating in an »

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expansive terrace with views across the local rooftops and railway tracks; Renzo Piano's hulking Shard is already the dominant feature on the near horizon. For Turner, the project presented a rare opportunity to hone his design and construction skills and create a project that will endure. 'The client is a friend,' he explains. 'He'd owned the site for a few years, as it was next to one of his other properties. Eventually, he decided to use it for his own house, rather than a development project, so I asked if we could design it from scratch. We also worked as the main contractor.'

Happily, time was on everyone's side. Without a pressing deadline, the design and construction of the Frame House proceeded at a leisurely pace. The client, a photographer, rented an apartment in the Barbican throughout the build, a sojourn that gave him a taste for the raw concrete aesthetic. Turner's approach was to think from the inside out. 'We approached the house as if it was

an empty structural frame, a found structure that we then inhabited.' As a result, Turner and his client were given the luxury of changing their minds both during the build itself and – theoretically – at any point in the future. For example, the concrete frame that gives the house its name has been designed to support up to two additional storeys, should the client need to expand the living space in years to come. Inside, there's also space to install a lift. 'The clients can really grow old there,' says Turner.

Starting with the frame meant form and finish could be shaped as the house progressed. 'The design of the façade only got planning permission after the frame was completed,' says Turner. 'If it hadn't, we would have been able to clip on a more suitable alternative.' With three simple bands of frosted glass balcony and large sliding doors that open up the living spaces to the street, the façade is practical but animated, evoking the warehouses and small factories that were once

THINK THIN

Frame House's top-floor kitchen/dining space, with concrete walls and ceiling. Sliding balcony doors and a skylight provide plenty of light in the narrow space

clustered around this part of London – with a contemporary glow once the sun goes down.

Inside, everywhere you look, the finishes are beautiful, with raw concrete given the same loving care as the polished metal and meticulous carpentry. The ceilings, for example, are silky smooth and richly textured, with carefully considered light fittings recessed into pre-cast pockets in the slabs.

The completed house oozes the kind of quality that can only be achieved by extreme attention to detail, and Turner's hands-on, on-site approach was integral to the project. 'It was incredibly difficult to achieve that simple feel,' the architect admits, 'as everything here is so bespoke.'

The craft is evident, but the functionalism has enabled Frame House to fit effortlessly into the city's timeline. 'It feels like it's been there forever already,' says Turner, 'it has built-in patina.'

Jonathan Bell

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