

Tradition's the mission: Chris Dyson in the first-floor panelled back dining room

The Dysons, desperate for a family home, found a ruin to restore - and a fine 18th-century house got a new lease of life, says Philippa Stockley

PITALFIELDS in east London, populated with artists, actors Dyson got to know his neighbour, he and eccentrics, looks like - and often serves as - a film set, recently for ITV's Mr Selfridge, while increasingly being hemmed in by

glassy City towers. In the early 18th century, many of its houses were constructed by speculative builders on small parcels of land, sometimes in pairs, which was a modest but effective economy of scale. In a Spitalfields street, one such early developer, Samuel Worrall, built numbers 22 and 24, twin five-storey houses. In the 20th century, No24 was cheaply remodelled as a grey, rendered box withmetal windows, its inside butchered. It had numerous tenants, including a maker of leather coats in the basement and a printmaker in the attic, while its still-untouched neighbour decayed graciously.

In 1996, Chris Dyson - a young architect working for Terry Farrell - his wife Sarah, a teacher, and their two children. Ollie, then five, and Issy, three, were living nearby in a tiny house with one room to each floor. "The children were at each other's throats," says Dyson, "so I was looking for a bigger house.

"I went to the Land Registry to see who owned the houses nearby, and wrote to four or five people, and one answered." After negotiation, this man sold them No 24. "The whole place was going to ruin," Dyson says, "with water pouring through from top to bottom."

First, he did necessary repairs. Concrete tiles were ripped off the rotting mansard roof and replaced with lead, new windows went in, and it was rewired and

wondered how he could restore the house to look as it once had, and the neighbour invited him to make measured drawings of every feature of No 22.

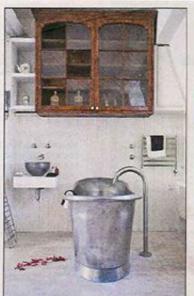
In 2008, now running his own practice from his attic, Dyson took the plunge. But instead of costly party wall agreements, he agreed to restore his neighbour's tired frontage alongside his own. Hoardings went up and the horrible grey front of No 24 was ripped off like a dolls house.

The basement held a pile of mouldy leather jackets and stank of tanning chemicals, while a roof had been slapped right across the back yard to make more factory space. When Dyson took it down it left a steelwork skeleton, so he used that framework to hold perforated industrial decking - "as cheap a walkway as you can make" - with iron stairs down to the small yard, which was eventually turned into a fernery. Georgian-style pivoting metal doors from the basement. designed by Dyson, opened up the back,

which was faced in lapped timber. The inside of the house became 18th century again, but with a light touch. Old things were interspersed with fabulous Matthew Hilton chairs and modern lamps, while the basement kitchen is modern, with a rubber floor, a kitchen island designed by Dyson, and a glossy

new bathtub with an antique cupboard; a new basement kitchen enlivened by a glossy ceiling and rubber floor... but with 18th-century china next to the breakfast table at the other end of the room











Talking point: the urn, a theatrical prop, isn't as heavy as it looks, but was too wide for the fernery doors, so stayed upstairs



white ceiling - "atrick I learned from the basements of grand Chelsea houses."

Reclaimed oak floorboards were laid and old panelling and fireplaces were ways to hide tracked down. At Lassco Three Pigeons architectural antiques centre in Oxfordbehind concealed shire, Dyson bought two 18th-century "jib" doors, timber pilasters, a fine fireplace and an arched, shelved reveal and installed them inch of space in the drawing room, with a matching reveal made by a local joiner. Room by Above: a simple room, the Dysons put back panelling and four-poster bed added showstoppers such as a nickel-plated copper bath in the master bathfrom Ikea lends a light, modern room, and a 6ft-high urn Sarah spotted touch to the attic in Columbia Road. Made of Ferracotta, bedroom, while a sort of cement, it is a theatrical prop. the sofa adds

ESPITE the house's now lovely innards, the exterior is the greatest triumph. Dyson measuredup and had patterns done in purplish brick offset with Suffolk reds. "The gauged brick arches over the windows weremade by a brick cutter who makes model trains for a living but cuts arches fer pleasure," he says. He found another original timber pilaster and had the site joiner copy it in pine, which was then oak grained, while the front door became positively majestic with fux burr-walnut graining. False graining was common in the 18th century.

The house and its primped twin now sit happily in the ancient street. But how did the neighbour put up with six months of dust and hammering? "He enjoyed the whole process," says Dyson. "Building doesn't have to be difficult when you have sensible neighbours."



in them. Add linen chests and wardrobes, and where you have panelling, add a concealed cupboard behind a jib door. You can't have too

are Victorian. Cut them off and the window will look the part.

Reclamation: graze on the local reclamation yards, antiques markets and shops. When you see something,

Paint and colour: avoid lots of white Use warmer shades and experiment. To get an authentic non-uniform finish, always use a brush, and ideally use oil-based paints. Leyland paints will mix any colour you like. Radiators: cast-iron radiators retain heat longer and look good. But buy new ones – they won't leak. Architects: some architects will give

GETTING THE LOOK

Architect: chrisdyson.co.uk Reclaimed bricks: lrbm.com Steel door fabricator: sih-metalwork

Cast-iron downpipes: from longbottomfoundry.co.uk Joiner for windows: North Kent Joinery (nkj.co.uk) Specialist reclaimed floorboards: Vinda Saax (07986 252867) Lassco Three Pigeons: lassco.co.uk Wood grainer: ianharper.com Modern chandeller in first-floor drawing room: lestroisgarcons.com Chairs at kitchen table, and first-

Bateau bath: williamholland.com Garden design: by Luis Buitrago -



"Period perfection": passers-by would never guess the property frontage is new

Chris Dyson's restoration tips

To create an 18th-century feel: Fireplaces: shouldn't be more than 50 per cent of the ceiling height. Storage: use the recesses either side offireplaces - 18th-century silk merchants often displayed woven silks Window homs: take them off - they

Decorative mouldings: don't go to B&Q. Look them up, there are plenty of books out there, such as The Elements of Style by Stephen Calloway. Then a good joiner can run them out for you.

time-charged advice, so you don't always have to have a whole design



floor drawing room armchairs: matthewhilton.com