

# DIGGING DEEP

*Despite having already completed an extensive renovation of his London home, TV architect George Clarke decided to dig out a massive basement beneath his house, giving his family all the extra square footage it needed* Words Sarah Baldwin Photography Thomas Stewart



*far left* A skylight just outside the bi-fold doors to the kitchen allows light into the basement. The large door ventilates the underground space and the kids can easily run from the cinema room to the garden *left* The cinema space is now the family's favourite room in the house. Most of the ground floor has wooden floors, but there's carpet here for a cosier feel

**A**sk most people what they think about basements and they're likely to say 'dark, damp, dank, dingy' – or pretty much anything other than 'airy, light-filled, bright'. And really it's no wonder, given that basements are, by definition, below ground level. Imagine, then, my surprise when I walked into architect George Clarke's basement to shafts of sunlight flooding the rooms. The white, sun-drenched space is so gloriously open that you quickly forget it's an underground lair.

George, presenter of Channel 4's *The Home Show* and *Restoration Man*, lives with his wife Catri and three children, Georgie, 8, Emilio, 6, and Iona, 4, in an end-of-terrace house in Notting Hill. They bought the property three years ago and had already completed a full refurbishment when they decided to embark on the basement build last year. Their brief was simple and straightforward: some much-needed extra square

footage for an office and guest bedroom, plus additional storage capacity.

Although George leads his own architectural practice and build company, and has considerable experience of new-build and commercial basements, he was in uncharted waters with this project, as he'd never before dug beneath an existing home. So he called on London Basement Company to manage the excavation. 'Always go with a specialist, well-established company,' he urges. 'It's an engineering exercise and you need a lot of specific experience and knowledge.' And he's just as persuasive about the importance of hiring an architect for the design phase.

The house sits on clay, a soil that's notoriously hard and slow-going to dig, which meant that the excavation took six months. Once the concrete shell was installed, in came George's men to sort the design. Extending from underneath the house, out under the rear →



*left* Although he has an office in central London, George sometimes works from home. The bookshelves, designed by Dieter Rams for Vitsoe, are filled with architecture and design tomes *right* The large, black desk is an original Bruce Burdick piece from California. All the office chairs were designed by Charles and Ray Eames for Vitra *below* George and Catri have a large utility room and extensive understairs cupboards



patio, it's a simple plan, with a large guest bedroom and en-suite bathroom to the front of the house, a utility room, masses of cupboard space and an extra WC off the central corridor, plus an open-plan living space to the rear of the house. 'My biggest design tip is frighteningly simple and important,' says George. 'Stick absolutely all the services and boring rooms in the middle, where there's no light.'

The open-plan space is used as part-cinema, part-office and is broken up with a level change; three steps lead down to the office area. George insists that rather than a stroke of architectural genius, this was a requirement to meet planning. It's necessary to leave a minimum of one metre between the ceiling height and the garden level, to allow enough depth for soil should future occupants want grass or garden beds.

As with many successful grand designs, glazing is the key to the project's success. The bay window in the front bedroom, which overlooks a lightwell, is as large as possible. To the rear, George has fitted one skylight in the middle of the large room (just outside the bi-fold doors on to the patio) and thanks to the exterior staircase that provides access from the garden, much of that side wall is glass. 'Work as creatively as you can to get lots of light and ventilation,' he says.

The build and fit-out cost £350,000; no small sum. A major cost came from having to dig through the front garden to avoid destroying the recently refurbished house (in which the family lived for the →



**'Work as creatively as you can to get lots of light and ventilation'**

**'I would have saved a fortune if I'd done it at the same time as the house refurbishment'**



*far left Most of George's family live in the north of England, and it was important to him that he had somewhere they could stay in London when they visit*  
*left The bath and washbasin are from the Duravit Vero range and the taps are from Hansgrohe. The bookshelves are off-the-rack pieces from Ikea.*  
*George's design regret? 'I can't believe we have a nicer bathroom off the guest room than off my own.'*

entire project). 'I would have saved a fortune if I'd done it at the same time as the house refurbishment,' explains George. His advice is that if you're buying a run-down house, make sure that you do the basement first and make it as big as you can afford.

Although it cost several hundred thousand pounds to build, the additional space has added a whopping £900,000 to the value of his home, in addition to the enjoyment it's brought. The whole family utilises the space, whether it's the kids doing their homework, George working or everyone watching DVDs in the cinema. 'I used to come home and the living room looked like a bomb site,' says George. 'Now the living room and kitchen are immaculate and quiet, and the house works as a family home for the first time.' **GD**

Thinking about a similar extension? Turn to p146 for an expert guide to basement conversions



### Suppliers

- Project team** Architect and interior design George Clarke & Partners (020 7404 6757; georgeclarke.co.uk) Excavation London Basement Company (020 8847 9449; londonbasement.co.uk)  
**Electrician** Liam McCartney (liam@mc-cartney.com)  
**Fixtures and fittings** Lighting iLight (01923 495 496; ilight.co.uk); The Light Corporation (01442 216 200; lightcorporation.com) Carpet Westend Velvet Collection in Silver Birch at Westex Carpets (01274 861 334; westexcarpets.co.uk) Tiling Terra XXL tiles in warm porcelain white by Mosa tiles, Netherlands (+31 43 368 94 44; mosa.nl) Exterior tiles Baycliff Lord sanded tiles from Burlington Stone (01229 889 661; burlingtonstone.co.uk)  
**Bath and washbasin** Duravit Vero (0845 500 7787; duravit.co.uk) Taps Hansgrohe (01372 465 655; hansgrohe.co.uk) Wardrobes Ikea (0845 358 3364; ikea.co.uk) Office shelving 606 Universal Shelving Systems designed by Dieter Rams for Vitsoe (020 7428 1606; vitsoe.com)  
**Furniture** Lounge chair and ottoman by Charles and Ray Eames for Vitra (020 7608 6200; vitra.com) Side table Side table by Eero Saarinen for Knoll (020 7236 6655; knoll.com) Kitchen dining table Oval dining table by Eero Saarinen for Knoll (as before) Kitchen dining chairs DSR chairs by Charles and Ray Eames for Vitra (as before) Flower picture Fabric from The Cross (020 7727 6760; thecrossshop.co.uk) Black desk Classic desk by Bruce Burdick for Herman Miller at Alternative Office Source (alternativeofficesource.com) Office chairs Aluminium Group by Charles and Ray Eames for Vitra (as before)

#### Basement

- 1 Bedroom
- 2 En-suite bathroom
- 3 Utility room
- 4 WC
- 5 Cinema room
- 6 Office

