

# COMPACT CHALLENGE

The challenge: The internal and external renovation of a compact three-bedroom, three-storey, mid-terrace period property in Margaret Street, Brighton. ARCH-Angels architects take us through the project



## The Brief:

An internal and external renovation of a compact three-bedroom, three storey, mid-terrace period property, including new services, windows, patio sliding doors, internal and external redecoration. The brief was to bring light down into the basement kitchen/dining area, which was a dark, compact space. The client also required the provision of a mini-utility room at the rear of the kitchen with a WC.

The interior scheme had to create open light spaces whilst simultaneously providing a lot of bespoke storage. We needed to open up the ground floor as one through-space and improve the connection to the rear patio area through full-height sliding windows. In order for this compact space to work as a home, we had to provide contemporary-style storage to the bedrooms and bathrooms, along with a coat cupboard near the front entrance door that also contains shoes and a mirror. This was achieved through designing the storage to be read as part of the walls with no visible hardware.

## The detail:

The coat cupboard, for example, floats above the ground. It is painted out to match the surrounding walls, with a large mirrored panel door to both expand views of the internal room and bounce reflected light around. In this way the cupboard virtually disappears into the wall behind it.

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The single bedroom upstairs had to provide a single bed, a wardrobe and a display area. This was achieved by designing the wardrobe to double up as a headboard for the bed, provide a niche for displaying objects and housing a reading lamp whilst also creating an area of hidden storage behind the bed.

Bringing the feeling of light and space was achieved by designing the stair to the basement in a way that borrows light from the ground floor living area through a glass panel in the stair wall. An existing light well was reclaimed, bringing a sense of space and light to a basement kitchen. A small utility area and WC were created next to this area, using pocket doors and cleverly thought-out storage. The rear of the property was opened out to an existing rear terrace by the incorporation of new sliding, glazed doors. Such features allow the house to be flooded with natural light, while the use of neutral decor allows the internal living space to feel fresh and spacious. By using LED lighting and finishing walls with Farrow & Ball paint, a perfect living area for both entertaining and relaxing was created.

Not only was the house compact, but access to the house was limited. Set in an urban environment, within a conservation area, with limited parking and no front gardens, the builders had a challenge on their hands! Getting materials delivered was, at times, problematic



and getting the materials into the house could be a struggle.

The overall finish was only achieved by some creative thinking regarding how to maximise every millimetre in the house. Unused fireplaces and chimney breasts were removed internally, but the stack had to be kept external as the house is within a conservation area. Beams were spliced and hidden within the floor zones and were designed to be as small a possible whilst still complying with regulations, both in terms of strength/loading and health and safety (handling).

Compact sanitary ware was used throughout to ensure space was not wasted without compromising on comfort and usability. Existing drainage connections were upgraded and gully repositioned. Existing sash windows were overhauled and some were replaced entirely to ensure no draughts or leaks. A new, integrated fire alarm system was installed to ensure the safety of the occupiers within the 4-storey house, which has a stair open to the living space and entrance level at ground floor.

Site management was exemplary, given the challenges faced: limited space, no parking, no

skip licences, coupled with a deadline set by the client. Working relationships were good, as was communication with the whole team. The clients were very much hands-on and responsive when asked about changes or confirmation of materials, finishes and the like. The project did overrun a little, but this was acknowledged in advance when it became apparent that the challenge of the site limitations had begun to slow progress. Given the quality of the finish and space created, this was soon forgotten about as the clients began to enjoy and realise the full potential of their dream home.



## Client Testimonial

"What to do with the ordinary – turn it into the extraordinary.

If you're thinking of refurbishing a property and want to maximise its potential, then using a good team of architects, as we did, makes all the difference. They were able to guide us through the unknown in a calm and positive manner.

Richard Zinzan, Co-owner/Director of ARCH-angels Architects took our brief and shared our vision to transform an airless basement kitchen and other dark spaces into a light, spacious home for our family.

One dated bathroom of average size was transformed into two 21st century shower rooms, complete with bespoke fitted storage. Green space from outdoors was brought into the living area by adding glass sliding doors – an entirely different perspective on a tiny yard. When lit at night, the Sussex flint wall is transformed into a work of art infused with light and shade.

By taking the clutter of everyday living and designing bespoke storage around our needs, Rachael Pigg, architect and interior designer, enabled us to organise and bring order and calmness to all rooms.

Pete Sonntag, as project leader, was always there to answer queries and help us navigate through important decision-making processes. Sounds like magic but by sharing your vision with the ARCH-angel's team your dream spaces are possible. They will challenge and extend your vision to its limits. Although it was tough whilst the work was being done, do try to enjoy the journey as we did and know that it will all be forgotten once you are living in and enjoying your new spaces." *Sally Bentley*

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