



planning a
LOFT CONVERSION

Be inspired by some creative loft extension projects, with insider tips on achieving similar designs and how to overcome any potential pitfalls

Words: Charlotte Luxford

Reaching NEW HEIGHTS

Emma Perkin, director at Emil Eve Architects, explains how the team added a mansard roof extension to create an additional storey



The brief A couple with two young children were looking to create a grown-up sanctuary to retreat to, away from the bustle of family life below.

Why this type of loft? The existing mid-terrace house had a butterfly-style loft. With this kind of roof there is no room to extend into, so a mansard roof extension is a good solution in order to create a usable full-height space. Mansard extensions always require planning permission, which can be tricky to get unless there are other examples in the neighbourhood or you can demonstrate it will be hidden from view from the street.

Project overview Because we could build the large mansard extension, we managed to add a full storey of accommodation. The generous master bedroom has been lined with bespoke joinery, including slatted panelling and a bedhead incorporating storage cabinetry, a full-height dressing area, and a large window seat integrated below a full-width window.

All the surfaces have been finished in the same chalky clay-pink colour to create a calm and contemporary feel. In the ensuite, graphic terrazzo tiles have been coupled with a textured plaster finish, which continues upwards to frame the dramatic shower rooflight. A solid ash stair links the new space to the existing house, with its slatted balustrade complementing the new joinery. A large rooflight lets natural illumination into the stairwell and the whole house.

From the outside, the new addition stands out with its crisp detailing, slimline glazing, and the subtle variation of the natural zinc cladding. My team and I also introduced a delicate steel balustrade to enable large glazed panels to slide and pivot fully open, without obscuring views and light.

What were the challenges? The property was in a conservation area in north London, so gaining planning permission was tricky; we had to be considerate of the local and national planning policies and produce in-depth documentation to support the design proposal. Also the clients wanted to stay living in the house during the works and their bedrooms were directly below the loft, so all the materials and tradespeople had to access the loft via the scaffolding rather than through the house. >



Photography: Mariell Lind Hansen



TOP TIP

"Consider insulation. Roof spaces can get really hot in the summer; I like to use wood fibre insulation, which is sustainable and has high thermal mass, meaning the space stays cool. Prioritise quality of space over quantity. Consider reducing the internal footprint if it enables you to integrate external planters or, if planning allows, a small roof terrace – you won't regret it."



Step CHANGE

An inspired design created by Andre Kong of Andre Kong Studio provided maximum floor space with minimum visual impact on its surroundings

The brief The project emerged out of two significant post-lockdown changes for the owners: the arrival of another child and a shift to permanently working from home. Suddenly the family were outgrowing their house and needed a dedicated office space, as well as a refuge from the rest of the busy household.

Why this type of loft? Inspired by a telescope, the stepped formation was our creative answer to maximising the floor area while minimising volume, giving us the best chance of obtaining planning permission. Instead of a large L-shaped dormer with a single roof height, which would have been very imposing, my team and I suggested breaking down the volumes and tapering the shape so it felt lighter. Planning permission was surprisingly smooth, thanks to a thorough design and access statement explaining the thinking behind the addition.

Project overview The internal layout was planned to maximise the space and light of each room. The staircase was the first piece of the puzzle, continuing the original staircase of the house in the same place, but using a glass landing to bring light into the first-floor corridor.

It made sense for the main part of the loft to be the bedroom and bath, both of which could make use of the lower height of the sloping roof for wardrobe storage and for the bathtub. We decided on exposed brick in the bedroom to give the space character, and used the depth of the chimney

flue as an opportunity for shelving. The outrigger of the L-shape could then become a light-filled study, with a long desk that can accommodate two people working at the same time. Additional storage has been built into a niche next to the stair landing.

What were the challenges? The intricate stepped brickwork was a challenge to align and get perfectly right, but with some on-site mocking up and testing, our competent contractor was able to deliver the building exactly to the intended design. We're really glad it turned out well, as it brings a lot of texture and relief to the exterior of the loft, catching the light and casting shadows. >



TOP TIP
 "To create something unusual, get a qualified architect to design your project and give them flexibility to present different ideas. Consider your opportunities for glazing and maximising daylight through clerestory windows, characterful shaped and slot designs, and folded roof lights, instead of relying on the standard roof window. Do bear in mind that current lead times on glass are slow and can severely impact your project timeline."



Hidden DEPTHS

Kim Loddo, director at Inglis Badrashi Loddo, explains how a sensitive double-dormer addition created a dedicated children's floor



The brief The clients, a pair of doctors, wanted to add more space while maintaining the existing character of the original house, as well as keeping their garden intact.

Why this type of loft?

We tried to retain as much of the character of the house as possible, and embraced the idea that the changes would be discreet, so adding a mansard roof extension was rejected from the outset. The intention was to sensitively and carefully reconfigure the house in a sympathetic, respectful and sustainable manner; and keeping the rear gable facade was a key part of that.

Project overview

The project involved almost doubling the space inside this typical London townhouse, with the addition of a pair of secret new floors at the top and bottom of the property. The loft extension created two new children's bedrooms, a bathroom, and a large play space at roof level.

The new double-dormer loft extension was hidden behind the retained brick gable end of the existing roof. This created a new children's floor, with a shared space for the kids leading onto a pair of bedrooms with completely glazed end walls concealed behind the retained gable. The central, light-filled space, lined in painted timber-boarding and decorated in muted greys and pinks, provides a generous play area, and is a spectacular culmination to the main staircase of the house.

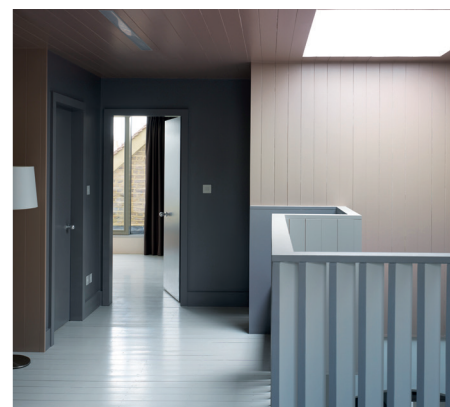
New underfloor heating, a sprinkler system, and maximum levels of insulation were incorporated into the design and the brick chimney was restored, giving

TOP TIP

"Loft conversion projects should never be thought of in isolation. Even though the actual building work may only be taking place on the top floor, it's critical to realise that a good project can have an impact that extends across the whole house. The balance, enjoyment, and character of the existing spaces on lower floors can be positively improved by a considered design for the top floor."

added texture and warmth. The stairs from the ground-floor entrance to the first-floor landing were extended upwards, with a gently curved stringer echoing the existing first-floor archway. The new painted timber handrail opens up towards the top, allowing views and light down into the rest of the house.

What were the challenges? In my opinion, a well-designed project has a mix of spaces with different scales, both generous and intimate – it's very easy to get seduced by the idea of creating an open-plan layout, but there is a danger that you end up with so little differentiation between spaces that you lose some of the qualities that make your home work well. In this project, the bedrooms and a children's bathroom were kept compact to contrast with the generous and open play area. Storage was built into the full width of the front eaves, and a window seat over the stair provides a place to read under a view of the sky. For me, a good design needs to be robust enough to accommodate the messiness of everyday life, as well as look stunning and function well. >



Photography: Brotherton Lock



Ahead OF THE CURVE

George Bradley, director at Bradley Van Der Straeten, explains how flipping the layout created a much better design, maximising garden views

The brief Martina and Joe are both talented graphic designers with a serious eye for detail and appreciation for classic, tranquil, and textured design. Martina comes from a tiny town outside of Venice and wanted her London home to reflect some of her favourite rustic aesthetics of Italy. The mid-terrace Victorian property needed an entire renovation, including extending at both ground-floor level and into the attic.

spatial flow more natural, while allowing for more light to enter the loft. When it hits the curves, it's a softer illumination. We also curved the wall inside the shower, so it's a real experience, as well as arching the doorways to increase the sense of space. The walls were painted in Bauwerk colour, a modern limewash paint that creates a textured, clay-style finish. The overall effect is reminiscent of a cave, carved out of something solid to create a space that's really conducive to relaxing and sleeping.

Why this type of loft? There were already a lot of mansard loft extensions on the street, so a precedent had been set. It was a no brainer for us to opt for one, too, as it was the best way to add the largest amount of floor area possible. It gives you a lot more flexibility than a pitched roof with box dormers, because you can go right up to the boundaries on all sides, and it makes it easier to carry your staircase upwards without having to step in to avoid banging your head."

What were the challenges? One of the key challenges was cost. It's easy to think of a loft conversion as a low-budget spend, with all the focus on the kitchen extension, but this was to be the main bedroom so it still needed to feel special. >

Project overview While Martina and Joe knew they wanted their main bedroom to be on the top floor, lofts are often harder spaces to visualise so this was the most open-ended part of the brief. We tried a few different layouts and ended up putting the bathroom at the front of the property so the bedroom could be away from the street. This change in placement was key to the success of the project. Most designs will put the bathroom at the back of the house. It's often the smaller part of the loft because it shares the back wall with the stairs, but in this case, my team and I wanted to maximise the treetop views and capture the morning light.

Lofts are often very boxy and we wanted to move away from that aesthetic to make it feel special. We introduced curved walls to make the



Photography: French + Tye

TOP TIP

"People always overlook glazing and often you'll see loft windows that are a lot smaller than the rest of the house, which can be a real shame. Windows dictate the feeling of the space internally, so incorporating a detail like the bench seat in the bedroom really makes all the difference. We added a low sill of around 45cm, making it the perfect height to sit on – and because it's lower, you also get a much better view when lying in bed."



Simply SMART

Lea Grange, director at Studio 163, reveals how she transformed the attic space through permitted development to create a serene master suite

The brief A few years ago, we got approached by the owners to do their kitchen extension. During the pandemic, they came back to us to design them a parental suite. As a young family with two children, they wanted a space to retreat to and leave the first floor for their two girls. In this new space they wanted a bedroom, ensuite bathroom, walk-in wardrobe, and a home office.

Why this type of loft? The original attic had a great footprint, but due to the house being semi-detached with a hipped roof, the headheight was not enough. By converting the loft, as well as transforming the hipped roof into a gable end, we managed to add a lot of usable floor space.

Project overview We designed the master bedroom as the centrepiece, with two walls lined with bespoke joinery, creating an oak-panelled surface with hidden doors. Those lead to the walk-in wardrobe, the office space, the bathroom and the main staircase. On the street side, we added some roof windows, but on the garden side, where the views are looking towards the trees, we created some bigger

openings with a huge fixed picture window and a big velux cabrio window that transforms into a small balcony in the study.

The overall palette has been kept minimal to highlight the oak panelling, but the client's favourite inky-blue colour is used as an accent throughout every room to tie the loft spaces together. There's a blue feature wall behind the bed, acting as a headboard, and the two bespoke desks have been painted in the same hue. In the bathroom, blue patterned tiles add a splash of colour against the textured microcement walls and timber vanity.

What were the challenges? The planning staff at the local authority had made it clear that they would not support a full planning application for a loft extension because, with the house being quite wide, a full loft extension would have been too imposing. We therefore used permitted development rules to create a smaller extension but by playing with different volumes and different solutions – combining a smaller loft extension, gable-end roof and hidden balcony – we managed to give the client a lot of space within the constraints." **KBB**



TOP TIP

"Prioritise natural light and views, as well as creating well thought-out spaces with integrated storage solutions rather than clinical, empty layouts. Building a loft extension is also an amazing opportunity to bring more light into the floors below, such as a huge rooflight over the stairwell."



Photography: Mariell Lind Hansen