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MOVE
IMPROVE!**

nla

2023 EDITION

Green ambitions

FEATURING

2023 Winners, Shortlist,
Longlist and more

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NLA is London's built environment community; a membership organisation for everyone with an interest in London's built environment. Its purpose is to help make London a better place to live, work and visit. Its mission is to engage with professionals, politicians and the public to deliver positive change in the city.

NLA's activities include events, exhibitions, tours, research, publications, learning, websites and social media, awards and competitions, as well as the London Festival of Architecture taking place each June. NLA's public gallery and event space, the London Centre, is based in the City of London and hosts its London Models.

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DON'T MOVE IMPROVE!

2023 Edition

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Green ambitions

The ever increasing cost of construction and materials and the importance of building sustainably for a changing climate are impacting the residential sector across London — so where does this leave homeowners who are looking to scale up? Now, more than ever, the case for renovating over relocating has never been more important. The programme responds to this year’s theme of ‘Green Ambitions’ by celebrating the best home improvement projects with limited resources, tight budgets and sustainability in mind, proving that during uncertain times, innovation and creativity can flourish.

Our shortlisted and winning projects highlight the importance of homes as healthy living spaces that are designed to last and reflect the diversity and character of London. This year’s projects also explore cost-effective solutions to maximising space, low-energy systems, access to nature, defining layouts through colour, and the use of natural, renewable materials.

The competition is part of our annual programme that is made up of design consultations, networking events, a yearly publication and exhibition, and a dedicated website that celebrates the best domestic-scale designs across London promoting green ambitions and supporting London’s architecture community.

Florence Maschietto
Programme Manager, NLA



The Secret Garden Flat by Nic Howett Architect. Photography by Henry Woide

DON’T MOVE, IMPROVE!
Don’t Move, Improve! is NLA’s annual programme and competition that encourages great design in everyday life and celebrates the newest and most innovative home improvement projects across London. The magazine includes this year’s longlist, shortlist and winning projects that responds to this year’s theme: ‘Green Ambitions’. Also featuring exclusive insights from industry experts on emerging trends and styles, interviews, thought-leadership and more.

THE COMPETITION
The annual competition is open to practices and homeowners who have carried out extensions on top of, underneath and on the side or back of buildings, and/or interior insertions, conversions, and garden studios in Greater London in the past two years. This issue covers the period between September 2020–September 2022. Projects featured in the awards demonstrate:

- Exceptional innovation, creativity and originality
- High quality design that improves liveability of space and quality of life
- Cost-effectiveness
- Environmental consideration for the materials, efficiency and longevity of the building
- Contextual design that adds to London’s character and the life of the surrounding neighbourhood

PRIZES
As well as the **Home of the Year**, awarded to The Secret Garden Flat by Nic Howett Architect (page 4), this year we have awarded seven prizes that celebrate emerging trends and key challenges within home improvements projects. These are:

- **Environmental Leadership Prize**
Low Energy House by Architecture for London (page 12)
- **Materiality and Craftsmanship Prize**
Brückenhaus by R2 Studio Architects (page 22)
- **Compact Design Prize**
Lubetkin Apartment by Studio naama (page 32)
- **Unique Character Prize**
CLT House by Unknown Works (page 42)
- **Urban Oasis Prize**
Kitchen in the Woods by A Small Studio (page 52)
- **Transformations Prize**
Elizabeth Mews by Trehela Williams (page 62)
- **Under £100K Prize**
Colour Casing by District.Architects (page 70)

JURY
Our jury includes experts from across the industry. This year’s jury consists of:

Phil Coffey, Director, Coffey Architects
Anna Beckett, Associate, Buro Happold
Marie-Louise Schembri, Sustainability Director, Hilson Moran
Ellie Stathaki, Architecture Editor, Wallpaper* Magazine



PEER REVIEW PANEL
Our Peer Review Panel, made up of the winning architects from *Don’t Move, Improve!* 2022, selected the top 50 projects to be featured in this year’s programme. The Panel includes:

Margaret Bursa and **Johan Hybschmann**, Partners, Archmongers
Abigail Ashton, Partner, Ashton Porter Architects
Gill Lambert, Director, AOC Architecture
Geraldine Ng and **Daniel Goodacre**, Founders, DGN Studio
Lizzie Fraher, Co-founder, Fraher and Findlay
Paul Ruff, Director, RUFFARCHITECTS



Top secret

HOME OF THE YEAR 2023
The Secret Garden Flat by Nic Howett Architect
Camberwell, Southwark



Photography: **Henry Woide**



The Secret Garden Flat is an innovative self-build bedroom extension of a lower ground floor flat in Camberwell. It includes a garden studio for the architect owner and his ceramicist partner to work from.

‘We self-built because we couldn’t afford to employ someone to build it. And we had to, in order to expand our family, have a second bedroom to our flat. We didn’t want to move; we couldn’t afford to move to a larger home in the local area, so for us, self-building was the only option to do that. Putting the building at the end of the garden has allowed it to have a destination and a focal point.’

Nic Howett, architect and homeowner



JUDGES’ COMMENTS

‘The winning project not only represented a huge feat in terms of vastly transforming an existing, tired flat that was no longer fit for purpose, tailoring it to the evolving needs of the family living in it; it also was an impressive self-build and almost the definition of the *Don’t Move, Improve!* values, about sustainable-led, home improvement and quality design that has the ability to change each residents’ life — without moving. On top of this, it also looks great.’
Ellie Stathaki, Wallpaper* Magazine



The bedroom extension and garden studio adjust the living spaces of the flat towards the large rear garden. By not extending the whole width, light is still able to reach the extents of the original flat.

It’s a time-honoured problem: the need for more space for a family, mixed with unaffordable property prices, and a general reluctance to relocate. The answer? The Secret Garden Flat, self-built on a limited budget.

The project involved remodelling a small, awkward flat situated behind a shop in a Victorian terrace on the busy Camberwell Road in Southwark, and in so doing, shifting the emphasis of living away from a busy main road to the garden behind.

Using a palette of simple and modest materials that could be crafted with his own hands, the architect added a new bedroom and secluded garden studio, which now sit comfortably amongst the palimpsest of alterations and development to neighbouring buildings. The end result is a flexible home that the whole family can enjoy for years to come.

Both the bedroom extension and garden studio are enveloped by the garden, which is large for an inner-city location, and one of the reasons the homeowners were drawn to the flat in the first place. Having cultivated it over the decade the owners lived there, they have created an oasis from which they grow flowers for pollinators (and pleasure) and food for themselves.

Before the build, the garden and basement flat felt disconnected. Now, however, both the indoors and outdoors interact in a way that the owners feel makes them inseparable, providing outdoor family living space in the summer, a quiet and serene work space sheltered by neighbouring trees, and ‘immersion in the changing seasons from the comfort and warmth of the house’.



The scheme represents extraordinary value for money, with the additional bedroom and a separate studio for two people to work in working out at £2,500/sqm. With the average cost of moving house in London of around £25,000 and with a build cost of £60,000, the architects point out that they have effectively bought an additional 25sqm of living space very cheaply.

The architect divided the space typically used for a full-width extension and shifted one half of this into the garden to create the studio. By doing this, two new timber structures, each with green roofs, were created with an intimate garden space in-between.

Ultimately, the sum of the parts is more than the whole, and what was a small, one bedroom flat with little relationship to the garden has now been transformed into an unexpected urban oasis. ■

JUDGES' COMMENTS

'Hidden away behind a busy row of shops, the flat and garden surprised us all, but as a self-built extension providing an additional bedroom for a growing family, the Secret Garden Flat really embodies what *Don't Move, Improve!* is all about.'

Anna Beckett, Buro Happold

A view of the garden studio looking out from the rear extension.



Home of the year

Florence Maschietto, Programme Manager at NLA, interviews Nic Howett, winner of this year's *Don't, Move Improve!* Home of the Year award



Florence Maschietto: Hi Nic, congratulations on winning 'Home of the Year', the jury panel were so impressed with the opportunities this project presents. This is a self-built project, what were the biggest challenges?

Nic Howett: The Secret Garden Flat was driven by a need to extend our one bedroom flat into a two bedroom family home in order to be considered as adoptive parents, it was a highly emotive project. We didn't want to leave our local community and in light of the expensive property market, our only viable option was to self build the bedroom and studio additions.

Given our limited expertise in building, coupled with the presence of a nearby balcony to the flat above and an unloading spot located 100 metres away, we were faced with several design limitations. Consequently, we opted for timber frame construction as it was lightweight, slender and manageable, as well as allowing us to build a spacious, well-detailed project.

We had to gain planning permission and confirm a build over agreement with Thames Water, however agreeing a license to construct the project from our freeholder was much more complicated and took over two years – this is a factor often overlooked by leaseholders.

FM: The bedroom extension overlooks a beautiful garden where you've built a studio, how did you consider the natural surroundings in your design?

NH: The garden which we had nurtured for the past decade now surrounds both the bedroom extension and garden studio. We merged the principles of the exposed timber frame construction and typical commercial shopfront glazing to provide new well detailed apertures to a previously disconnected garden.

Before the build, our garden and basement flat bore little relationship to each other. Indoors and outdoors now interact in a way that makes them inseparable, providing outdoor

family living space in the summer, and a quiet and serene work space sheltered by neighbouring trees – an immersion in the changing seasons from the comfort and warmth of our bed. The emphasis of living has now been shifted from the main terrace to the garden.

FM: The house is located off a busy main road, but as you step in, you are surrounded by an oasis of green and calm, how did you achieve this?

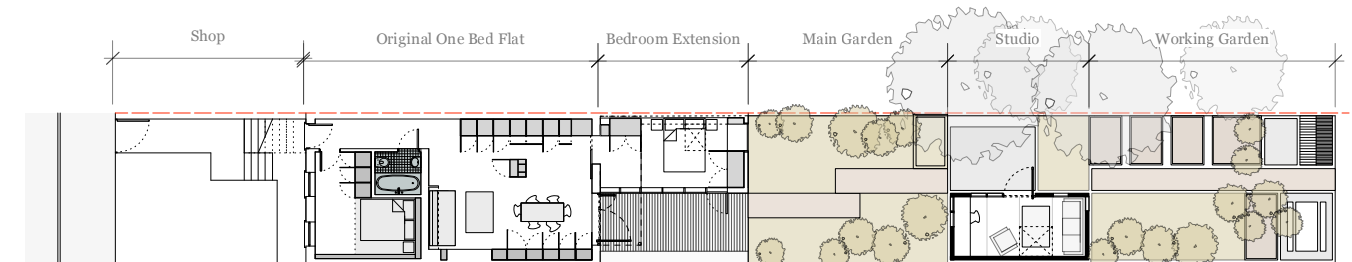
NH: One of the main original draws of the flat was the large inner city garden. Set behind a commercial Victorian terrace, we always knew there was potential to inhabit a world where the busy urban thoroughfare becomes a distant memory.

We have always been keen to maintain the discreet street entrance through to a small courtyard and into our flat. We emphasised the threshold between the outside world and our garden with a dark hallway that brings you into the main living space, from here you have views through to the bedroom, garden and studio beyond.

FM: What is your advice to homeowners who want to renovate with limited resources?

NH: To save on costs, we utilised materials we knew we could work with, skills we already possessed and others we knew we could learn. We found alternative types and sources for materials. The rapidly increasing cost of labour and materials allowed us to develop a thrifty means to delivering a beautiful project.

We understood what was beyond our capabilities and where necessary employed the relevant expertise. There were of course moments when things did not go to plan – any self builder needs to be prepared to overcome these challenges. Despite the difficulties, self-building can be an immensely fulfilling endeavour, and we have a huge sense of satisfaction that we now live in a family home that we constructed with our own hands.



Green exemplar

ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP PRIZE
Low Energy House by Architecture for London
Muswell Hill, Haringey



An energy-conscious and stylish extension and retrofit of an Edwardian Terrace in Muswell Hill that reveals and celebrates the original structure of the house but also aims to be an exemplar for a sustainable treatment of a typical terraced London home at the same time.



Photography: **Lorenzo Zandri**