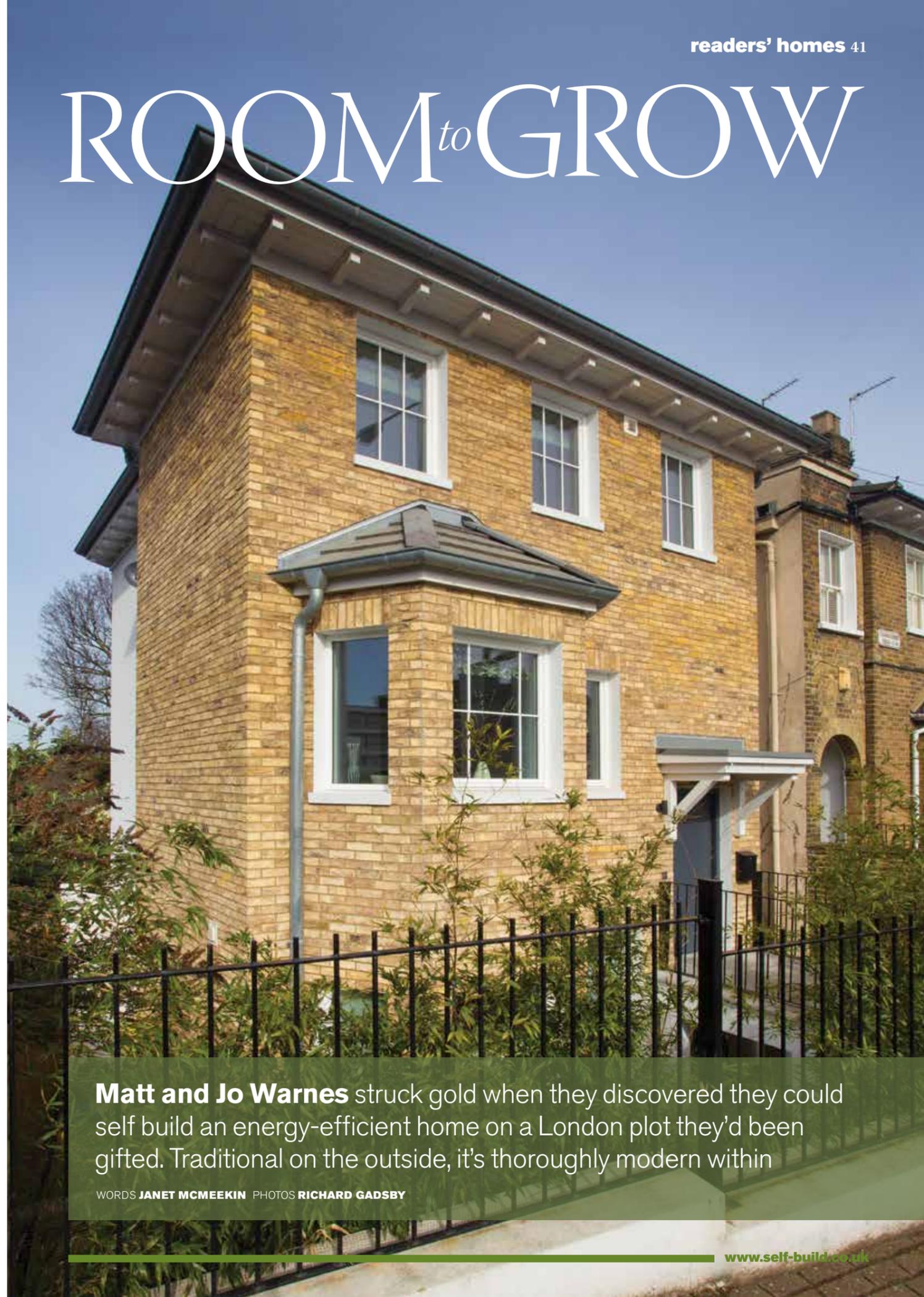


# ROOM<sup>to</sup>GROW



**Matt and Jo Warnes** struck gold when they discovered they could self build an energy-efficient home on a London plot they'd been gifted. Traditional on the outside, it's thoroughly modern within

WORDS **JANET MCMEEKIN** PHOTOS **RICHARD GADSBY**



Left: A clean, contemporary look was specified for the rear, where fitting into the wider streetscape was less of an issue. Below: The bay window is the only hint of the traditional outer appearance of the Warnes' house – inside it's much more modern

When Matt and Jo Warnes started house hunting in London, they had no idea they would eventually end up building an energy-efficient property next to his mother's home – right on her vegetable garden. "It's funny how things turn out," says Matt. "Mum moved into the house after I had finished university but I often stayed over. If anyone had told me that one day I'd be living next door, with my own family, I would have found it very hard to believe."

Their journey down the self build route came about four years ago when the couple were living in a two-bedroom apartment in London. "At the time, our daughter Lauren had just turned three," says Jo. "The apartment had no garden and was beginning to feel a little cramped. When we began looking into schools we realised that the local ones weren't great, so we reckoned it was time to move."

#### A clear solution

It was while enjoying Sunday lunch with Matt's mother, Janice Weston, that the subject of moving cropped up, and she suggested an innovative plan. "Mum asked if we'd consider building next door on her brownfield plot," says Matt. In 2007, 10 years after moving into her Victorian home in Putney, Janice had gained planning permission with the intention of building a house as an investment. However, she decided it would be such a huge undertaking that she

#### THE WARNES FILE

**NAMES** Matt & Jo Warnes  
**OCCUPATIONS** Marketing director & online video consultant  
**LOCATION** London  
**TYPE OF BUILD** Self build  
**STYLE** Victorian facade with contemporary interior  
**CONSTRUCTION METHOD** Timber frame  
**PLOT SIZE** 156m<sup>2</sup>  
**HOUSE SIZE** 140m<sup>2</sup>  
**BUILD COST** £464,300  
**COST PER M<sup>2</sup>** £3,316  
**BUILDING WORK COMMENCED** January 2013  
**BUILDING WORK TOOK** 50 weeks  
**CURRENT VALUE** £1.5 million





put the idea on hold. "Even though the planning permission had expired, Mum was confident that, if we were to resubmit, it wouldn't be a problem," says Matt.

The couple instantly realised that for many reasons, the idea made perfect sense for all three generations. "Mum regularly had to travel over to our home in Kennington to look after Lauren. She's of retirement age and we could all see that this solution would work well both now and in the future," says Matt. "The schools in Putney looked great and the prospect of my mum kindly gifting the land to us was extremely appealing."

Previously, when Janice was planning to build, her long-standing family friend Geoffrey Bodker, a retired local architect, had, with much ado, drawn up plans for a new home with a Victorian-style facade. "With the plot being in a conservation area and right beside a train line, I remembered only too well the struggle Geoffrey had on his hands," explains Matt. "The planners originally favoured the idea of a brick-and-block property to complement the Victorian street scene, but coincidentally, through work, I discovered that it was actually feasible to construct a timber frame property on the plot and clad it with brick slips."

### Quick thinking

Fired up by the exciting prospect of self building and having checked the local school would have a place for their daughter, the Warnes seized the opportunity and began carefully researching the next step. "Although Jo and I like modernist design, we both knew time was not on our side," says Matt. Having seen the battles that Geoffrey had faced with the conservation officer, the couple were pragmatic enough to realise that to gain planning permission swiftly, they'd need to submit very similar plans to the previous ones to ensure the exterior would blend in and there wouldn't be any delay. "The interior, however, was to be a different matter completely. Our vision was for a contemporary, tailor-made, energy-efficient home boasting clean lines," says Matt.

Armed with his new-found knowledge about building a timber frame home, Matt carried out some research before approaching two firms offering the prefabricated method he felt would be preferable for the site. "In terms of custom design, both companies had the ability to build the house we wanted, but Hanse Haus was the only one that could offer a more bespoke home with the brick slips and bay window required by the planners," says Matt. "What's more, they had a can-do attitude and no qualms about tackling a build on what was a particularly difficult site."

The Warnes decided not to opt for the full turnkey package. Having been restricted on the exterior, this creative couple felt they wanted to express their personalities throughout the interior – features like their multi-coloured tiled bathrooms are the evidence of this sense of individuality. "We decided to hire an additional local builder for interior work, who we thought we knew and trusted. Unfortunately, though, this turned out to be a mistake," says Matt.

### Neighbourly concerns

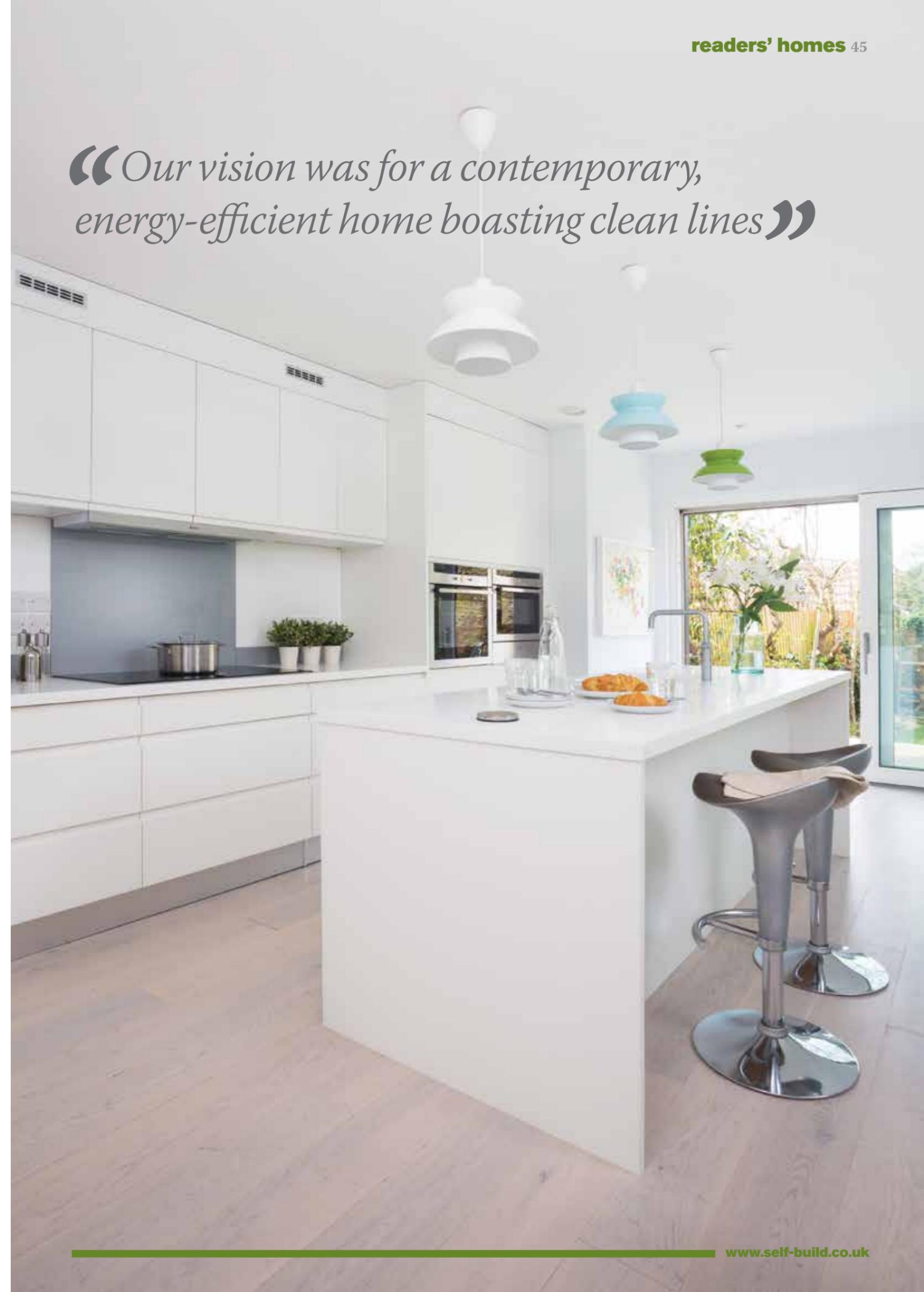
Having decided to finance the build through equity from the sale of their apartment plus a very competitive personal loan and a mortgage, in 2011, the Warnes were ready to submit their proposals for planning. But despite their initial hopes, gaining consent ended up taking around six months due to complaints from neighbours. "Some people living nearby were worried that the house was too big for the plot, while others, expecting a traditional build method, thought that the project would be disruptive," says Jo.

The couple decided to tweak the plans they'd drawn up with the help of Hanse Haus architect Bianca Keil. Their application went to

A second reception room is ideal as a children's play area and study space



*“Our vision was for a contemporary, energy-efficient home boasting clean lines”*



## WE LEARNED...

**BE AWARE** that the groundworks can eat into a lot of your budget. After our soil test, we discovered that we'd need 16 piles, at a cost of £1,000 each, to stabilise the foundation slab. Coupled with the £25,000 cost of the slab, it made a big dent in our finances.

**CHOOSE A REPUTABLE FIRM.**

We were very impressed with Hanse Haus; their work ethic was excellent and the result is an extremely comfortable and energy-efficient home.

**HAVE A CONTINGENCY** budget. We weren't prepared for how much we'd end up spending on parking permits and road closures due to lorries and the crane. It ended up costing around £10,000.

**NEVER PAY FOR** all the building work in advance, as it exposes you to unnecessary risk. Consider including a penalty clause if works overrun.



committee, but in the end, permission was granted. Matt decided to take on the mantle of project manager, and they were ready to start work. "At the beginning everything went well," says Jo. "The main contractor was hired to clear the site, tackle the groundworks and lay the slab – all of which happened without a hitch."

On 16 January 2013 – despite London grinding to a standstill due to heavy snow, and road closures caused by a helicopter crash in Vauxhall – five Hanse Haus lorries arrived in Putney. In just three days, the four-strong team had erected the external and internal walls. "It was magical to watch our house being built from scratch in such a short period of time," says Matt.

Over the next two months, the Hanse Haus team pulled together, creating the bulk of the new build, which suddenly became a project that got the locals talking. "Our once-concerned neighbours were visibly relieved when they saw that this method of construction meant there was none of the on-site noise, dirt and disruption of traditional schemes," Jo explains. "The building inspector was so impressed with the quality of the workmanship that he even went away with a brochure in his hand."

**The inside jobs**

Once the Hanse Haus team had left, it was time for Matt and Jo's chosen builder to carry out work on the second-fix electrics and plumbing, lay the wooden floors, install the doors and skirting, tile, decorate and finish the project. "Sadly, from then on, it all went pear-shaped," says Matt. "Some days the builder just didn't turn up, even though we'd paid him in advance. He was unreliable and the delays meant it was costing us an extra £2,000 a month in rent."

Matt and his family were eventually forced to move into his mother's house as they discovered the electricity hadn't been connected safely, and more problems arose soon after. "The builder went bankrupt so we then had to start contracting other trades in order to finish," he continues. "But in November, we were so relieved to eventually be able to move in. In hindsight, I wish we'd gone for the full turnkey option which would have been much quicker and offered peace of mind," says Matt.

Having settled into their stylish new home and put all the stresses and strains of the project behind them, Matt and Jo are delighted with their triple-glazed, super-insulated three-storey home. "Our total energy spend for the first year was £850 – a huge saving compared to the £4,000 annual bill that Mum pays on her period house next

door, which is only marginally larger," says Matt. The house features the Hanse Haus solid wall system, which combines the advantages of structural insulated panels and solid wall construction for both the external structure and the 120mm-thick internal partitions. "The walls have a stud every 300mm and they are completely glued on both sides with OSB boards. That makes them loadbearing, which means that the fixing of wall units, including heavy kitchen cupboards, is possible everywhere," explains Matt.

**Making life easier**

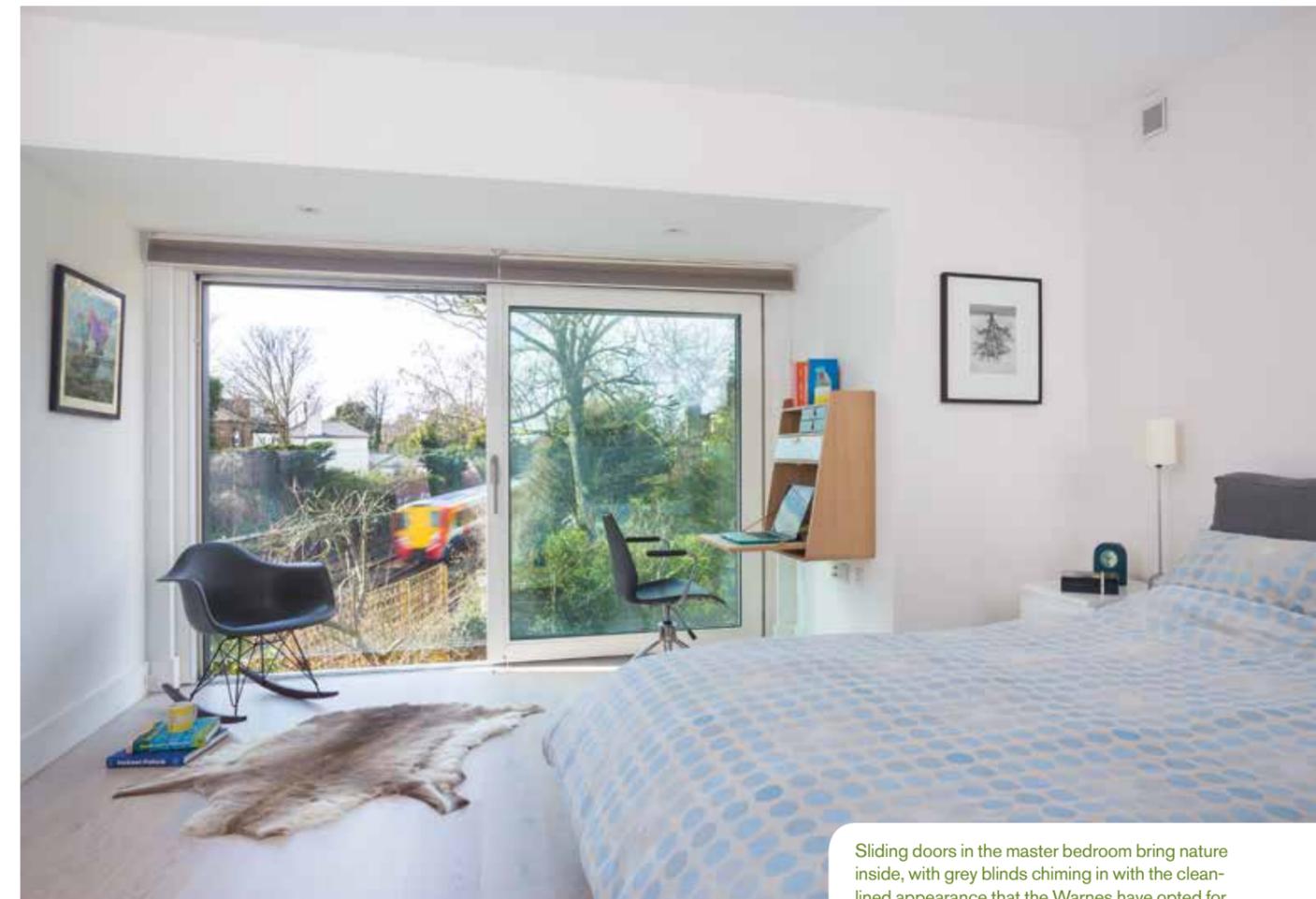
The whole house has a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. On the ground floor there's a reception room and an open-plan kitchen-diner, which leads out to the leafy garden shared with Janice.

On the first floor, the cosy sitting room is one of the family's favourite spaces in the house, and across the landing, Matt and Jo's bedroom is bright and spacious. At the top of the house are two further large bedrooms and a spacious boiler room. "We didn't go for any over-the-top gadgets, but invested in items such as underfloor heating, thermostats in every room, a boiling water tap, an induction hob and a steam oven. We chose these practical items because they make life easier and more comfortable," says Jo. "It's a really mellow environment, created in a solid home with such great soundproofing that we don't even notice the trains going past."

Matt and Jo are grateful to have been given the opportunity to create their own home. "It's a huge bonus that Lauren and Mum have been able to develop an even closer relationship. She can just glance out of her back window and see Lauren dashing around," says Matt. "That's such a lovely reward for her kindness and generosity in enabling us to create a truly fabulous family home."



Grey, blue and white square tiles in the bathroom give a highly individual look



Sliding doors in the master bedroom bring nature inside, with grey blinds chiming in with the clean-lined appearance that the Warnes have opted for

closer look

# Feature glazing

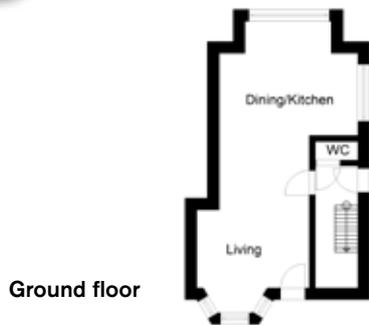
Matt and Jo opted for a glazed Juliet balcony at the back of their London home. Its minimal appearance complements the contemporary white-rendered finish of the rear elevation and ensures the master bedroom benefits from as much daylight as possible. They used local firm Putney Glass & Glazing to create, cut and install the balcony, which spans the entire width of the opening. The feature cost £1,600, and really comes into its own during the summer when the sliding doors go right back, opening up the bedroom to the outside world.



The glass balcony



## Floor plans



## TOTAL BUILD COST BREAKDOWN

| Elements                       | Cost m <sup>2</sup> | Cost % | Total cost      |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------|-----------------|
| Planning application           | £2                  | < 1%   | £300            |
| Utility connections            | £43                 | 1%     | £6,000          |
| Site clearance                 | £143                | 4%     | £20,000         |
| Foundations                    | £286                | 9%     | £40,000         |
| External walls & windows       | £1,286              | 39%    | £180,000        |
| Roof structure & covering      | £357                | 11%    | £50,000         |
| Brick slips                    | £64                 | 2%     | £9,000          |
| Internal walls                 | £143                | 4%     | £20,000         |
| Plumbing & heating             | £286                | 9%     | £40,000         |
| Electrics                      | £179                | 5%     | £25,000         |
| Joinery & fittings             | £71                 | 2%     | £10,000         |
| Floor, wall & ceiling finishes | £214                | 7%     | £30,000         |
| Additional decorating          | £64                 | 2%     | £9,000          |
| Parking fees                   | £71                 | 2%     | £10,000         |
| Plants/trees                   | £36                 | 1%     | £5,000          |
| External works                 | £71                 | 2%     | £10,000         |
| <b>Grand total</b>             |                     |        | <b>£464,300</b> |

## Useful contacts



PREFABRICATED TIMBER KIT **Hanse Haus** 0845 658 9780  
[www.hanse-haus.co.uk](http://www.hanse-haus.co.uk) **BALCONY Putney Glass & Glazing** 020 8870 0380  
[www.putneyglass.com](http://www.putneyglass.com) **BATHROOMS, FLOORS, JOINERY, BRICK SLIPS & LIGHTING Eco Select** 07712 225486 **KITCHEN Tineo Designs** 020 8393 3250 [www.tineodesigns.co.uk](http://www.tineodesigns.co.uk)

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