

Ingenious infill projects

Innovative urban houses that fill the gaps between other buildings

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Some self-builders wait years to find the right plot, especially if they're looking in places where land is scarce – and expensive. But suitable pockets do exist, between, beside and behind existing buildings. It takes some clever design thinking to see the potential in an awkwardly shaped plot, and there may be additional hurdles, such as poor access or the need to preserve the privacy of neighbours. The results can be worth the effort, though, for these one-off examples of thoughtful architecture.

1 CORNER PLOT The team behind this clever project, Studio 54 Architecture, described the two-bedroom house in north London as an urban cabin. The site had previously been used as a car workshop and sits at the crook of a bend in the road, where two terraces of houses meet. A two-storey building was not acceptable to planners, because it would have visually closed the gap between the two terraces, so the answer was a single-storey home, with a rear facade that is stepped to avoid privacy issues with neighbours. Similar materials used both outside and inside – cedar cladding and exposed brickwork – unify the two spaces, and the building is lit via a series of large roof lights. (studio54architecture.co.uk)



2 SUBURBAN UPDATE

The owners of this new-build in New Malden, south-west London, spotted an opportunity to develop their home's detached garage. They asked Duncan Foster Architects to design this four-bedroom, 145 square metre home on the site. It is a contemporary take on a bay-windowed Edwardian house, with similar materials (brick, render and slate) but fewer embellishments – such as the two corner windows in frameless glass, a modern version of a bay window. Planners stipulated that the roof ridge be between the height of the neighbouring properties and that there should be a metre gap off the boundary on each side of the house to preserve the street's rhythm. The project cost £450,000. (duncanfosterarchitects.co.uk) >>



3 A LOCAL INFLUENCE Having made its name designing infill projects, 3i/44 Architects was asked to work its magic on an end-of-terrace site in south-east London. It's clear where Red House derives its name but the bright brickwork also helps to create a relationship with nearby houses, since the same red is used as a detail on the adjacent Victorian properties. An arched window at the front also echoes the entrance to the older house next door. Inside there's a double-height atrium, a courtyard, and a top-lit oak staircase leading to two bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor, and a main bedroom at the top of the house. The project cost £465,000. (3i44architects.com)



MADE TO BE INVISIBLE
 This house in north-east London, by T-space Architects occupies a backland site known as a panhandle, because of its shape, and is accessed via a gap between two houses. This type of site can be tricky to develop because of the privacy issues that arise when there are so many overlooking neighbours – in this case there were 20 adjoining back gardens. A flat-roofed design helps to make the house less obtrusive. The walls closest to neighbours have a canted profile, with the corner chopped off, to make them appear to recede. Green walls create further camouflage. The house was built from timber frame, which was cut and installed on site rather than prefabricated. It's highly insulated and includes a ground source heat pump and solar panels for heating and hot water. (t-spacearchitects.co.uk) >>





5 SKINNY HOUSE Designed by architects Gwendolyn Huisman and Marijn Boterman as their own home, this 140 square metre house in Rotterdam, Netherlands, fills a gap between buildings that was just 3.4 metres wide and 20 metres deep. Dubbed SkinnySCAR, the house is fairly public in its outlook, with projecting bay windows off the main living spaces, where Gwendolyn and Marijn can watch the world go by. The black brickwork includes decorative elements to echo the historical styles of adjacent architecture, while perforated sections cover three of the windows, filtering daylight into dappled patterns inside. Interiors are clad in pine ply, with a staircase that runs up the centre of the house. Playful touches include a void that vertically connects the living spaces on the ground and first floors, with netting strung across that acts as a hammock, offering views of the peaceful garden.



6 COURTYARD DESIGN Architects often turn to courtyard layouts for houses on infill sites because of privacy issues with neighbours. When combined with well-thought-out overhead glazing, they can produce a home that feels intimate and protected. Whole House in south London by Hayhurst & Co has been described by the architects as 'an exemplar for backland urban living'. The 92 square metre property is arranged around a central courtyard with roof lights that provide natural light in the absence of windows on the perimeter. Views are directed upwards and through, down and around the interior of the house. Stairs step gently between the levels, with a drop down to a basement level, which is filled with daylight via the glass blocks that form the floor of the courtyard above. (hayhurstand.co.uk) >>

7 MICRO LIVING Once a disused garage and derelict garden, this mews house by Russell Jones in Highgate, north London, is a compact 68 square metre. The pale brickwork was specified partly to differentiate the property from its neighbours, with similar pale mortar used to create an almost ghostly presence – the planners also liked it because of the way it helps increase light levels along the cobbled passage. The house's simple appearance creates a feeling of greater space – the same paving is used externally and internally, and the brickwork continues inside. A rainwater harvesting system and photovoltaic panels make this home small but mighty when it comes to sustainability. (russelljones.net)



8 INSPIRED BY THE PAST This 145 square metre modern townhouse by 31/44 Architects in Amsterdam, Netherlands, was once an extensive building yard. It had been developed over the centuries in a more irregular and piecemeal way than other areas of the Dutch city. With its brick front facade and pitched gable roof, 31/44's design pays homage to the traditional townhouse, while bands of structural concrete and big windows reference historic facade details from local workshops. In contrast, the rear aspect is clad in Equitone fibre-cement panels, which give it a simple, functional look. Inside, the rooms run the full width of the narrow home, with a split-level ground/lower-ground floor that creates a kitchen-living space, with full-width glazing opening to the rear garden. (3144architects.com) >>



9 MODERN MEWS Tucked on the end of a row of houses, this 102 square metre home in Dublin, Republic of Ireland, by DUA subtly updates the character of its neighbours. A more traditional style of property had already received planning permission for the infill plot. It was the architects' challenge to create something that was more modern without fundamentally changing the proportions, so it could still fall under the existing permission. Inside, DUA flipped the layout so that the bedrooms were on the ground floor, with the living spaces moved to the airy first floor, closer to the roof lights. The simple materials – brick, concrete, pine ply and plasterboard – were chosen as much for cost effectiveness as for the warm, tactile feel they lend the interiors. The project cost €250,000 (£222,900). (dua.ie)

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10 CLEVER GEOMETRY A tricky triangular end-of-terrace plot in London – with a history of failed planning applications – was successfully developed by Undercurrent Architects. The resulting two-bedroom house, does not feel like it has awkward wasted areas – rather, all the angles make the space look more engaging. On the ground floor, a bedroom and en suite have been sited in the right-angle of the triangle, with an open-plan kitchen and dining-living space adjacent; upstairs is an additional bedroom and terrace, overlooking a triangular courtyard below. The house is named after the unusual cladding material, Palmwood, which is derived from coconut palm stems, a sustainable alternative to hardwood. (undercurrent-architects.com) GD



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