

At a glance

NAME James Davies
LOCATION Hackney, east London
PROPERTY TYPE Converted warehouse, dating from around 1890
BEDROOMS 2 BATHROOMS 2
PROJECT STARTED October 2015
PROJECT FINISHED October 2016
SIZE OF HOUSE 115sqm
COST £350,000, including interior fit-out

These two high-level windows are the only original examples in the property. The glazed double doors lead to the courtyard

Hidden GEM

Architect James Davies' stunning warehouse conversion reimagines industrial space for modern living

Maintaining the double-height volume played a key role in planning the layout of the converted space



The narrow glazed doors are in keeping with the original building

The prospect of buying a derelict warehouse, nestled between a doctor's surgery and a gated residential development just off a busy high street in Hackney, couldn't have been more enticing for James Davies, the founding architect of new practice Paper House Project. His childhood had involved frequent visits to the regenerated Albert Docks in his parents' hometown of Liverpool, and after qualifying he lived in a converted warehouse in New York, an experience that cemented his natural affinity with industrial-style spaces. So when this plot came onto the market, he jumped at the chance.

Despite his enthusiasm for the project, converting this run-down building into a home was fraught with complications, and it took all of James' tenacity to overcome what for many people would have been insurmountable obstacles. 'It was soul-destroying at times and I'm sure there were moments when other people would have given up,' he admits, 'but I'm passionate about giving buildings such as this a second life and knew that as long as I could get the go-ahead for the project, it could be transformed into a unique home.'

Originally for sale at auction as part of a larger lot, which also included the adjoining surgery, the warehouse had been empty for a considerable time. Landlocked inside a courtyard, there was no direct access to the site. 'The first time I went to look at the property I had to walk through the doctor's surgery to reach the warehouse,' recalls James. 'It was completely overgrown and hadn't been touched for decades. No-one seemed to know that it even existed, but I could see that it was an amazing find.'

There ensued lengthy negotiations between James and the owner to split the title of the two buildings and surgery, enabling him to buy the warehouse as an individual →



property. He also had to gain permission from the freeholder of the adjoining apartment block for a right of way across the residents' car park, as well as approval to have services installed, involving digging a 90-metre service trench across the third-party land. 'It took more than six months of negotiations, and even though I was spending money on legal fees there was no guarantee that I'd get all the necessary agreements in place,' he says. 'It was a gamble, but I was convinced it was achievable.'

In comparison to these negotiations, getting permission for the building's change of use was fairly straightforward, and the local planning officer immediately got on board with James' plans. 'I wanted to retain the original footprint of the building and restore the brick exterior,' he explains. 'My proposal also included demolishing a single-storey extension that wasn't originally part of the warehouse, and replacing it with an internal courtyard that would maximise natural light in each of the living spaces. Inside the building, the aim was to retain the double-height

volume wherever possible, even if it meant sacrificing additional bedrooms on the first floor to achieve this.'

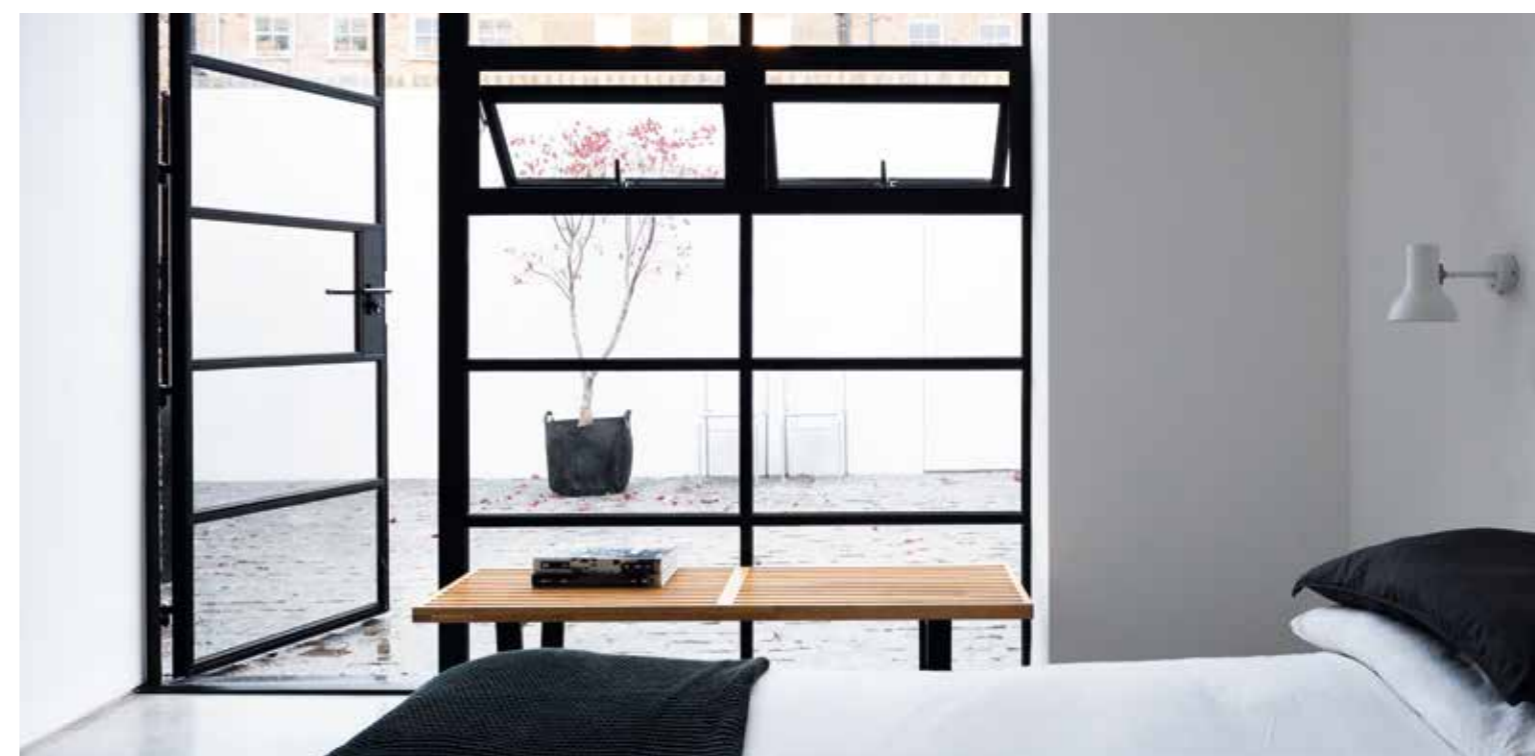
Creating such a streamlined layout required structural interventions, so James worked with engineer Michael Humphreys to find the most effective way of hiding the necessary elements. 'I was nervous because the building has a complex shell and core, so finding the right solution was key to achieving my open-plan vision,' says James. The resulting design includes bespoke extended-leg steel trusses and cable rod supports designed to support the new slate roof. A high-level perimeter ring beam with concrete corner bonders holds the original brick envelope together while allowing large new window openings to be formed.

To improve the building's energy efficiency, the old concrete floor was broken up and used as aggregate for the new, heavily insulated structural floor slab. There's also lightweight, superfoil wrap insulation in the roof, and rigid wall insulation has been fitted to the internal face of the exterior walls. The new window and door openings bring →

above left The structural cable rods criss-cross the interior, tying the warehouse's perimeter walls together

above right The ground-floor layout includes a study with a full-height window looking out to the courtyard

right The white rendered finish and reclaimed granite setts for paving create a tranquil Japanese-inspired outdoor space



‘The house is exactly how I hoped it would be: a calm space tucked away from everything’

left Spruce wall panels and flooring add warmth and texture to the en suite, featuring a walk-in shower

below A small extension to the warehouse was demolished to allow for a hidden courtyard at the property's heart

vital light in, with gridded, steel-framed, double-glazed designs chosen for their industrial look. Conservation rooflights are a suitable choice for the Welsh slate roof.

Walking up to the new entrance, the bank of glazed doors and tall windows offer enticing views of the modern interior. The incredible sense of space and light hits you as soon as you enter, with the double-height hallway leading to the main living area where James' original vision for the property is revealed to maximum effect.

Light pours into the room from the many rooflights, allowing you to appreciate the height and volume of the space. Polished concrete flooring unifies the open-plan layout, including a roomy living area at one end and a kitchen-diner overlooking the enclosed courtyard at the other. 'An easy trick to make a space feel bigger is to create diagonal lines of sight, so I built a 3D model of the space to ensure I was happy with the layout,' says James. 'One of the best places to stand is at the kitchen island as you get a panoramic view of the double-height space and the courtyard at the same time, which is how I imagined it.'

The combination of the exposed structural elements and the black cables for the pendant lights sets the tone for the modern industrial aesthetic of the interior. Utilising the original stepped profile of one of the exterior walls, the kitchen appears to have been carved into the space as the units sit flush with the wall above. Featuring a mix of

powder-coated doors, oak veneer units, Silestone worktops and a black marble splashback, it's a carefully considered palette that adds richness and texture to the layout.

A section of spruce panelling punctuates the white wall of the living area, forming the outer wall of the staircase leading up to the master bedroom and en suite bathroom. The slatted timber screen at the top of the staircase creates shadows on the wall and lets natural light into the stairwell. 'I wanted to include materials that would break up the space,' says James. With the staircase, en suite walls and bedroom floor finished in the same pale timber, there's a visual connection between the first and second floors.

Although James has invested so much of his time in the project, he points out that choosing the right team was key to the success of the conversion. 'Working with an outstanding group of people has allowed me to bring this forgotten historical building back to life,' says James. 'The quality of the contractor's workmanship and attention to detail really shine through in the finished product.'

'The house is exactly how I hoped it would be: a calm space tucked away from everything,' he adds. 'This was such a passion project for me that living here feels like a dream. I keep expecting someone to come in and tell me to leave – I'm not going anywhere though.' **GD**

TURN TO NEXT PAGE FOR PROJECT DETAILS >>



WORDS BETH MURTON PHOTOGRAPHY RORY GARDNER

Project details Find out more about James' modern conversion

NAME James Davies
LOCATION Hackney, east London
PROPERTY Converted warehouse, dating from around 1890
BEDROOMS 2 **BATHROOMS** 2
PROJECT STARTED October 2015
PROJECT FINISHED October 2016
SIZE OF HOUSE 115sqm



THE BUDGET

Total build cost including VAT and interior fit-out	£350,000
Cost per sqm	£3,043

SUPPLIERS

PROJECT TEAM

Architect Paper House Project (020 7923 1595; paperhouseproject.co.uk) **Structural engineer** Michael Humphreys (0117 929 7949; kb-2.co.uk)
Contractor Hexagon Construction (020 7580 5966; hexagonconstruction.com)

STRUCTURE

Polished concrete floor Lazenby (01935 700 306; lazenby.co.uk) **Windows and doors** West Leigh (020 7232 0030; west-leigh.co.uk) **Underfloor heating** Omnie (01392 363 605; omnie.co.uk)

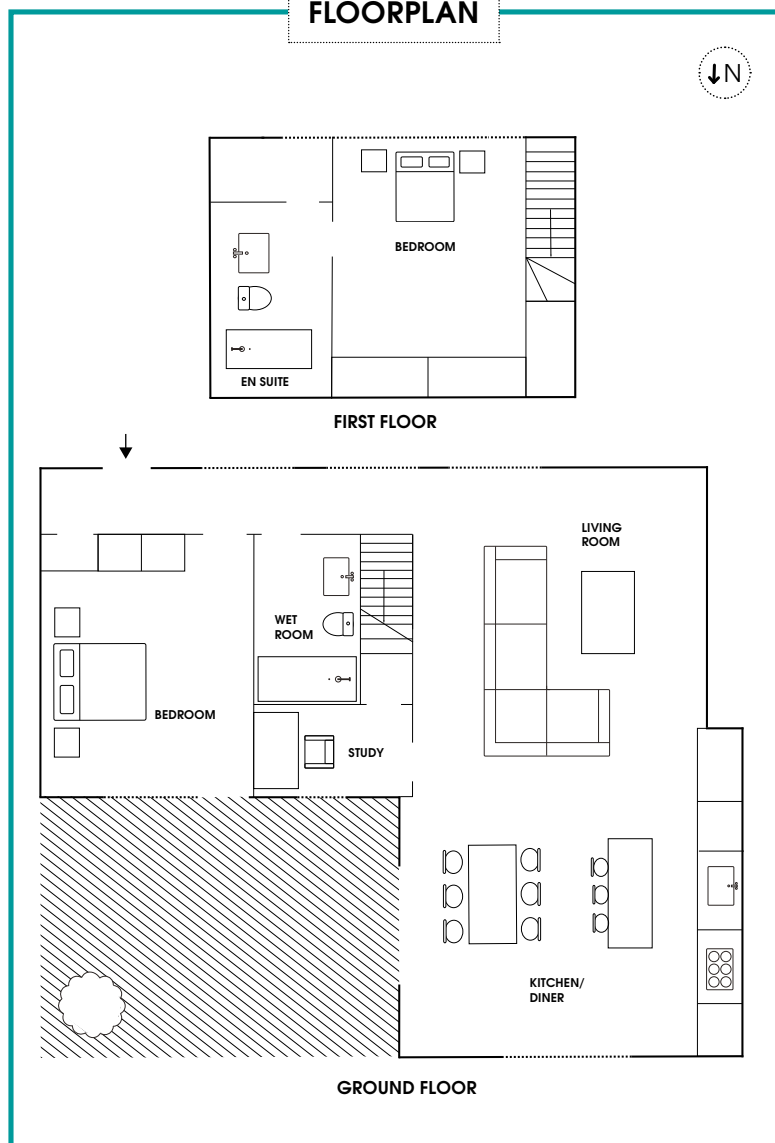
FIXTURES & FITTINGS

Kitchen Hexagon Construction (as before)
Worktops and splashback Roann (01924 834 111; roann.co.uk) **Timber panelling and wood flooring** Tintab (01273 515 155; tintab.com) **Bathroom** Reuter (reuter-shop.com) **Wall tiles** Topps Tiles (0800 783 6262; toppstiles.co.uk)

FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES

Light fittings Lightsy (0800 634 9662; lightsy.co.uk); Modern Lighting Solutions (020 8123 7914; modernlightingsolutions.co.uk); Mr Resistor (020 8874 2234; mr-resistor.co.uk) **Sofa** Söderhamn by Ikea (020 3645 0015; ikea.co.uk) **Chair** Gamfratesi at Haus (020 8533 8024; hauslondon.com) **Coffee table** Forest London (020 7242 7370; forestlondon.com) **Dining table and benches** Made.com (0344 257 1888; made.com)

FLOORPLAN



SPOTLIGHT ON

FIRE SAFETY

Due to the open-plan layout, an auto-mist fire protection system was fitted to meet building regulations standards. Heat sources over 70°C activate sensors embedded in the wall, which project a mist towards the heat. It uses less water than sprinklers, resulting in reduced water damage. Automist Smartscan system by Plumis (020 7871 3899; plumis.co.uk); installed by Firefend (020 3691 0349; firefend.co.uk), £5,500.

Style finder

Cool tones and clean lines are key to achieving this contemporary look



IN DETAIL

PALE TIMBER

Rustic finishes enhance the modern industrial style of this simple interior. Light wood board cladding in the en suite helps make the small space seem larger. It also creates a connection between the first and second floors, with the same material being used for the staircase and bedroom floor. For similar, try beech-effect furniture panels, £27.76 per sqm, Wickes (0330 123 4123; wickes.co.uk).

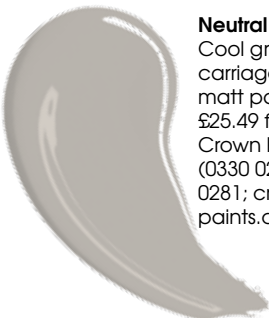
GET THE LOOK

1. **Monochrome look** TS coffee table, £579, Gamfratesi (020 7692 4001; madeindesign.co.uk)
2. **Black beauty** Nexus 20 pendant light in black, £120, Nordlux (01643 707 505; lightingcompany.co.uk)
3. **Social space** Bala table and benches, £499, Made.com (0334 257 1888; made.com)
4. **Contemporary wood** Design Project chair in oak, £250, John Lewis (0345 604 9049; johnlewis.com)
5. **Simple storage** New Waverly stackable shoe rack, £58.99, Hallwood Furniture (0800 169 0423; wayfair.co.uk)

MATERIAL FOCUS



Stone effect
Atlas gris lapatto floor tiles, £38.29 per sqm, Tile Giant (01782 597 777; tilegiant.co.uk)



Neutral hue
Cool grey carriage door matt paint, £25.49 for 2.5L, Crown Paints (0330 024 0281; crownpaints.co.uk)



Natural finish
Exterior plywood board, from £20 for 12mm-thick board, B&Q (0333 014 3098; diy.com)