

THE COAST IS CLEAR

A beach-front house in North Berwick is finally making the most of its assets, thanks to a thorough reconfiguration to let in the views

Words **Catherine Coyle** Photography **Angus Bremner**



DETAILS

Architect Ros Livingstone at Helen Lucas Architects, www.helenlucas.co.uk, 0131 478 8880

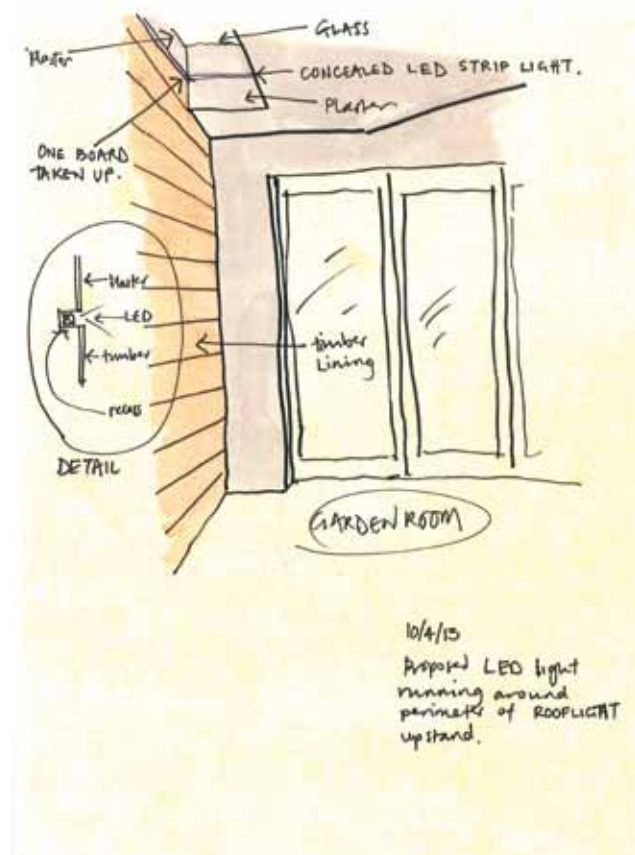
What Upgraded and extended seaside townhouse

Where North Berwick

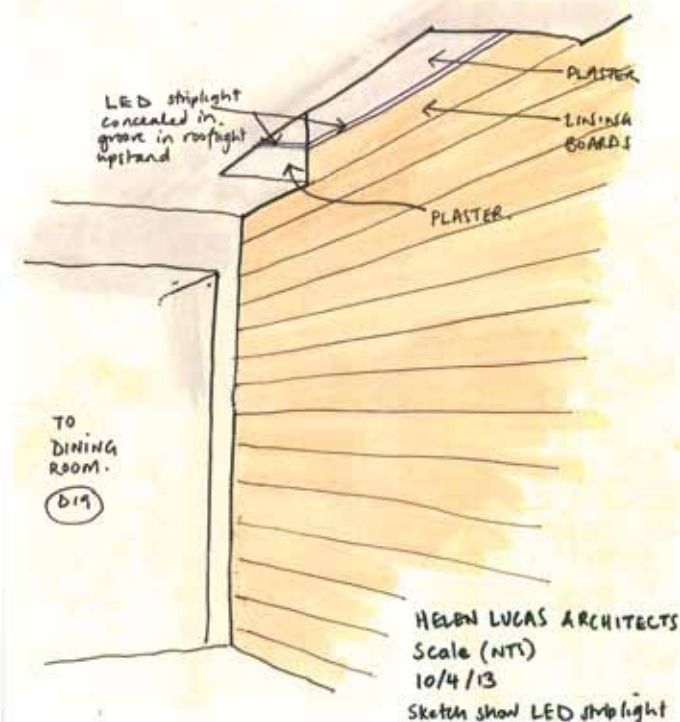
Brief To create a sunny family holiday home

Timescale Nine months

ARCHITECTURE



[Above and below] Ros Livingstone's sketches of what the garden room might look like. [Right, top and bottom] The reality is not far off it: horizontal larch tongue-and-groove flows from the sitting area, through the dining room and into the new kitchen at the front of the house. A mix of folding and sliding doors opens one corner up to the garden, while roof lights provide even more illumination



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hose quirks that pass as character to some homeowners are nothing more than bugbears to others. Little idiosyncrasies – squeaky floorboards, narrow stairs, tiny windows – that are part and parcel of life in a period property are often the first thing to go in a renovation project. Kevin and Andrea Gibson, the owners of this North Berwick home, wanted to combine the best bits of their traditional three-storey Victorian townhouse with modern upgrades that would serve their growing family. Making the most of its enviable beach location was top of their wish list.

“We bought the house knowing that the existing layout didn’t meet our needs,” says Andrea. “There was a series of small rooms on the ground floor and a very old, dilapidated lean-to sunroom that you’d struggle to fit three people in. As a family with three young children, we knew we needed to make better use of the space. We also wanted to bring more light into the house.”

Key to the renovation was creating a connection between the house and its setting, and giving it a contemporary look while retaining the heritage of the house. To this end, the Gibsons approached Helen Lucas Architects; the Edinburgh practice had been recommended by a family friend who had seen examples of their work, including Helen Lucas’s own holiday home. Ros Livingstone, lead architect on the project, began by surveying the building and sketching some initial ideas based on the clients’ brief. The emphasis, for Ros, was on how the family would really use the space. “We were asked to focus on the stair to the attic and to provide a better connection to the garden,” she explains.

Initial consultation with the planning department proved fruitful; the proposed dormer window on the rear side of the roof was rejected, but the large sloping window that was eventually installed was approved. The gradient meant that there was more head height inside when moving upstairs – you no longer have to cling to the banister to make it safely up a level – but it also conforms to the exterior requirements, retaining the roofscape view from the beach. “It has worked really well,” agrees Ros. “It’s simply a wall of glass, and the views are beautiful from up there.”

The new roof light gives a fabulous panorama all along the West Sands, to North Berwick golf course. Andrea ►



“If we ever lose a guest, we will very often find them sitting in the armchair at the top of the stairs, watching the comings and goings in the bay”

is delighted with it: “It’s light and bright now and feels really spacious with great views.” Their friends love it too: “If we ever lose a guest, we will very often find them sitting in the armchair at the top of the stairs, watching the comings and goings in the bay.”

The Gibsons have also embraced their new garden room. What was once a poorly executed PVC construction – too hot in the summer months and too cold in winter – has been replaced by an elegant, highly insulated timber-frame extension that references early Victorian beach huts. All their wishes, including moving the utility room and opening up the room with sliding doors to the garden, have been granted. Changing its proportions helped make the room a success: “We didn’t want to obstruct our neighbours’ view, so the garden room is lower than the previous structure but comes out further.”

The interior has been clad horizontally in Siberian larch tongue and groove, with sliding and concertina doors that allow one entire corner to open up to the garden. It creates the New England style that Andrea and Kevin were keen on. Natural light streams in from above, while concealed LED strips throw light down the timber wall.

The original kitchen was a small dark space to the back of the house; Ros’s decision to bring this room to the front means it now basks in the morning sun. It ►



[Left] A spiral wine cellar sits below the dining-room floor. [Below left] A few low-key nautical details enhance the subtle seaside feel. [This page] The architect designed this coat rack as extra storage in the utility room



[**Above, left**] The architect had originally proposed putting a dormer in at the top of the stairs, but this was rejected. Her alternative, this large sloping window, works brilliantly, allowing more head space for anyone climbing the stairs and creating an ideal spot to sit and look out to sea. [**Above, right**] Luxurious, streamlined bathrooms add to the boutique seaside hotel feel



Insider knowledge

Ros Livingstone, Helen Lucas Architects

"Most lighting should be functional, so use discreet, practical lights (which can be hidden) that illuminate surfaces and objects. Pendants in key locations, such as over islands or dining tables, work well if chosen and positioned carefully. Avoid bulky ceiling connections.

LED strip or tape lights come in a roll that can be cut to any length; they last for years and give a good, strong even spread of light. Incorporate them into cabinets or recess into shadow gaps above bathroom mirrors.

Lots of glazing gives fantastic views, but be sure to take into account things such as heat loss, solar gain, glass cleaning and the need for privacy, particularly at night. At this property, we built blind-boxes into the window head and fitted Silentgliss automated blinds."

is also now next to the dining area, which, in turn, leads to the new garden room, so the new configuration is already making connections to the outside easy. In addition to that, says Ros, the increased footprint of the garden room means the family now enjoy better views of the coastline and the evening sun.

"During the build process, we were undecided about the doors between the garden room and the kitchen/dining room," explains the architect. "But the bespoke design, made by Bob Logan of Woodgate Joinery, means that when these doors are in the closed position, they are discreetly recessed – rather like a traditional window shutter. Open them out, and a glazed leaf allows light and views through."

Andrea and Kevin have noticed the improvement these alterations have made, especially when they have friends round. When these clever folding doors are closed at night, forming two distinct rooms, a sense of privacy is created. They've given the children their own space in the living room, while the adults tend to congregate in the garden room.

For the kitchen, Andrea and Kevin opted for a simple Shaker-style design from Murray & Murray. Ros designed a dresser for the dining room that keeps the ambience understated and allows for greater storage space. Similarly, in the utility room, where a lot of storage space was lost to plumbing (a giant hot-water tank to service the property's five bathrooms is housed here), the architect designed a hat and coat stand to help solve the storage issue. A spiral wine cellar that can hold a thousand bottles was installed beneath the dining room – another vital space saver.

"The garden room has totally changed the way we use the house," smiles Andrea. "It feels very comfortable and relaxed. Thanks to the underfloor heating, you can kick off your shoes whether it's summer or winter, open the sliding doors and sit outside on the deck with a cup of tea and listen to the waves on the beach." ■