



It is best described as an “urban cottage”, says the architect Thomas Croft about his home in an unexpectedly leafy mews of compact houses fronted by gravel in Notting Hill. ‘You don’t feel in the city when you hit the gravel.’ Croft says he was first attracted to his home, shared with his wife, Max, a journalist, and their daughter, Kitty, 11, because it feels ‘off-grid, not directly on the street’.

The location of their two-bed, two-storey home, which Croft has redesigned, reflects his philosophy as an architect. His first job, in the 1980s, was to build a house in an unconverted 18th-century barn in Whitstable, Kent – part of a farm owned by his family since the 1920s – for his parents. (It is now Croft’s weekend home.) Keen not to adulterate

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the barn’s rustic architecture, he kept the exterior intact, including the massive doors farm carts once drove through, and built a modern house inside it. ‘Converting barns into houses is a mistake. It neuters the original architecture,’ says Croft, who likens this project’s dovetailing of old and new to ‘a 20th-century boat in an 18th-century bottle’.

Ever since, Croft’s London studio, TCA, founded in 1995, has been known for renovating period

buildings, sympathetically incorporating modern elements. He has also designed new-builds that complement historic locations, such as a pavilion next to the Royal Yacht Squadron’s former HQ in the Tudor-era Cowes Castle on the Isle of Wight. Crowned by a distinctive Regency-style copper roof, Croft’s building references the marquees that once dotted the castle’s lawns. ‘It’s used for receptions and regattas,’ he says. ‘I’m now designing a big project for Sotheby’s in London, although it’s too early to say anything more.’ Other clients include Sir Paul McCartney, the screenwriter Richard Curtis and the art collector Yana Peel.

It is hard not to conclude that Croft’s even-handed appreciation of tradition and modernity is influenced by his background. His great-great-

Croft original

A dingy 1970s house in Notting Hill has been transformed by its architect owner, Thomas Croft, whose speciality is blending the old with the new. By **Dominic Lutyens**. Photographs by **Luke White**

The kitchen and dining area The slender spiral staircase in the dining area is an original feature, although Croft replaced a metal bannister with a nicer wooden one. The dining table was once owned by the fashion designer Bruce Oldfield. On it is a vase by Hella Jongerius from SCP (scp.co.uk). Dining chairs by Alvar Aalto are from Skandium (skandium.com). The far end of the kitchen occupies a space that was once an outdoor alley. ‘This allowed us to extend the house slightly,’ Croft says. Here kitchen units by Bulthaup are fitted with ultra-convenient compartments specially designed to hold kitchen foil, clingfilm and washing-up brushes (bulthaup.com).

The view from the garden A cantilevered first-floor window is a new addition to the main bedroom, which also solves the problem of how to take large pieces of furniture up to the first floor, since it is not possible to do so via the spiral staircase. ‘There’s a panel under the window which opens,’ Croft says. ‘It allowed us to get pieces like our beds upstairs.’ The large window is fitted with a blind for privacy.



grandfather John Croft was made a baronet for his services to intelligence during the Peninsular War of 1807 to 1814 while in Portugal. The Crofts also established the firm Croft Port (now owned by the sherry company González Byass). Although Croft is the 6th baronet, he doesn't use the title, saying, 'I don't think it belongs in the modern world.' After studying architecture at the Bartlett School and Royal College of Art in London, he worked for the cutting-edge architects Richard Meier and John Pawson.

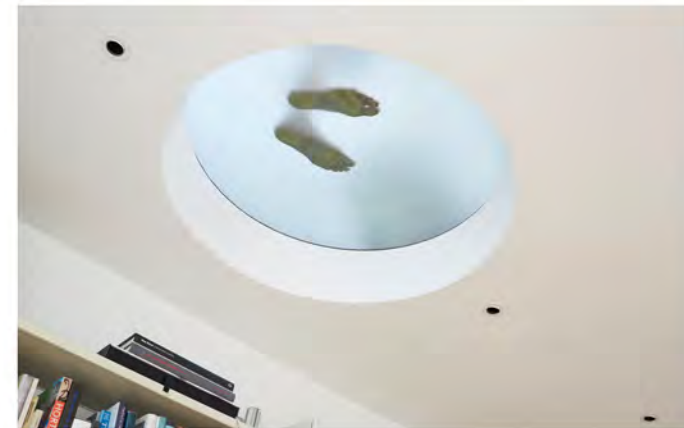
Croft's own home demonstrates his flair for interweaving the old and new. 'It was built in the 1970s. When we bought it in 2001 it was very run-down,' he recalls. 'The original owners' children lived there and it looked like a squat.'

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There was a downside to the house being on a narrow, leafy lane. 'It was dark in winter, which Max found depressing,' Croft says. 'But it couldn't be altered without major constructional surgery. Eventually, we pulled down half the house and started again as it was cheaper than renovating it. We didn't do so until 2012 because of the extent of the building work involved and the need to resolve a subsidence insurance claim.'

Today, to the right of the hallway is a loo-cum-utility room that was formerly the kitchen. Beyond this is an open-plan space with the new kitchen straight ahead, and to the left is the living room (the new part of the house). These areas form an L shape around the garden reached via sliding windows. 'The house was carved up into small rooms so we removed lots of walls,' Croft says.

He and Max liked one original feature – an elegant spiral staircase that leads to the bedrooms. Croft has punctured some ceilings with porthole-like skylights to draw light into the house. But these touches aren't purely practical, he says. 'In all our projects, we like to add something poetic and abstract into the mix.' *thomascroft.com*



The living room is in what was once a cramped garage. Wall-to-wall shelving is by Vitsoe (vitsoe.com), which also supplied the nest of tables and the Dieter Rams 620 chairs. The Sax coffee table and Matthew Hilton sofa are from SCP (scp.co.uk). The sofa cushions and Paul Smith rug are from the Rug Company (therugcompany.com). Skylights in the ceiling admit light from an office and a bathroom above.

The view into the garden The custom-made cantilevered bench-cum-shelf in pre-cast concrete inside forms a continuous line with an identical bench outside.

Kitty's bedroom The bed and the wall-hung storage unit are by ASPACE (aspace.co.uk). The duvet cover is from the Linen Works (thelinenworks.co.uk), and the throw and cushion on it are by Donna Wilson from SCP.

The main bedroom The bed is by Jasper Morrison for Cappellini (cappellini.it/en); over it hangs a piece by Gary Hume, one of Croft's favourite artists. A storage unit concealing a fold-up television is by Mathers & Hirst (mathersandhirst.co.uk).