



It took 200 viewings before Penny found her Mayfair mansion flat, but the interior still needed major work



WHO LIVES HERE
Owner: Penny Nimmo
Profession: Management consultant
Property: Two-bedroom basement flat in a period building
Location: Mayfair, London
Lived here since: 2003

The entrance hall into the basement was dark and enclosed, while the courtyard was dark and depressing



‘I turned a damp basement flat into a contemporary, light-filled home’

Although Penny Nimmo’s mansion flat boasted its own courtyard, the space as a whole was uninspiring and crying out for a change of layout



PROJECT PROFILE

Remodelling of basement flat and courtyard

Build route: Builder, subcontractors
Build time: Nine months
Build dates: August 2007 – April 2008
Valuation at start of project (2007): £1,000,000
Cost of project: £200,000
New valuation (2008): £2,500,000

COST BREAKDOWN

Damp-proofing, etc: £20,000
Builder and materials: £71,000
Roof and rooflights: £25,000
Flooring: £15,000
Lighting: £7,000
Kitchen and appliances: £22,000
Sanitaryware: £10,000
Labour: £30,000

- Courtyard covered over and converted into open-plan dining area between the kitchen and sitting room
- Dressing room and shower room removed to create a larger, brighter hallway
- Staircase redesigned with glass balustrades
- Lounge and second bedroom switched over in order to create open-plan space along one length of the apartment
- Dividing former lounge in two created a guest bedroom and new en-suite bathroom
- Two large rooflights added over living area and dining space to bring in light
- Artificial lighting includes low-voltage halogen spots and feature lighting
- Storage includes under-stair hideaway for wires and controls, recessed bookcase on the stairs and built-in wardrobes
- Underfloor heating and integrated music system installed
- Neutral scheme with colour introduced through accessories and furniture

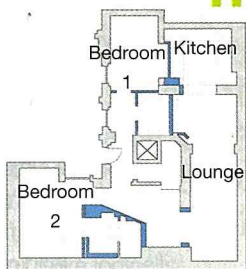


The courtyard has been replaced with a spacious, open-plan dining area, with two large rooflights and extra lighting by Kreon

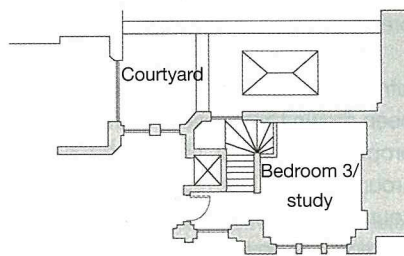
HOW THE DESIGN WORKS



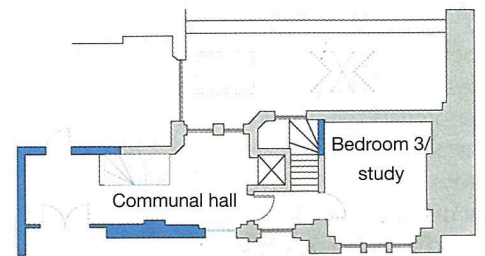
BASEMENT (BEFORE)



BASEMENT (AFTER)

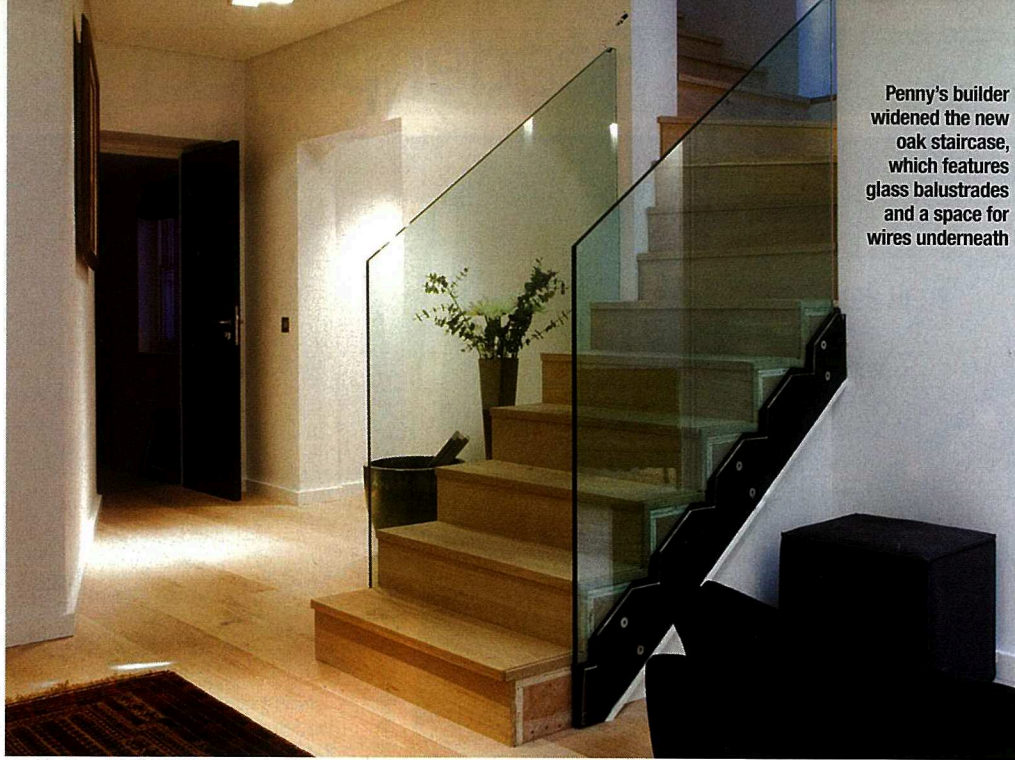


GROUND FLOOR (BEFORE)

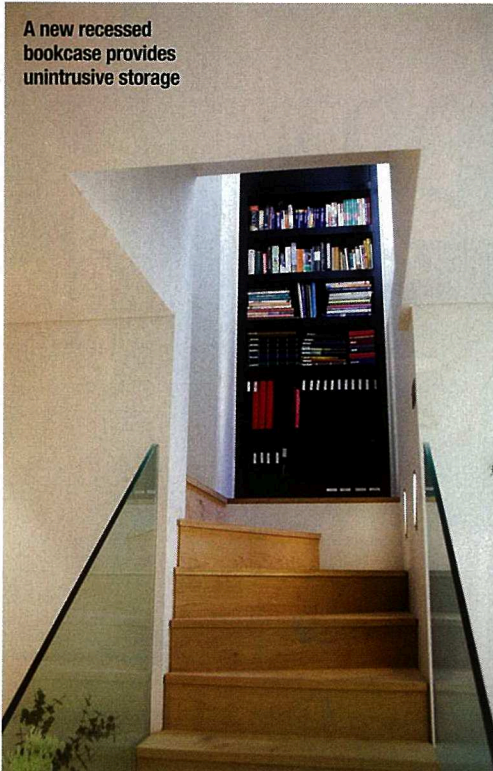


GROUND FLOOR (AFTER)

Turn the page to see more of Penny's renovated apartment



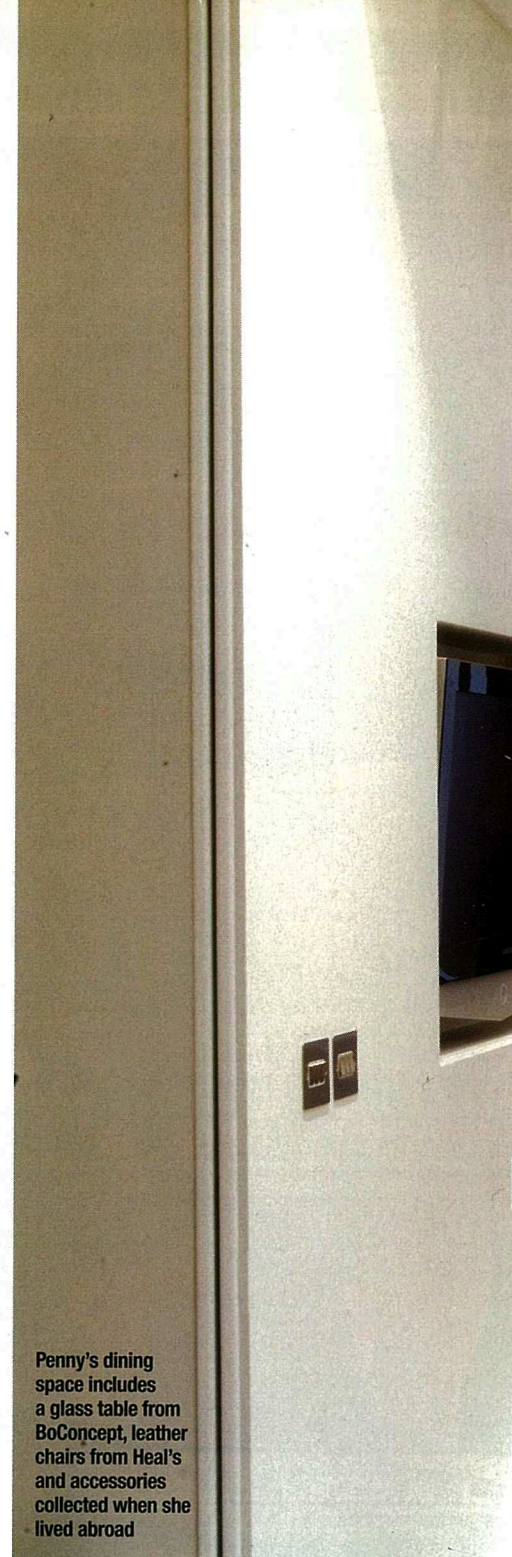
Penny's builder widened the new oak staircase, which features glass balustrades and a space for wires underneath



A new recessed bookcase provides unintrusive storage



The black velvet sofa is from B&B Italia; the floorboards are by Dinesen of Denmark



Penny's dining space includes a glass table from BoConcept, leather chairs from Heal's and accessories collected when she lived abroad

After many years spent living in Thailand, Penny Nimmo was eager to find a light and airy new home when she returned to London. However, after viewing more than 200 different properties without success, she was beginning to despair – until she discovered a promising lower-ground apartment within a period mansion block in Mayfair.

'Most people who love light would steer clear of a basement flat,' says Penny, 'but this one had so much potential – despite being damp and ordinary-looking on first viewing.'

'I love doing up homes, but I wanted to live here first so that I could get a real feel for the place before making any radical changes.'

Penny, a native New Zealander who works as a management consultant, moved into the two-bedroom flat in 2003 and began to adapt herself to a home that was a fraction of the size of her previous house in Thailand.

Accustomed to a relaxed alfresco lifestyle, she had initially been drawn to the layout of the property, which was arranged around a small internal courtyard, accessible through glazed doors in the kitchen, dining area and one of the bedrooms.

'After moving in, I never really used the courtyard,' she admits. 'It was just far too dank and depressing out there, with only a few

pot plants and some dull paving. 'It was living space that I needed, so I soon decided the courtyard had to go – and this opened up all sorts of possibilities for the rest of the layout.'

Created in the late 1990s by a developer, the leasehold apartment is predominantly on a single storey. It has just a sitting room/study at ground-floor entrance level and, from here, some stairs lead down into the main living

area, which prior to Penny's renovations featured the kitchen, lounge, two bedrooms and three small bath/shower rooms, plus that tiny courtyard.

'I don't like clinical interiors, so I've introduced pictures and pieces collected on my travels'



‘Only the kitchen and master bedroom have remained in the same position,’ she says. ‘Everything else was changed and reconfigured, with a new open-plan dining area created where the courtyard once stood.’

The second bedroom, which previously overlooked the courtyard, is now a sitting room, and the old lounge has become the guest bedroom and bathroom. Even the narrow staircase was replaced, and the dark, enclosed hallway has been enlarged by removing an existing shower room and dressing room, so that the layout now flows far more logically.

The reconfigured bedrooms and hallway have conventional window openings into lightwells, but the remaining rooms are lit from above by two large rooflights: one positioned ▶

Converting a courtyard to indoor space

- ✓ A courtyard makes a great external space but, particularly in urban locations, converting it to a useable indoor room, or rooms, means extra space that can then be brilliantly lit.
- ✓ Don't consider opening up any walls without first checking that they are not structural – consult a structural engineer (www.istructe.org.uk). You'll also need to raise the level of the floor.
- ✓ Cover the courtyard space with a clear glass rooflight (try specialists Vision Group and Cantifix for ideas). Consider a retractable cover to get the best use of air and light in the space.





over the living area, the other over the new amazing new dining space.

'People always comment that it's surprisingly light for a basement flat, and it certainly doesn't feel at all claustrophobic,' says Penny. 'Light drops down through the skylights into the living and dining areas, and reflects off the pale grey walls. It's relaxing to be able to look up at the sky overhead without feeling at all overlooked, and I love hearing the rain on the skylights.'

Such radical changes in a flat measuring just 127m² required careful planning, so Penny approached architect Tito Chaudhuri to work with her on the project. He brought on board builder Greg Pierzgalski, forming a close-knit team of sticklers for detail and quality.

'It was definitely a multicultural experience,' says Penny, 'and we all got on incredibly well because we're so similar in our tastes. Tito had been recommended to me by someone I'd previously worked with, and he listened closely to my brief, which was for a light, modern space. This meant getting rid of all the existing period details, such as cornices and skirting boards, and introducing shadow gaps and underfloor heating. It really was a major project.'

With its being a leasehold flat, the proposed alterations to Penny's property required permission from the freeholder. There were also various party-wall agreements and planning consent to be secured – all of which took time.

Penny then moved out to stay with friends for six months while the builders set about stripping out her original fixtures and fittings, until all that was left was a bare shell. Unfortunately, this process uncovered some serious issues – including extensive damp, and wet and dry rot – which needed to be resolved

▲ A red, high-gloss imported kitchen was teamed with brown composite worktops and stainless steel. Integrated appliances help keep the overall design simple and clutter free

before work on the property could continue.

There were other problems, too. One of the bedrooms was positioned underneath the pavement outside, and the roof of this room was leaking. Meanwhile, a new roof needed to be introduced above the former open courtyard and inset with one of the two large rooflights.

Stainless-steel worktops

✓ Until recently, stainless-steel worktops were more common in commercial rather than domestic kitchens. It is now a standard material in modern homes thanks to its sleek, seam-free contemporary look.

✓ Stainless steel is hard-wearing – it's resistant to both heat and cold, so it will last for a long time. And of course it is stain resistant. Ensure it's at least 0.9mm thick, though, to avoid it bending over long spans.

✓ Maintaining stainless steel is relatively simple – wash with soap or a mild detergent and warm water, using a soft cloth, followed by a rinse with clean

water and a wipe dry. Alternatively, a multitude of specialised cleaning products are available. One downside is that it can scratch quite easily.

✓ Expect to pay around £500 per linear metre for a stainless-steel worksurface. Most are bespoke, so you can have one fitted specifically for your kitchen. Try companies such as Second Nature.

✓ 'Off the peg' options are available if you're on a tight budget. Screwfix is a good start with prices from £64.99 for a basic 500x600mm length up to £159.99 for 1200x600mm with a hob cut out.



Relaxing and air-conditioned, the master bedroom has plenty of built-in storage and an en suite with a walk-in shower.

'I was on site every day – it was so exciting to see everything coming together,' enthuses Penny. 'Even from an early stage, it was obvious just how much brighter the flat was going to be, which made all the effort and expense worthwhile.'

When it came to fitting out the interiors, Penny enjoyed searching the internet for ideas, but would then go to look at items in person so that she could feel the quality of the finishes before making a final decision.

The oak flooring came from Denmark and the lighting from Belgium, with some carefully chosen statement pieces, including two original Barcelona chairs and a B&B Italia black velvet sofa, bought in a sale at Selfridges.

Penny's striking red kitchen was an import from Germany; its high-gloss finish, helps to reflect light back into the room. It has the fridge-freezer, dishwasher, washing machine/dryer and even a coffee machine all integrated for a pared-down look. ▶

The second bedroom, decorated in pale grey with dark wood furniture, was converted from the original lounge





The master en suite features two wall-mounted shower heads and twin Colourwash hand basins



Large-format tiles help make the bathroom space appear larger



The ground floor sitting room/office is a place for both work and relaxation. The brown leather sofa is from Heal's

of furniture I brought over from Thailand, which have helped to create a very eclectic feel.'

Lighting plays an important role in the design, with low-voltage halogen spotlights and feature lighting carefully positioned to achieve the maximum dramatic effect. 'One of the main things that I wanted to get right this time was the lighting,' continues Penny. 'It's an area that I haven't done at all well in previous houses,' she admits.

The bathrooms are also a particular favourite feature, with the luxurious master en suite incorporating double hand basins and a walk-in shower with two wall-mounted shower heads.

'I was so lucky to find such an amazing architect and builder to work with. They were just as intent on creating a flawless finish as I was, which meant there were never any arguments on site,' she says.

'Now, it feels like a completely different flat and I wouldn't change a thing. But now that it's finished, I'm restless to find a new project. It would be great to do it all over again; I wouldn't hesitate about using the same fantastic team of people because I've loved working with them, and that is really important on such a big project. It's my therapy from my day job!'

PROJECT CONTACTS

Architect Chaudhuri Architects: 020 8458 1200
Builder Eldeco Limited: 020 8640 0922
Structural engineering Ian Drummond Consulting Engineers: 020 7253 6805

'Storage was one of my main requests,' she explains. 'So some really clever ideas make the most of every last inch of space. The pivoting TV is set flush into a new wall, and all the wires and controls are concealed from view under the stairs.' Additional storage solutions include the recessed bookcase on the staircase, while the master bedroom has large built-in wardrobes with sliding doors in mirror and veneered oak.

Underfloor heating, an integrated music system and uniform wall and floor finishes make

the most of the compact space, and the glass balustrades of the bespoke oak staircase reflect light and create a stylish focal point in the remodelled hallway, where an automatic fire curtain has been installed.

'I don't like clinical, modern interiors, so colour and texture were important, and I've introduced pictures, rugs, plants and pieces collected on my travels,' says Penny. 'Friends tell me that there is a definite Asian influence thanks to the artwork, accessories and pieces