

TheObserver  
**Magazine**

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**HOW TO  
BE A MAN**

**Mackenzie Crook looks  
into the obsessive soul  
of the British male**

PLUS  
**MEN'S  
STYLE  
SPECIAL**



Tom Jones Sam Claflin Joseph Trivelli Ernest Hemingway Rick Edwards

# Homes

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## LET THERE BE LIGHT

**A dingy newbuild in north London has been turned into a modern masterpiece, says Gareth Wyn Davies**

Keep it simple: (right) a ceiling-height window by Crittall now floods the sitting room with light. The Utrecht armchairs are by Cassina and are flanked by vintage Artek tables that belonged to owner Paul Gillen's grandmother. Below, from left: details of the sitting room; and the new kitchen which was made locally and boasts an integral kennel for the couple's terrier, Edward

Paul Gillen and Colin McLeod's elegant north London home doesn't strike you as the sort of place to have a dark and miserable past. For one thing, at barely 15 years old it surely can't claim much of a past. But if you listen to Gillen, the house – and chiefly its ground floor – was bleak and uninviting for most of its teenage life.

"It was horrific," he says, before reeling off a whole inventory of ills: a faux-Georgian front door that shook like the set of *Crossroads* when shut, cheap flooring, an ugly UPVC conservatory tacked on to the back that creaked in the wind, a poky kitchen that was cast into darkness after midday. "It was so gloomy. Also you couldn't fully open the kitchen door because the table was in the

way, and you couldn't open the fridge properly if someone was sitting at the table. Every time we watched a home-makeover programme they would say: 'Keep it bland. Nothing too challenging' – and it was always our blinking kitchen they put in."

So far, so depressingly normal for a new-build. And yet you can't help thinking that Gillen, a primary school teacher (McLeod works in TV), is guilty of a bit of exaggeration, given that the place he describes is at such odds with the picture of modernist refinement that it has become.

The house sits in a gated development off Chichester Newington Church Street and looks like any other that has been thrown up by builders in a rush for profit.

"We wanted Victorian, we wanted period features," Gillen says. "But we had an hour between viewings and the estate agent talked us into coming to see this. We were like: 'What >



CHRIS TUBBS PHOTOGRAPHY



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## GET THE LOOK

Retro reading floor lamp  
£30, [iconiclights.co.uk](http://iconiclights.co.uk)



Patrick Caulfield print  
£25, [shop.tate.org.uk](http://shop.tate.org.uk)



Symbol side table in walnut  
£182.70, [heals.com](http://heals.com)



Utrecht chair  
£2,466, [conranshop.co.uk](http://conranshop.co.uk)



Croft Collection office desk  
£499, [johnlewis.com](http://johnlewis.com)



> have we got to lose?"

Seduced by the location (you can get to Whole Foods on foot in under a minute) and all the bedrooms (there are four), they were convinced. Casting aside all thoughts of cornices and sash windows, they stoically suffered the plasticky floor, the grim kitchen and the creaky conservatory for years. They even mastered the awkward fridge-door shuffle when entertaining guests. Until, that is, they found themselves poring over an interiors website and decided they could take no more. They hired interior designer Charles Mellersh, who arrived with a team of 12 fastidious Japanese workmen and a remit to reinvent the kitchen, hall and living room as one seamless, timeless modern space.

Up came the laminate floor, to be replaced with honey-coloured herringbone parquet. Down came all the twee coving. In went

a streamlined new kitchen of soft-grey tulipwood and MDF cabinetry, honed Carrara marble worktops and brass taps. Bespoke Crittall windows and glazed doors replaced the partition wall between the hall and kitchen and the solid door between the hall and living room and the conservatory, where the couple now have an atrium that looks on to the garden and floods the ground floor with light. Now, as soon as you enter through the replacement front door (fittingly modernist, it shuts with a satisfying thud), your eye travels from kitchen to living room to rear garden and all the pieces of furniture and artwork in between.

"I love it – it is beautiful and the space works so much better," says Gillen. Others have reached a similar verdict, including one envious neighbour who said: "This is exactly how these houses should have been to begin with." ■

**Shades of grey:**  
one of the house's four bedrooms

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