

VAULT HOUSE

YORK

for

Paul Kirkman & Lilly Shahravesh

designed by

STUDIO BEN ALLEN

The client, Paul Kirkman the director of a local museum, and his wife Lilly Shahravesh, a textile designer who runs her own business, approached London based practice Studio Ben Allen to come up with ideas for the renovation and extension of their recently purchased house which was in a poor state of repair.

The brief was to refurbish and extend the typical "L" shaped Victorian terraced house overlooking the river Ouse in York. The existing house is built from traditional handmade York bricks which have a distinctive mixed palette of colours that overall give a brown / pale pink hue. This brick is used in almost all buildings and walls in the neighbourhood (which is a conservation area) and lines the walls of the rear lanes. As well as the core brief to bring the house up to modern standards in terms of heating, bathroom and kitchen provision, window replacement and general redecoration throughout, the client also asked Studio Ben Allen to investigate the conversion of the attic space into a second workroom / studio. The most open part of the brief was the possible extension of the house for which the client was interested to investigate the general possibilities for how to improve the rear of the house, creating a new work and dining space and bring in more light and provide storage for their collection of bicycles.

The house is reached either by the river side pedestrian walk or from a back lane. Grand on the front, the houses are utilitarian at the rear with small back yards adjoining narrow brick lanes. It was the simple beauty of these rear spaces, a landscape almost completely of one material: local York brick facades, yards and lanes that was the inspiration and departure point for the design. The extension, built of loadbearing handmade York bricks, fills the back yard leaving a small glazed courtyard garden which brings light deep into the house. The extension contains a kitchen, living and work space. The roof comprised of two structural barrel vaults (the brickwork is load bearing). On the East elevation (facing the back lane), the two glazed vault-ends provide high level light from the back lane whilst on the west side one of the vaults frames the view of the courtyard. The newly enlarged ground floor creates one expansive space with the courtyard appearing as a room within a room.

The materials are robust, utilitarian and designed to last and improve with age. The cupboard doors are solid oak and the concrete counter is supported on three solid concrete arches. The heated floor is a cement screed that is typically used as a sub-floor. A bike store caters for the clients' keen love of cycling (it also disguises the bin store - the bike store was by happy co-incidence also a planning condition) and can house up to six bikes. The first floor bathroom also follows the utilitarian theme

with inexpensive taps stripped back to their base brass and matched with bespoke milled brass elements.

The stair to the attic and bedroom wardrobes are designed as one element that interlocks through the central wall of the house. The stairs are computer (CNC) milled from birch plywood and made as a kit of parts to save costs and for quick assembly on site.

Credits

Design: Studio Ben Allen

Structural Engineer: Mason Clark Associates

Contractor: J A Pike Building Contractor Ltd

Joinery: Broadleaf Joinery

Photographs: [All photographs where labelled are to be credited Mel Yates.](#) [All photographs where labelled are to be credited 24mm Photography.](#)

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Text describing materials used for AJ Specification magazine:

Materials throughout are robust, utilitarian and designed to last and improve with age. The cupboard doors are solid oak (engineered tri-ply block board) and the concrete counter is supported on three solid concrete arches. The heated floor is a cement screed that is typically used as a sub-floor. The contractor cast the kitchen counter and finding products suitable to treat the counter and floor without a specialist contractor to advise was a challenge but was overcome with a number of tests and a patient contractor. A bike store caters for the clients' keen love of cycling (it also disguises the bin store - the bike store was by happy co-incidence also a planning condition). The first floor bathroom also follows the utilitarian theme. The sanitaryware is from a wide range of budget producers. In order to unify the diverse elements, we wanted all parts to be natural brass (as oppose to PVD plating as it commonly used now) which would also tarnish over time. We had the chrome stripped off exposing the brass bases and where necessary the replaced non brass parts (the tap cross heads are radiator valve heads repurposed). The escutcheons and back splash are laser cut from sheet brass. The stair to the attic and bedroom wardrobes are designed as one element that interlocks through the central wall of the house. The stairs are computer (CNC) milled from birch plywood and made as a kit of parts to save costs and for quick assembly on site. In order to save on material, the architects produced nesting plans for all of the kitchen and cupboard wood panels showing how they could be cut with minimum wastage.