

Among the small group of foreign anglophile architecture writers who praised the English way of life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was the Dane Steen Eiler Rasmussen who considered how all levels of society lived in his 1934 book "London - The Unique City." His photographs from visits in the 1920s and 30s capture a different world, hide-bound by class and where few could afford a car to park on then empty residential streets. Today such a survey of London would not find quite the same civilization of harmonious standardization and apparent conformity. To consider changes to an ordinary typology, Rasmussen's observation of the London terraced house as having a 'classic front - functionalistic back' presages the development of the contemporary rear extension. Typically combining knocked-through interiors with a well-glazed new addition opening to what is left of the garden, this domestic realm is distended out of the old shell to meet the demands of modern life. Often this results in a pale imitation of the spatial ideas of modernism, its outward form hidden from the public view behind a quite different architecture of defined rooms and formal street facades.

John Glew's extension to a 1950s faux-Georgian cottage on Gloucester Crescent in North London is an intriguing, and at first glance absurdly small, bookend to this argument. Part of a group of three houses dwarfed by much grander Victorian neighbours, it sits behind a wall between two of these dolls house-like cottages. Working to a minimal budget, the tapered geometry of the tiny space to one side of the house provided the opportunity for a far more compact strategy of addition. Leaving only a small gap to its neighbour, the annexe fills the depth of the house and extends the front and rear facades instead of spilling out into the garden.

Walking through a narrow overhanging passage from the front to back garden brings one in close proximity to the outer clothing of standing seam zinc panels that wrap the timber frame structure. The measure and language set up here with the existing facade is unusual in being reciprocal, set up by the pattern and proportion of window openings of the old house it has also re-ordered the existing. New painted oak windows matching those of the extension replace sash windows, a curlicued Napoleon's hat over the door has been removed and eventually the brickwork will be covered with a silver-grey lime wash similar in colour to the zinc. Like a 'special plain suit for every possible occasion' that a proper English gentleman of the thirties would have worn according to Rasmussen, the unified ensemble expresses a new propriety to the street and gardens. The precise tracery of the standing seams standing 25mm proud of the facade provides the new compositional order.

The new building is however ambiguous as to whether it is a discrete object or part of a background that includes not only its host building but all the other buildings and non-architectural elements of the environment around. The new concrete pad behind the gate in the front garden curves round the base of a tree and can be seen from inside the front room of the extension. The low cill, proportions and placing of this window creates an unexpected relationship between interior and the space of the front garden, the experience of these layered spaces is made all the more intense by careful framing. A smaller window is set above and to the left where the zinc facade takes a step forward to the plane of the existing brick facade. New connections to the exterior from inside the old house have also been made with vertical opening doors to reinforce the status of the house sitting calmly between front and back territories.

This fastidious attention to the way things look and are assembled continue with a wealth of details in the interior. A project of very fine tolerances as the architect admits, the interior linings have their own set of tightly defined rules that meet with the exterior order at the windows. Painted a toffee brown inside and out, these bespoke oak framed panes with opening vents are integral and repeatable objects just as built-in folding timber shutters form part of the formal repertoire of a Georgian house.

In the interior spaces of the extension, constructed with the help of a specialist furniture joiner, the measure is that of the human frame. Due to the tiny spaces activities are as well choreographed as the interior of a well-designed Pullman cabin and are calibrated to the body at rest. The door to the upstairs bedroom for the parents of the household is accessed through an intricately tri-folding door with a beautifully crafted timber door catch. Just big enough for a double bed on the wider end of the plan and a bath set within an oak pedestal attached to the wall in the narrower. Natural white plastered walls are set 3mm back from low oak tri-board panelling and thin picture rails, together with the high gabled roof space the light walls and single rooflight prevent any feeling of enclosure. Stainless steel or brass light switches are placed unusually low and specially made lights are mounted high up in corners or low down either side of the bed. An oak cabinet is mounted below the small window that provides a glimpse to the back garden from the bath. These small scale refinements and the pale soap finish of the tri-ply linings reference the Danish modernist tradition Rasmussen himself helped to establish.

These rooms suggest a different and quite defined way of life, almost monastic and without objects. Downstairs a sitting room just big enough for a sofa and a built-in tv shelf is accessed

through a new opening through the gable wall. A pantry with a door to the back garden opens to the re-arranged ground floor of the existing house, which has been cleared out and rearranged for the more chaotic nature of family life. Overall the project does not rely totally on the ready-made ingredients of the site conditions it so carefully responds to. It also defines its own rigorous, autonomous rules and like a piece of paper folded up again and again then wedged into a corner, it retains the potential to be picked up and deployed at a larger scale.