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# HOUSES 1 & 2

*A shared garden unites TAKA's new-build mews house and its renovated Victorian home in the suburbs of Dublin – page 22*



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# THE SECRET LIFE OF HOUSES

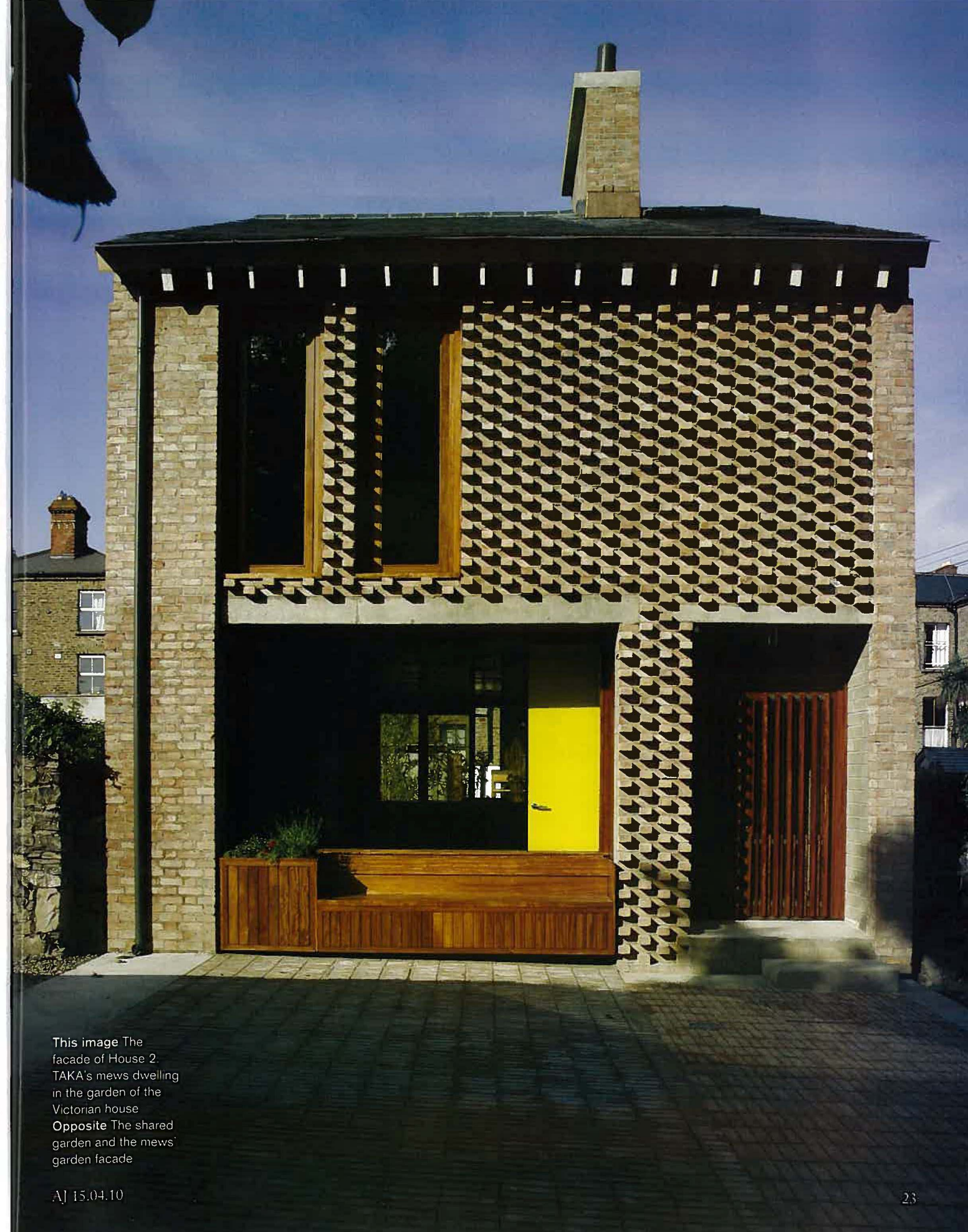
Patrick Lynch visits two homes by Irish practice TAKA that sparkle with ideas, but also speak of the quotidian aspects of life, death and rebirth. Photography by Alice Clancy



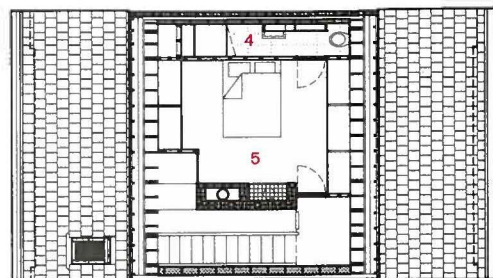
In his 1939 novel *Finnegans Wake*, James Joyce declares faith in an animate, articulate cosmos, claiming: 'All the world's in want and is writing a letters. A letters from a person to a place about a thing. And all the world's on wish to be carrying a letters.' In certain places in the world we sense this communicative wish, and architecture seems a resonant echo of the world's voice witnessed in brick and stone. If a house could speak, what would it tell us? Tales of wedding feasts and baptisms and funerals?

Or just the everyday stories of human situations and common unfulfilled time; the idle chatter of happiness and boredom? Irish houses might be particularly articulate, since in them the dead are laid out to await burial. A wake imbues a dwelling with the poetry of death. A table in an Irish house is not simply for celebrations and meals, but is also a setting for mourning; a *memento mori*. In the suburbs of Dublin, the House 1 and House 2 project by local practice

TAKA ties together a renovated Victorian house and a new mews dwelling in its garden, creating homes for two generations of the same family. In the Victorian house's new dining space, TAKA has placed a 3m-long cast-in-situ concrete table beneath a west-facing rooflight. A bare brick wall behind is dappled not just with light, but with reflections from glazed white tiles and the black lines that refract their appearance like ripples on the surface of a pond. The contrast with >>

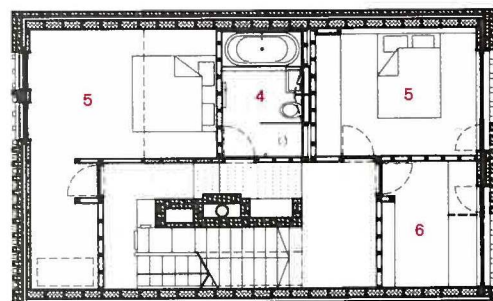


This image The facade of House 2. TAKA's mews dwelling in the garden of the Victorian house  
Opposite The shared garden and the mews' garden facade

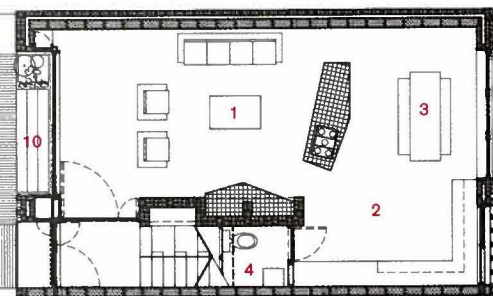


1. Living space
2. Kitchen
3. Dining space
4. Bathroom/WC
5. Bedroom
6. Study
7. Shared garden
8. Shed
9. Movable garden wall
10. Bench
11. Snug
12. Steam room

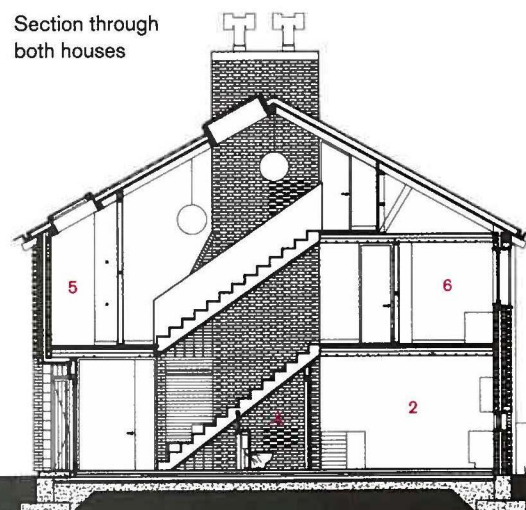
Mews attic plan



Mews first-floor plan



Ground-floor and location plan for both houses



Section through both houses

Right Detail of the mews' garden facade  
Far right Circulation around the chimney in the mews house



the deep, thin, laminated Douglas fir beams above and the lambent surface of the concrete table is extreme. Phenomena are inverted: thin wooden planes appear as dense shadow; thick concrete as a meniscus.

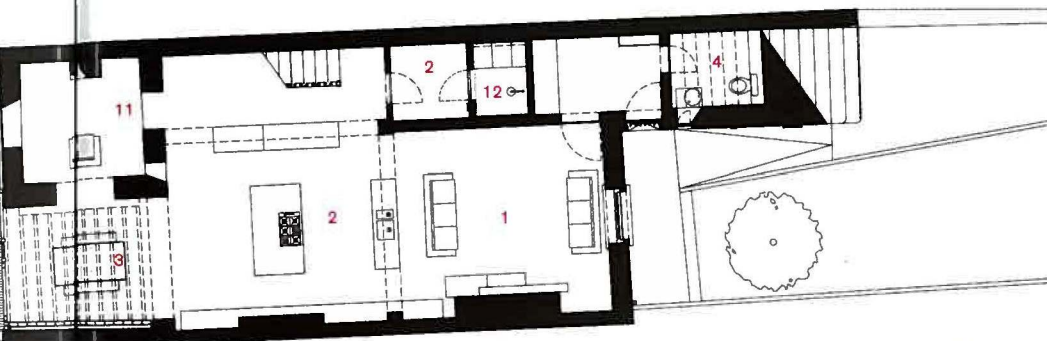
The dining space's rooflight and its glass door, which looks out on to the garden, are invisible; they appear as pure absence or as air. This garden room owes much to the Italian villa tradition. Since Sebastiano Serlio *et al* began to fragment spatial settings into garden rooms, architects have admired the archaic qualities of semi-ruined spaces. Hadrian's Villa turned a garden into a theatre; Palladio transformed farmhouses into temples; and John Soane and Edwin Lutyens indulged the villa trick of inverting reality in the mirror of a garden room.

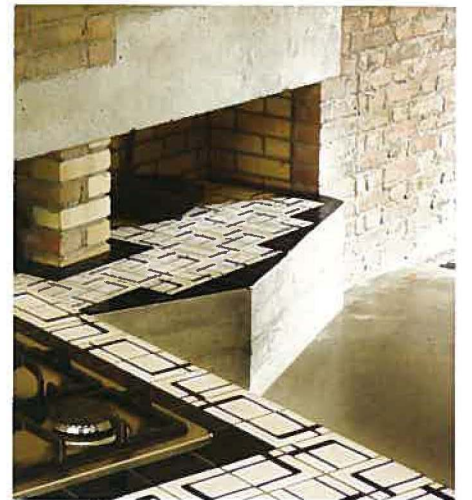
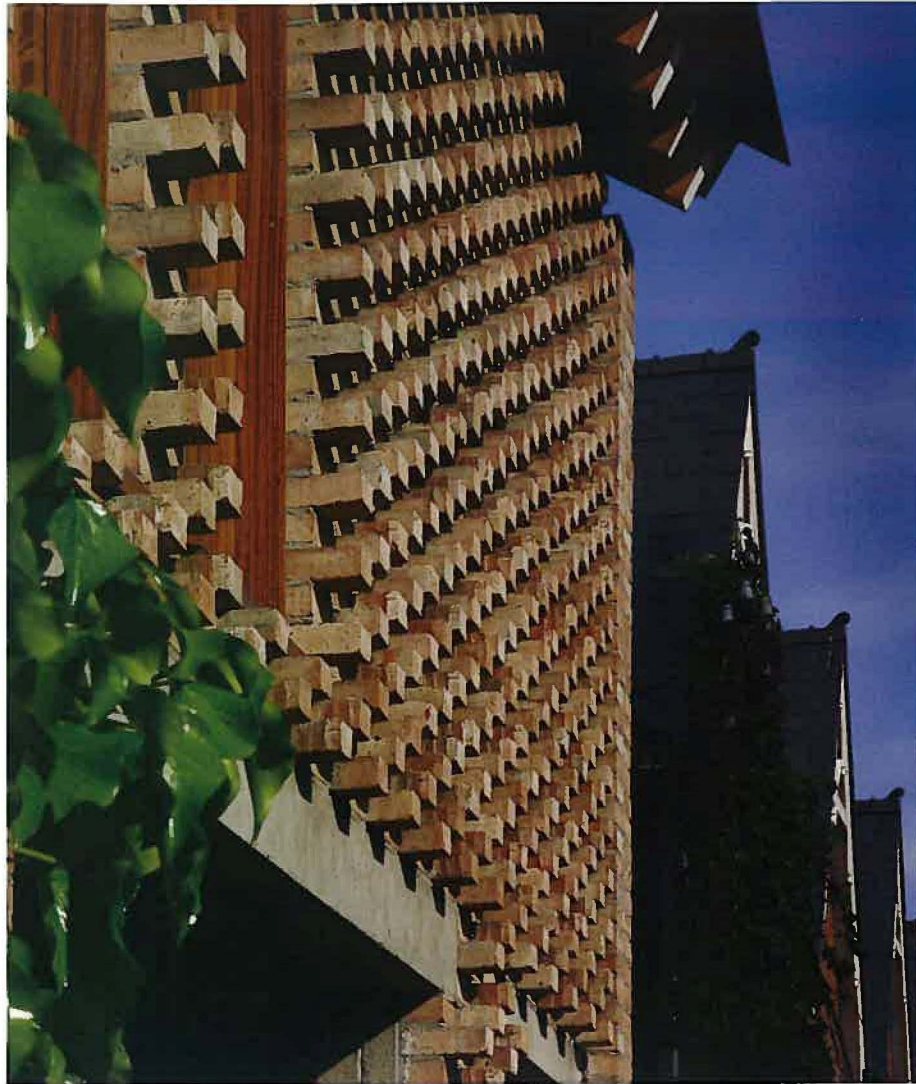
TAKA is relaxed about the unfinished and delights in games that confuse old and new. It takes a particular will and imagination to contrast rough brickwork with glazed tiles, and to dematerialise concrete into a bath of light. This game is explicit in the grottos of baroque villas, where light and materials combine to reveal the playful character of nature. TAKA's imagination resides in this tradition of playfulness and extreme balance, of risk and counterpoint, rather than in the glossy flatness or mute materialism of most contemporary design.

The practice's brilliantly calibrated garden room is part of a sequence of spaces that ties together the old and new buildings with a shared garden. Analogically speaking, the mews houses of Dublin's suburban villas are seen by planners and most developers as cottages. TAKA's neighbours take this analogue and beat it to death with the usual kit of DIY gewgaws and cast-stone gob-ons. In contrast, TAKA's new-build mews house is made up of garden walls and is conceived as a continuum of the Victorian house, not its opposite.

The primal analogue of brick garden walls gives the architecture of the mews house real communicative presence, while allowing it >>

*A sequence of spaces ties together the old and new buildings with a shared garden*

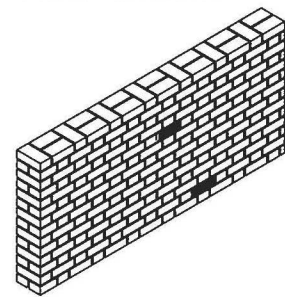




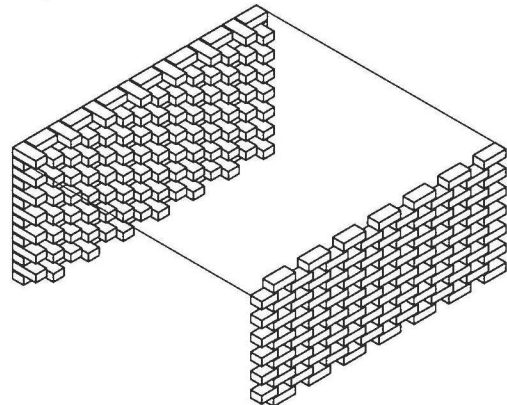
This spread, clockwise from above Glazed hearth in the mews house; open fireplace in the Victorian home; the

Victorian home's new dining space (bottom), and seen from the garden (top); detail of the mews house's street-facing facade >>

Victorian Flemish bond



'Separated' Flemish bond



0 500mm

*The mews house's curious 'separated' wall bond and exposed timber linings make spaces that seem carved out of the site*

to remain abstract. Its curious 'separated' wall bond and exposed timber linings make primitive and rich spaces that seem carved out of the site. Such a compositional conceit has an obvious risk, and the architecture could become subservient to a concept, but here it largely works.

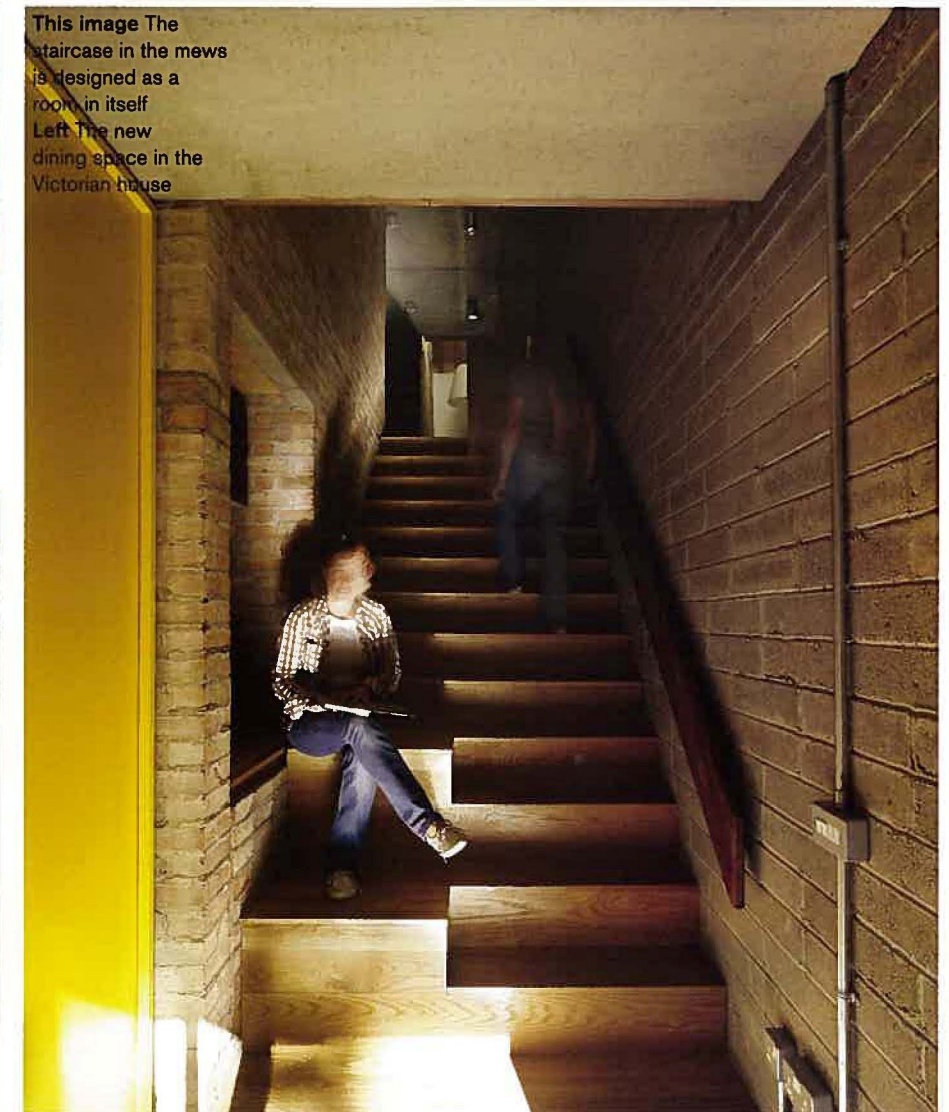
The two properties are divided and connected by a timber fence and sliding gates, and practice co-founder Alice Casey's parents occupy the main house while her sister's family inhabits the new one. TAKA added new windows to the rear facade of the old house, and wall linings that respect the grandeur of the Victorian living room while

linking it with the garden beyond. A new window looks south-west over the roof of the garden room, which is roofed by a corresponding mirror plane of glass, folding the Victorian *piano nobile* into the garden room below.

The mews house is arranged around a huge brick fireplace, and the ground-floor spaces swirl around this centre without quite settling into clear regions. A skewed but fixed island worktop jars slightly as it tries to define rooms in a free plan that seems to want to flow into the garden without interruption. The white and black glazed bricks reappear in the kitchen space as tiles, and their simple module collides with the clashing geometries of

worktop and hearth. Similarly, the fireplace feels hemmed in by the staircases pressed against it and everything feels like it could do with room to breathe, in the manner of the magnificent garden room next door.

There are nice surprises, like a double-height hall above the entry staircase (designed as a room in itself), echoed by a mirrored wall on the first floor. But the second flight of stairs and its relationship with the chimney results in a compression of space that doesn't quite work as a room or corridor. The tectonic logic of birch plywood and brick that works brilliantly elsewhere doesn't quite function on the stair balustrade. >>



This image The staircase in the mews is designed as a room in itself  
Left The new dining space in the Victorian house

Perhaps one notices such weaknesses more acutely in a project that is bursting with good ideas. The residual impression is of a beautiful series of spaces converted and made effortlessly out of the stuff of a city, and of some astonishingly mature and poised decisions. Juxtaposition and extreme contrasts are typical of life, and these urban garden houses look like good places to live and to die in. ■

Work by TAKA and by Patrick Lynch is on show at the RIBA, London W1, until 28 April as part of the Lives of Spaces exhibition. Visit [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com) for more information. TAKA will co-curate the Irish Pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale

**Start on site** November 2007  
**Contract duration** 14 months  
**Gross internal floor area** 400m<sup>2</sup> (mews 150m<sup>2</sup>, Victorian house 250m<sup>2</sup>)  
**Form of contract** RIAI standard form of contract  
**Total cost** Undisclosed  
**Cost per m<sup>2</sup>** Undisclosed  
**Client** The Casey family  
**Architect** TAKA  
**Structural engineer** Casey O'Rourke Associates  
**Landscape design** Thirty Three Trees  
**Main contractor** Elmleaf Construction  
**Annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions** Not supplied