

After a Home's Re-do, a Do-Over

A London couple's 'terrible' renovation forces a Phase 2 to fix the floor plan and blend design styles

BY RUTH BLOOMFIELD

JASMINE AMARIA and Gareth Owen's home-renovation took two attempts and cost far more than expected. But the real low point was when a ceiling collapsed in a shower of rubble, dust and dead squirrels.

The couple's adventures in remodeling began after the birth of their first child, Karina, now 11. At the time they owned a two-bedroom apartment in the affluent neighborhood of Putney. Ms. Amaria, 41, a partner at international law firm Walkers, was determined not to move far from the southwest London neighborhood where they could take advantage of free child care courtesy of her parents.

They began viewing larger properties, including a Victorian house that Ms. Amaria viewed alone and rejected on the basis that it was dark, rundown, had an unwieldy layout, and was generally "horrible."

But when a neighbor offered to buy their apartment for about \$866,000 their hunt became more urgent. Mr. Owen, 43, partner in a renewable-energy firm, decided to see the rejected property for himself. Despite its downsides, he saw potential in the 2,659-square-foot home and persuaded his wife that it could be turned around. They paid \$1.77 million for the house in 2009 and immediately launched into what they now describe as Phase 1 of the refurbishment.

The house needed a complete renovation—starting with new electrical wiring, plumbing and structural support. Despite negligible experience with construction, the couple designed their project without the aid of an architect.

It was when their contractors began work on the top floor that the ceiling collapsed. This messy



RENOVATION REDUX Jasmine Amaria makes a snack for daughter, Karina, top left. Above, two views of the dining room in the home's extension. At right, Ms. Amaria and Gareth Owen with their children, Karina, 11, and Zaal, 7.

incident was ultimately a happy accident, because it inspired them to leave the tall, vaulted ceiling in the top-floor bedroom.

The master bedroom, children's rooms and a study are on the middle floors, linked by a wide central staircase. "I do really love the sense of space it gives," said Ms. Amaria.

Downstairs the couple decided to move the kitchen to the back of the house, overlooking the backyard. The former kitchen at the front of the property became a living room.

The project cost around \$277,000 and took a year during 2010 and 2011, during which time Zaal, now 7, was born.

When they moved in, Ms. Amaria was far from delighted. "We did a terrible job," she said. "The kitchen ended up far too small.

"I put the sink in the kitchen island, which was a mistake—water

everywhere—and it was just not a usable, happy space for us."

Mr. Owen says he would probably have stopped at that point, but "Jasmine made her unhappiness known" so they hired Simon Gill, director of Simon Gill Architects, who suggested a dog-leg extension wrapping around the side of the yard.

Work on Phase 2 started in February 2016, and by the following November, work was complete. The project took longer than expected, plagued by constant rain and by the need for complex temporary props to support the house's upper floors while the addition was built.

Having Mr. Gill on board not only helped the couple perfect the layout of their home, but reconcile very different personal styles.

The period rooms of the house lend themselves to Ms. Amaria's taste for texture and color, ergo



PHASE TWO COSTS

Structural work
\$350,000

Windows and skylights
\$41,500

Flooring
\$21,000

Kitchen
\$102,000

Landscaping
\$10,000

Audio visual
\$5,500

Professional fees, permits, insurance
\$70,000

PHOTOGRAPH BY DYLAN THOMAS FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (4)

the shelves stacked with books and sofas heaped with cushions. To satisfy Mr. Owen's taste for the modern, the new kitchen features black cabinets and a white composite-stone work surface with a line of black ceiling lights.

The couple intended to spend around \$275,000 on Phase 2. In reality, including 20% value-added tax and professional fees, it ended up costing over \$600,000.

The work was carried out

against a backdrop of slowing home values in London since 2014. According to data from the Nationwide Building Society in December, average prices fell 0.5% during 2017. Ms. Amaria suspects that even taking into account the additional floor space they will not have covered the cost of the work. And she couldn't care less. "It has improved the quality of our lives and we have no plans to sell, so it doesn't really matter," she said.