

Camden Town is truly modern. Its 18th century streets are ravaged by inner city highways, roughly inserted Victorian and Edwardian buildings and a-contextual modernist high rises with large illegitimate families of developer trash. Maintaining a shabby chic it is the neighbourhood of choice for young dissidents and old creatives. For people coming from other parts of the world to browse 14 lace hole Doctor Martins or body piercings it is like New York in the 1980s where anything seems possible. In this milieu is situated the project I will discuss: the reworking by John Glew of a 1950's neo-Georgian developer house that occupies an unintended space in a mid 19th century crescent of stucco terraced houses and Italianate villas of uncertain parentage. In this milieu, to extend the house in a completely different style, to add windows of a different form, to seek to paint the house with thin silver grey Danish calc and suggest that the walled space around the house with its pollarded lime trees, is a place of stillness, as the architect has done through creative, interpretative will seems entirely appropriate.

Like the Austrian architect Hermann Czech, John Glew channels a great deal of thought through a small number of things, including things over which he has no direct control. For the client this gives a very high ratio of artistry and planning intelligence per sq m on a low budget in a project constructed with the clients and their children in residence.

In a tiny space at the side of the house a zinc clad timber frame extension has been added to provide a covered entrance to the back garden, a pantry and a narrow sitting room on the ground floor, and a bedroom-with-bath for parents on the first. The rest of the house stays as it was-which is often quite raw- except for dark aubergine coloured linoleum laid throughout the ground floor that contrasts with the uniform white paintwork of the rooms. Interiors in the new part, which is for the parents, are much finer. Walls are finished in natural white plaster. Tall skirtings, cornice and window and doorframes are in oak tri-board, finished with soap in a Danish manner to bring their tone and coloration close to that of the plaster. The door to the parental bed/bathroom folds in three pieces and its handle is made of oak, like the work of a carpenter in a rural cottage or the kind of continuous invention of everything in the Glasgow School of Art. Window pulls consist of brass discs, repeated at larger scale as the reflectors in custom designed light fittings. As the surveyors say, I was unable to test the light fittings before writing this report, but I would be prepared to be electrocuted by something so beautiful. The endgrain of the tri-board is exposed as part of the décor, door handles are selected for form and reminiscence, light switches are assembled from components for similar reasons. Everything is placed in a composition that continues out into the spaces around the house to capture events and objects there, and onto the façades. New windows consist of fixed panes and opening timber ventilators, a format that is used in different ways across the façades. Depth plays a part the composition. Windows in the existing façade are flush with the brickwork while the zinc seams and windows on the new façades are on the same plane. To get this intensity from not very much requires an ability to notice and be attracted to things in the surroundings, the existing building and the client's demeanor, and to make an imaginative context from them in which the design takes shape. Association is a primary agent. Did the exposed rafters in the angled ceiling of the existing house suggest the linear zinc cladding. Did the existing overall white paintwork on doors, walls and woodwork suggest the natural white plaster in the extension. Did the eccentric spaces of the extension start from a simple desire to add space and financial value to the house and continue with an understanding of the way the client wanted to live-to get away from their children into a space, however small, just for themselves, which being free from finger marks and toys could be pure and compelling. Did the client's requirement for a bath in the bedroom release a kind of anarchy in the mind of the designer that suggested the light fittings, and did the smallness of the new bed-bathroom suggest that a beautiful roof shape and northlight would make it alright? This is an architecture that has to be experienced and considered, and one that makes the case that spectacle, scale and gesture are no guide to the value of a work of architecture. It is only artistry like this that counts.