



The Italian job

When hunting for a property for a client, architect Laura Petruso came upon a tiny Seventies bungalow with a sizeable garden on Trinity Road, which she then claimed as her own, writes Cheryl Markosky

"I fell in love with the site immediately. This was the house of my dreams off a major street, and in a big, secluded garden with room to extend," she says.

Originally from Sardinia, Petruso brought a bit of Mediterranean flair to the bungalow after buying it with her husband and son, now nine. It took a year to more than double the size of the property from 720 to 1716 square feet.

Petruso comments that although it's always interesting designing homes for clients with her contractor business partner Ian Patterson (former footballer with Sunderland and Burnley): "There's a higher level of freedom when designing for you."

Because of the unusually large garden, Petruso could extend outwards and downwards. The biggest part of the project was hand-digging a basement extension round a sunken courtyard, with a substantial reception room, bedroom, bathroom, utility and boiler rooms and an enormous wet room.

"The wet room is fit for a king and big enough for a family to fit in," points out selling agent Sarah Thomas from Kinleigh Folkard & Hayward's Clapham branch.

The ground floor of this Garden House consists of three good-sized bedrooms, two bathrooms and an airy and light kitchen and reception room leading onto a garden measuring about 45 by 35 ft. "It's important to have big spaces, but not so big that you don't know how to live in them or how to furnish them," Petruso suggests.

She adds that she's chosen a simple and minimalist finish, using off-white tones and stained oak. But she believes minimalist homes like this shouldn't be like museums. "The house needs a bit of life, with fingerprints on the walls and the inhabitants having parties and hanging art on the walls."

Lighting's also important to bring new conversions to life. Petruso is a great fan of well-placed artificial lighting that changes the mood. A good lighting system, she



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Sarah Thomas, Kinleigh Folkard & Hayward Clapham

thinks, can make a place more interesting, illuminating different areas at different times.

Petruso's advice to anyone thinking of undertaking a project like this one is: "Whatever you do, do it with your heart. This is your home and where you will live, so spend as much as you can afford on good materials and workmanship."

A question from one of her university professors sums up the right attitude to tackling projects: "Would you want to live here? If you hesitate, then you have a problem," Petruso adds.

As well as getting a house with a sense of la dolce vita, you also get something at a good price, Thomas says. "Along these roads it's hard to find a house for under £2.5 million. But this is just under £2 million, so you don't have to pay the 7 per cent stamp duty."

The Garden House, Trinity Road, Wandsworth SW18, £1.95m, Kinleigh Folkard & Hayward 020 8675 5436



BEFORE

THE PROJECT