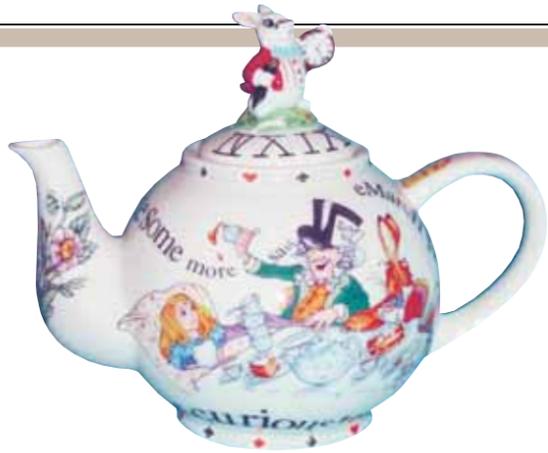


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GRAHAM JEPSON

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PECKHAM'S WARTIME MILK DEPOT

GOLD TOP
DESIGN

High living: three self-contained flats have been built on top of the main building



Pint-sized: intimate seating areas have been carved out of the barn-like living space



Used again: sheeting from the roof has been recycled as cladding for the living area

THE milk depot in Peckham, built during the Second World War to ensure south London families got their daily pint despite the hostilities, was not a thing of beauty. In fact it's owner-architect, Ken Taylor, described it as a "bog standard A-frame shed". But Taylor regularly cycled past it and the "shed" began to capture his imagination.

It had potential for what he wanted – an office, studio and living space. So Taylor and his partner, the artist and writer Julia Manheim, decided to try to reinvent it as an "urban barn".

"It was an industrial building and the idea was to add layers to it. The council conservation officer's view was that it was horrible, we should tear it down, but we didn't want to go in that direction," says Taylor.

"It is a sort of collage," says Manheim. "A lot of the materials are what was there originally – just used differently."

The couple paid Southwark council £70,000 for the site in 1998 and work began that summer. Having used a lot of their funds, they had to give up their flats and move in immediately, camping out in the space for the four-year project.

Today they have a three-bedroom home with a huge central living space, two gardens and room for Taylor's architectural practice (www.quay2c.com). Manheim's studio (her book, *Sustainable Jewellery*, has just been published by A&C Black) was finished later.

With their driving principle intact they continued to utilise as much as they possibly could from the original building – it made sense for economy as well as sustainability.

Sections of the original dairy floor have been preserved, worn to a lustre with age, alongside areas of newly laid, polished concrete. And most of the original doors were saved and re-hung as the house took shape.

CREATIVE RECYCLING

To maximise outside space the design involved taking down a section of the back of the original building to create a secluded courtyard.

The corrugated cement and asbestos roof was replaced with steel sheeting, some new and some reclaimed.

Over the years the old roof had been patched up with corrugated steel sheeting, daubed with tar in a series of failed attempts at waterproofing.

Most people would have thrown this

Architect Ken Taylor and writer Julia Manheim bought a wartime milk depot in Peckham and turned it into an exciting urban home and workplace, says **Ruth Bloomfield**

realised we could do something on top of the cold store."

He came up with a series of four pods clad in western red cedar panels. The couple nicknamed the pods "the beach huts" and they are used as bedrooms and a bathroom.

Their width was dictated by the trusses which run along the inside of the building, meaning they are compact, but there was no limit on how tall they could be so Taylor designed steeply sloping pitched roofs to give a feeling of space. "It is quite a nice surprise when you go in," said Manheim.

A metal walkway – with the slight feel of a penitentiary – was installed to reach the bedrooms. "It is incredibly cheap, and it also lets the light through," explained 49-year-old Taylor.

Among the most obvious examples of recycling in action, and a nod to the building's history, are the lines of wire mesh cages which have been filled with plastic milk cartons and used to screen the main garden from the street and neighbouring houses.

Another theme is the use of cheap and durable materials, like the translucent polycarbonate used to clad the back wall of the main room which would more usually be used as roofing for a conservatory. It has been embedded with lights which give a festive feel to the room.

CELEBRATE THE DIFFERENCE

The project took until 2002 to complete, creating a total of just over 300 square metres (3,230 sq ft) of living space on an impressively small budget of £90,000.

The recycling theme also extended to the décor, like the brightly covered dining chairs which look like designer pieces but in fact cost £5 each at a second-hand office furniture shop.

The impressive dining table was made from a glass wall reclaimed by a friend from another build. A second phase of the work, which has helped recoup the investment in the building, was to create Manheim's studio, as well as three self-contained flats above the main house. Their silver, wave-shaped roof continues the seaside theme begun with the beach huts and gives the front of the building a unique profile.

"My belief is that everywhere in the world is different and you ought to celebrate that difference," said Taylor. "I am not much of a minimalist, I like texture and the idea that there should be some kind of single, unified style is just weird."



"The beach huts": a series of cedar-clad new bedrooms now top the old cold store

Most people would have thrown the old roof sheeting straight in the skip. Here it clads the huge living area

sheeting straight in the skip. Taylor and Manheim saved it and later used it as an evocative cladding for part of the huge main living room's wall and part of the courtyard wall.

Virtually the only original inside feature of the depot was a long cold store running along one wall. It has now been split into a series of smaller rooms, including a kitchen and a library.

"There was no upstairs at all when we arrived," said Manheim, 60. "But Ken



Bulk delivery: wire cages packed with plastic milk bottles (left) provide screening for the courtyard garden but also echo the building's past use

Walk this way: Ken Taylor and Julia Manheim on the metal walkway (right) that connects the new upstairs rooms in their converted milk depot in Peckham

Original features: the doors from the old milk depot were restored and re-hung

'My belief is that everywhere is different and you ought to celebrate the fact'

Kitchen dairy: the original cold store has been divided into a series of smaller rooms, including a kitchen (left) and a library

Photographs by: **Graham Jepson**

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