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Opening Extract from...

George Clarke's
Home Bible

Written by George Clarke

Published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson

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George Clarke's

HOME BIBLE

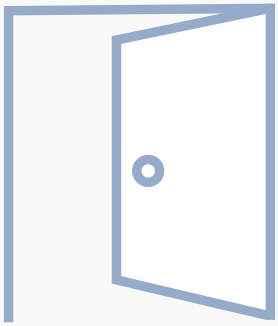
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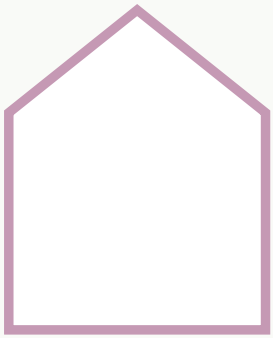


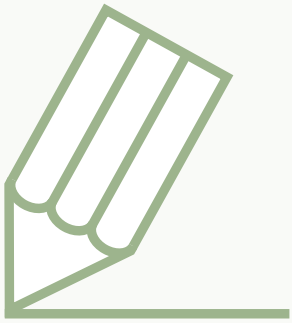
George Clarke is an architect and creative director of his architectural practice clarke: desai, property development company dreamspaces and design and build company CDS Build. He is a writer, TV presenter – *Build a New Life* three series for Five), *The Home Show* (two series, a third in preparation for Channel 4) and *Restoration Man* (Channel 4) – and a postgraduate lecturer. He also writes three monthly columns for *Grand Designs Magazine, Real Homes* and *Your Home*. He is married with three children.

To my family - Catri, George, Emilio and Iona x

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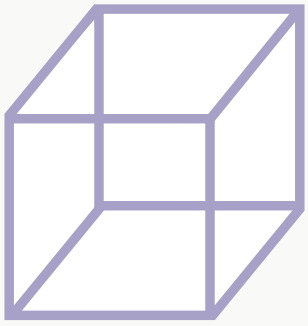
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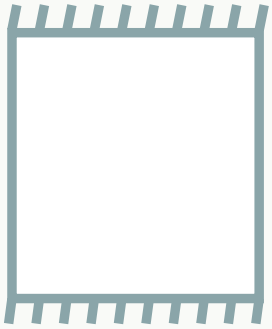
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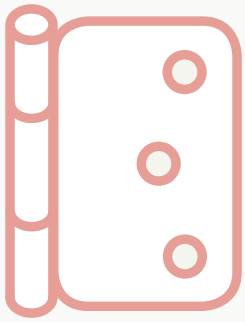
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Introduction

'The house is a nest for dreaming, a shelter for imagining …'

Gaston Bachelard, French philosopher

Since I was a young boy, I've been fascinated by buildings. I would take the bus to nearby towns and cities like Sunderland, Durham or Newcastle to sketch the beautiful architecture that affected the everyday lives of people in the Northeast. From my humble bedroom, I would read books about spectacular buildings that had transformed civilisations in faraway places. I would imagine myself walking through the streets of ancient Rome, climbing to the top of an Egyptian pyramid or scaling the dizzy heights of the Great Wall of China. Since deciding to become an architect at the age of 12, I absorbed myself in hundreds of buildings and dreamed of visiting them all one day. To this day I've only managed to see a tiny fraction of those I've studied; many of them I doubt I'll ever see. I don't mind this at all, for they exist in my mind as such beautiful structures and magical spaces that I'm worried I may be disappointed by the reality of them. I'm happy to dream.

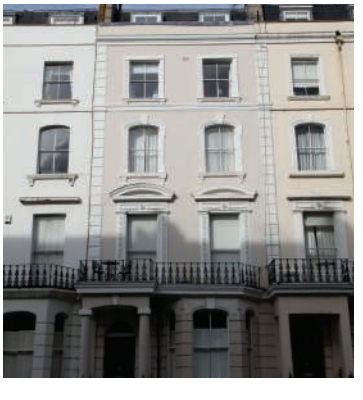
My home story ...



The home I grew up in. It may not be much but it was everything to me… It still is.



My student home: the typical Tyneside flat in Byker, Newcastle.



The first flat I lived in as a student in London.

The home that got me dreaming

But, there is one very real building that meant more to me than any of the architectural wonders I dreamt of as a kid. That building was our family home. Our new home sat in the middle of a revolutionary new town, where everything – from the dazzling town centre, shops, schools, libraries, offices, swimming baths to the public transportation system, road network and enough housing for over 100,000 people – was built in only five years between 1972 and 1977. What was once arable farmland and home only to pigs and sheep became Washington New Town, the jewel in the crown of the Local Development Corporation. It was the realisation of a new philosophy in town planning. I was a human guinea pig thrown into a new social and urban experiment, and I loved it.

Our 1970s home was very simple, brick-built and two storeys high. It had a single-pitched, gently sloping roof that I later learned is called a 'mono-pitched roof'. We were on the end of a terraced row, with three other terraces surrounding us to form a small pedestrianised square in the middle. Here, I could play with my three sisters and my friends in complete safety, away from the roads and cars.

The plan of the house was very good. Downstairs there was a small loo, a cupboard to hang coats, a small but cleverly planned kitchen, and then a decent-sized space to the rear that was used as a combined living and dining room. This room had a huge window giving views out and, alongside it, a standard single door providing access to the small back garden.

Upstairs there were four very small bedrooms with modern full-width windows that, up until the age of about 12, I had to stand on my tiptoes or on my bed to see out of. We had one bathroom, which was a miserable space with no windows or natural light at all, and no shower aside from one of those rubber hoses with a plastic showerhead on the end, which could fit onto the hot and cold bath taps to use in the bath. There was no fire in the house because it had an all-singing, all-dancing central heating system, with combi-boiler and gleaming radiators had been installed in every room to keep us warm. It was a hopeless system! I can't remember the number of times we needed to light a scrunched-up bit of *The Sunderland Echo* to reignite the pilot light in the boiler. Even though this was a new-build house, the building regulations were so poor there wasn't a single piece of thermal insulation in the floors, walls or roof. No matter how much heat we pumped into the place, it soon escaped to warm the cold Northeastern air. It must have cost my Mam and Dad a small fortune to run.

Small but efficient

All of the rooms were small, but the design was very efficient. There was very little wasted space and no pointless corridors. Every single square inch of that house was useful and served a purpose.

To this day I can remember every single part of that house. You spend so much time in your home that its geography becomes part of your subconscious. So much so that if I wandered the house at night, either on boring visits to the loo or more exciting and covert adventures without my parents knowing (on Christmas Eve to see if the presents had arrived), I could navigate my way around perfectly in the dark. I could feel every change of surface along the way and find every step with ease on the staircase – even managing to avoid the only squeaky floorboard mid-flight. I could accurately reach for every door handle and open it at just the right speed to avoid making a single noise. The map of your home – the very essence of its built form and the design of the space that surrounds you – becomes a fundamental part of your being.

Today, our little council house would be referred to as an 'affordable home'. This simple building, built on a shoestring, was the container of all my dreams and the absolute centre of my world for over 15 years. I will never forget that the home in which I raise my kids will not only be remembered by them, but will become part of them for the rest of their lives.

There's no place like home

Our homes are very special places, and they grow to reflect us. I truly believe that there is 'no place like home'. As the 1970s home in which I grew up was for me, your home is *the* most important piece of architecture in your life.

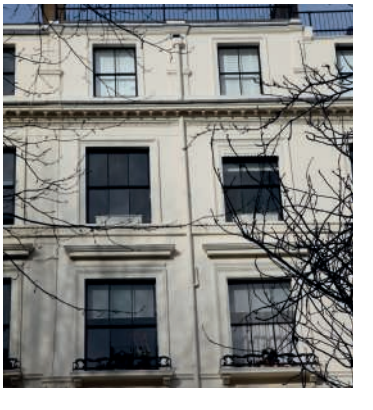
Our homes not only serve the very simple function of protecting us from the elements, but they are powerful containers of intimate spaces that tell a story about our own very unique way of life. A home is constructed using some very basic elements to form walls, floors and roofs; their purpose, when brought together, is to create something that allows us to store all of our personal belongings and live in comfort. That something is *space*.



I moved to Hampstead. The shop beneath us was a handy wine shop when I lived there.



Next, I rented a room in this house in Primrose Hill for a short time.



And then I moved in with my girlfriend, Catri, who soon became my wife.

The concept of space

Space is, without a doubt, the very essence of architecture. It's very difficult to describe what it actually is, as it isn't something that we can necessarily smell, taste, hear or touch. However, it is certainly something that we can see, and spaces that are well designed can stimulate incredible emotions and feelings. Just think about the most beautiful buildings you have visited in your lifetime. Yes, the architectural style and the selection of materials most certainly add to the experience, but if you are able to look beyond these structural elements it is often the atmosphere and quality of the space that lifts your heart.

My job as an architect is to make space work, to create homes that truly reflect the needs of the people who live in them. Although there are many newly built houses in Britain today, the vast majority of us live in older houses that have been around for years and years. Beautiful as they may be, they don't really reflect the way that we live in the 21st century. The layout of the rooms may have been very well designed for the generation for which they were built, but most houses don't suit the needs of our society today. There is nothing more rewarding than redesigning an existing home that not only looks beautiful, but also works.

The meaning of home

I feel that during the biggest boom years the housing market has ever seen since the 1990s, we have lost sight of what 'home' actually means. In fact, the word 'home' has often been replaced with the word 'property', meaning something different altogether. The phenomenal rise in house values meant that we were completely infatuated with how much our 'properties' were worth rather than thinking what a 'home' could do for the emotional wellbeing and happiness of our families.

But when recessions return, which they do regularly, the economic climate makes us look at our houses differently. We have begun to think about our families' 'needs' in a home, rather than our 'wants'. We all love to watch extraordinary modern houses being built on eye-watering budgets, but what about the vast majority of us who don't necessarily want, or can't necessarily afford, such over-indulgent designs? What of those of us who would love to take a more affordable budget and transform the ordinary house in which we already live into something truly special?

Why move house time and time again, just to climb the property ladder? You are throwing hard-earned money down the drain on stamp duty, legal fees and estate agent's fees, and that's money you can never get back. During a recession it's time to stay where you are and improve what you've got.

Efficiency does not depend on what the interior of a home actually looks like, but on how the spaces are organised within it. I had absolutely no idea at the time, but this simplicity of design and the efficient planning would have an enormous effect on my life and the way I would design in the future.

Creating something special

Through the work I do in my office, and in making *The Home Show*, I know that good design and efficient planning can make an ordinary house into a beautiful home on even the smallest budget. It breaks my heart to see people spending the money they've worked so hard to earn having work done on their homes that hasn't been either designed or considered properly. It is a complete waste of time, energy and money. I want to show you how to avoid doing this.

So what is it that we want from a home? For years I've asked people what they consider to be their most important need when they think of home. I've been given a wide range of answers, from people wanting their homes to be 'beautiful', 'light' and 'ecological' to 'practical' or 'with stunning views'; however, the answer I hear more than any other is that people want their home to be *'comfortable'*.

Comfort is a very simple human need, and yet it never fails to amaze me that, in all of my years of architectural study, the word 'comfort' has only been used on a couple of occasions. You would expect comfort to play a massive role in home architecture and appear constantly within academic lectures and debates; however, the truth is that the word has been relegated to fairly uninspiring technical design lectures about heating and ventilation systems. Architects felt uncomfortable with comfort. They believed that cosy and comfortable architecture couldn't possibly be radical and contemporary. But it *can*. We want comfort in our homes, realised through efficient planning and good design appropriate for the needs of 21st-century society. It's important that we rediscover the beauty of comfort.

I want this book to be an inspirational guide, one you can return to time and time again – a guide that will help you to avoid the many common pitfalls into which people stumble when refurbishing their homes. I want to share with you all of my experience, knowledge and the tricks of the trade that I've learned since starting my apprenticeship at an architect's practice at the tender age of 16, and subsequently redesigning hundreds of homes across Britain.

This book will open up your mind and show you the exciting opportunities that exist in many perfectly average homes across Britain and how making the simplest changes at the lowest cost can have the most incredible effect on transforming a space. With this bible at your fingertips to guide you every step of the way on the journey of home improvement, you will discover that the house you live in right now could be the home of your dreams.

Happy reading, designing and building … good luck!

How often I hear people exploring the inside of well-designed public buildings and saying to their friends: 'What a beautiful space.' Why shouldn't we say the same for our very ordinary domestic homes?