

street life

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUKE WHITE

Detmar Blow's Waterloo

Fashion guru Isabella Blow's husband Detmar used glass and steel to transform their dark Georgian workers' cottage into a sexy open space

'This terrace was built in 1820, so the houses are late Georgian, originally built as workers' cottages. A local developer called Ropell, who was based in Herne Hill, saw this plot of land as an opportunity to make some money, but he ran into problems as the ground was marshy. In fact, quite a few people in the three streets he developed have problems with water in their basements. A friend of mine remarked that all they need is a fishing rod.

Because the houses were sinking, they're not very tall. This house is a tiny wee thing with doll's-house proportions so you need a good architect. The person who had been living here – for 80 years – was born and died here. There was no kitchen, no bathroom and just a tin bath and an outside loo, which we've kept. We met the architects Ferhan Azman and Joyce Owens, who redesigned the house, through Gerhard Jenne, the owner of Konditor & Cook, the bakery on Cornwall Road. They'd done wonderful things to his house. His bakery is also fantastic and has the most delicious pastries and cakes.

We bought the house in April '97 and put in a bid for planning permission as this is a Grade II listed building. We wanted to let in as much light as possible as it was very dark and dingy, and to have vistas from door to door, front and back. The residents' association didn't like the idea of us using glass and steel, but we got permission in the end.

My grandfather [also called Detmar Blow] was an architect so I've always been interested in art and architecture. The point about architecture is that if the old and new are of a high standard then they can work well together. Architects always have a real vision and they work with amazing craftsmen. Whereas interior designers are all about cosmetic, surface details – they just want to put froth on the walls – architects focus on the

structure of the building. It's quite a sexy, open house as it's warm and cosy. You can wander around naked – I'm quite a nudist – without feeling that anyone is peering in.

We're going to have leather floors. I hate wooden floors – they're naff, not cosy – and my wife [Isabella Blow, fashion director of *The Sunday Times*] wants mink-covered chairs in the sitting-room. The photographs of Honor [Fraser], Alexander [McQueen] and Erin [O'Connor] in the sitting-room, "gossip room" and dining-room are from shoots Issie has done with Sean Ellis. Colin Glen designed the mirrored frames.

The basement is eventually going to be an office. We kept the original staircase and put in underfloor heating. Ben Curnow, a Cornish artist, did the water installation in the floor of the room upstairs. It recreates a wave effect. The dining-table and chairs are by David Bartlett, made out of cardboard. Alistair Thain did the Warhol prints on the stairs six months before Warhol died. They're quite prophetic as they look like death masks.

The bath's like a fish tank. It's not restricting like most baths; you can float. We have to keep the blinds down as the holes in the metal grilles, which were inspired by Turkish window bars, aren't quite small enough. We're over budget, but we're getting a Swarovski crystal-and-glass bed, and the garden will be done properly by someone who works with Arabella Lennox-Boyd.

The house is like an extension of Modern Art Inc, the Shore-ditch gallery I run with Stuart Shave, the arts editor of *i-D* magazine. We're going to paint the door the same pink as the gallery. The 3-D *Rubik's Cube* sculpture is by Ian Dawson and the light sculpture, *Excessive, Sensual, Indulgence*, by Tim Noble and Sue Webster; all three of whom we represent. In February, Tim and Sue are going to be



Fish in water: the Blows' bathroom (above) has a bath like an aquarium. One of Isabella's hats (below left), by Philip Treacy, stands in the doorway of a bedroom. Sketches of Detmar and Isabella (below) on the music-room wall, looking towards the sitting-room

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