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Kitchen sync: kitted out differently, flats share a sense of space



Window on the world: floor-to-ceiling glass is a prized feature



Natural palette: oak flooring sets off the bed Horne designed



Lighten up: Horne's living area makes great use of natural light

Downsizing architect Trevor Horne built a block of flats, moved into one and filled the rest with pals, writes **Philippa Stockley**

TREVOR HORNE set up an architecture practice in London after coming to the city as a student from Canada 30 years ago. "By 2009 we were looking to downsize," he says. "We were shown this converted Fifties petrol station, which was once owned by an East End character called Tommy Redface."

The "we" was Horne, his wife Susan Morris – a conceptual artist – and a group of like-minded friends, including the graphic artist daughter of a man Horne once designed a house for.

The former garage was in Hoxton and had been rather crudely turned into housing. It was crying out for help.

"So we bought it," he says. Foxtons showed the Hornes the corner site, at the end of a side road just south of Kingsland Basin. It was in an area fast becoming fashionable and Horne settled the deal with the vendor over coffee and a handshake, in true East End fashion.

Most professions enjoy perks of the job: clothes designers can wear fabulous clobber, chefs' families can exist in a foodie paradise. But architects tend to hit the jackpot. If they can find the right plot to build on, they can go on to design



NICK HOIT



WE'RE FRIENDS

a dream home. Horne could go a step further, designing and building a small block of apartments instead of a single house, to create good-value homes for an artistic community all living under one roof. Who wouldn't value a friend like that?

Kingsland Road continues to boom because of the arrival of the London Overground, which runs up its right-hand flank. In neighbouring Orsman Road, among the last few rotting warehouses sit two new developments of flats, nearly finished, one clad in bronze. At the end of the street is Horne's block. A modest five storeys, it has six good-size flats with lots of big windows, and two floors of artists' studios, including the architect's own new office.

With another new, timber-clad block of apartments sitting behind it and Thirties council flats all around, it makes for a lively, mixed community.

What you see at once, apart from the numerous big windows and the nicely modulated front, is the beautiful, varied dove colour of the bricks – "handmade, Dutch," says Horne, cheerfully. They are laid with a soft-coloured mortar smoothed by a wet thumb. The bespoke windows, in faintly lavender-tinged aluminium, accord perfectly with the bricks. The result is both understated and voluptuous.

Horne, who worked on a similar group-building project in Islington a decade ago, makes the whole thing sound easy. That earlier venture was not without its

problems, however. When he took the fledgling communal project to a solicitor for some advice, the solicitor insisted: "Do not do this, you will all end up in court with each other."

"But in fact," smiles Horne, "the only person who got sued was the solicitor." He explains that you can avoid rows by engaging a good financial adviser from the outset to tie all the complex financial aspects together. A big upside is that with one architect responsible for both the design and project management, consistency can be maintained from start to finish, which saves money.

Inside the now-fully inhabited Hoxton block, Horne's interest in materials is evident everywhere. The building was made using a structural system called Cobiax, a sort of honeycomb concrete that can achieve big, unsupported spans of up to nine metres.

Horne's builders, Kind & Co, mixed and poured the coloured concrete on site. It allowed for trial runs until they finally hit on a warm, golden tint that is more Cotswold stone than brutal Barbican. Walls and ceilings bear attractive "shuttering marks" left behind by the wooden boards used to support the drying concrete.

Horne stuck to a simple, natural palette to complement the walls, with grey-black basalt flooring in the communal areas, oak flooring throughout the flats, and bespoke, three metre-high, floor-to-ceiling windows and doors. The metal windows frame tremendous picture-



Hoxton hip: the block Horne built, finished in handmade brick



Photographs:
Timothy Crocker

Design classics: the Hoxton home, left, of architect Trevor Horne and wife Susan Morris is simply but stylishly finished and furnished

Man with a plan: Horne, far left, designed and built six flats on a former petrol station site, creating homes for himself and friends



White's right: the bathroom fittings are contemporary and functional

WHERE TO GET THE LOOK

Architect: trevorhorne.com
Builder: Kind & Company (kind-build.com)
Windows: kawneer.com
Door handles: dline.com
Bathroom fittings: duravit.co.uk
Socket plates: mkelectric.co.uk
Arne Jacobsen Series 7 Ant Chair: from £305 at utilitydesign.co.uk
Flos Arco lamp: £1,635 from geoffreyharris.com
Vitra lounge chair and ottoman by Eames: £4,305 from heals.co.uk

COMMUNAL BUILDING TIPS

■ **Use an architect.** A developer will look for a 25 per cent profit, so it is cheaper to use an architect to negotiate any problems with planners and help you get the result you want.

■ **Build in as much volume as possible.** You can, and will, change finishes and fittings, but space is your most valuable commodity.

AND NEIGHBOURS

views across London, which, Horne says, are breathtaking at night.

Beyond these "basics", each flat was left as a shell, with owners fitting out as they wanted. Each of the six apartments looks different, reflecting the tastes of the owners, but all are united in the same

sense of light, volume, height, and a quiet grace. Horne and his wife kitted out their space simply, but with design classics everywhere, including Arne Jacobsen Series 7 Ant Chairs, and the looping curve of a Flos Arco lamp hovering over two well-worn Thirties leather

chairs. But it isn't pompous. The kitchen has practical, black granite worktops, the bathrooms are neatly fitted with white tiles and Duravit white-ware, while art softens the walls.

"Spend money on things you touch," says Horne, with unexpected passion,

"surfaces, door handles. Other things, such as bathroom tiles and electric sockets, can be cheaper."

To prove his point, Horne's smart-looking steel socket plates are from a budget company and the white paint is good old Dulux.