



**Clockwise from above: an external view of the glass-roofed penthouse; Gregory Brackett in the open-plan kitchen area; the honed slate floor and sunken bath in the bathroom**

# RAISING THE ROOF



Roosting pigeons and rotting floors meant years of hard work for Gregory Brackett when he took on the renovation of a Shoreditch warehouse. But the addition of a light-filled penthouse has made sure his investment of time and money has paid off

## AS A WAY OF RECOUPING HIS INVESTMENT ON THE RENOVATION

of an old Shoreditch warehouse, Gregory Brackett built himself a penthouse on the roof. Although at times funds were tight, he admits now that the money he tied up in the three-year building project would have been worth about half as much today if he had put it into equities on the nearby Stock Exchange.

But Brackett isn't your average city slicker or property developer. He is, he says, a "hands-on type of guy". Having worked on a farm in his native Boston, and during college as a carpenter on building sites, he finally settled in the IT industry, and it was this last job that led him to become a property developer.

"I had spent ten years on the move, going from hotel to corporate apartment in Luxembourg, London, Italy and France, and I got to the stage, at the age of 38, where I wanted to put down roots, to know that if I fixed a tap it would be worth the effort because I would be there to use it again."

While living in a flat nearby, Brackett started to hunt for the building that would provide him with the project he longed to undertake. Eventually, in April 2000, he came across a disused warehouse built in 1890. Due to ten years of neglect the place was in a bad state – rotten floors, leaking ceilings and a large proportion of London's pigeon population in residence. Besides ▶



Report by Vinny Lee Photographs by Ray Main

◀ which, before renovation work could start, a special archaeological survey had to be carried out due to the building's location in an area of historic interest.

"I bought the building from a speculator who had already got planning permission to convert the place, and the architects who had put the planning application through were from Gregory Phillips's practice. Although I did consult other architects, Phillips and his team already knew the building so I decided to stick with them.

"It took from April to December to get through the paperwork and planning permissions. The project was spec'd to the nth degree so there were no surprises and it stayed on budget – I think my experiences as a carpenter helped me get the project tightly planned."



## 'BECAUSE THERE ISN'T A LOT OF ROOM FOR FURNITURE I DECIDED THAT WHAT I DID HAVE HAD TO BE INTERESTING'

At their second meeting the architects showed Brackett their sketch for the penthouse and that was it: starting from scratch it was constructed on the roof of the warehouse. Due to planning regulations you can hardly see the double-height space outside; you have to walk halfway down the street on the opposite side before you catch a glimpse of its shining glass roof.

Its distinctive shape – a parallelogram – caused headaches in its construction. "The steel-encased beams are exceptionally long, and the cross transom bars had to be re-cut on site. Then the original glazing company pulled out and the second company had to start from scratch; waterproofing is essential so the job had to be done carefully," explains site architect Jay Salero.



Under the sail-like glass spread, Brackett's one-bedroom dwelling consists of a main living and bathroom. "When I met Greg he told me he had six metres of clothes that needed hanging space, but I also think that good storage is vital to successful open-plan living," says Salero. Thus deep cupboards with featureless doors were built in on the small landing area at the top of the staircase, and on either side of the bed.

The mezzanine bedroom, which has to be open-plan to comply with building regulations, has french windows on to a small balcony at the back and the vast glass roof to the front, but only an opaque voile curtain, operated by an automatic switch, to block out the light.

When asked about the problem of early waking due to intrusive daylight, Brackett is dismissive. "Business travel has made me able to sleep anywhere," he says. "But if it did worry me, it would take no time at all to add a blackout panel to the curtain." Brackett also sleeps well because it is incredibly peaceful here. "It's comfortable and tranquil, a bit like a spa," he adds with a smile.

There are indeed spa-like facilities in the en-suite bathroom with limestone-clad walls and a honed slate floor. The Jacuzzi bath appears to hang out over the back of the building in a three-sided glass pod which is, in fact, part of a new rear stairwell. In front of the bath is a shower with a pencil-thin gutter that takes away the water from the overhead rose, as well as from the bath overflow.

Throughout the penthouse the floors are covered in dark herringbone parquet and the walls in a stucco polished plaster which has a rich but subtle sheen. The bespoke staircase and balustrade of the mezzanine were custom-made and brought to the site in sections, where they were welded together.

Downstairs, the area closest to the rebuilt front parapet is a seating space. "Because there isn't a lot of room for furniture I decided that what I did have had to be interesting, so I went for this multi adjustable Flap sofa by Edra, and it has certainly proved to be a talking point," says Brackett. A series of wall-mounted, built-in cupboards with sliding doors are fitted along the shallow section of the wall, and contain CDs to be played on the wall-mounted Bang & Olufsen system.

Under the rise of the staircase Brackett has a small study area. Beyond that is the dining area and a high sheen, gloss polyester kitchen with steel worktop and splashback by Boffi. "I thought it was never sunny in England," jokes Brackett, "but in the last months it has been too sunny and I haven't installed the blinds yet."

Looking back over the past three years, one of which Brackett took off work to be more directly involved in the building's final fitting-out stage, has it been worth the effort? "I really enjoyed the project, it gave me a sense of balance. Working with my hands and getting involved in the building was the ideal contrast to the IT business, which is mainly sedentary and mental rather than physical."

And his bank balance can't be in bad shape, either. ●



## THE SOURCE

### Fixtures and fittings

**The interior of Gregory Brackett's penthouse was created with the help of a wide variety of suppliers**

**1** Black polyester WK6 kitchen with stainless-steel worktop and panel by Boffi, and Gaggenau appliance, from £27,000, at Alternative Plans, 9 Hester Road, London SW11 (020-7228 6460; [www.alternative-plans.co.uk](http://www.alternative-plans.co.uk)).

**2** The Flap sofa by Edra, £6,270; Sedia 130 dining chairs by Emmembobli, £284; Ufo table, £2,995; and VuVuVu desk, £2,175, all from Chaplins, 118/120 Brompton Road, London SW3 (020-7589 7897), 477/507 Uxbridge Road, Pinner, Middlesex (020-8421 1779) and 17/18 Berners Street, London W1 (020-7323 6552). For brochure, call 0800 328 7570; [www.chaplins.co.uk](http://www.chaplins.co.uk).

**3** Bulldozer custom-built and made-to-measure furniture, such as the bedside light cabinets, prices on application (020-7284 3234; [www.bulldozerfurniture.co.uk](http://www.bulldozerfurniture.co.uk)).

**4** Jac's Interiors custom-made staircase and balustrade, from £15,000, Jac's Interiors, 1378 High Road, Whetstone, London N20 (020-8446 7060).

**5** Honed slate is from £35.25 per square metre from Stonell (01892 833500; [www.stonell.com](http://www.stonell.com)).

**6** Gregory Phillips architects, 66 Great Cumberland Place, London W1 (020-7724 3040; [www.gregoryphillips.com](http://www.gregoryphillips.com)).

**7** To view the property on screen, visit [www.45tabernaclestreet.co.uk](http://www.45tabernaclestreet.co.uk).

**Clockwise from far left: the stone-clad bathroom; the bespoke staircase; the living area seen from the mezzanine; the bedroom**