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Homes & Property

NEW HOMES: LONDON'S HOTTEST SPOT **P4** AFFORDABLE RICHMOND **P7** BATHROOMS **P24** SPOTLIGHT ON CHISLEHURST **P28**

Step up to colour

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Mixers: Julia loves greys, using them for the bath, floor and blind



Washroom: painted white walls give the room a stark beauty

Just one thing... the bathroom

By **Corinne Julius**

Make the biggest difference in the smallest room

WITH money in short supply, few can afford a major makeover of their homes. But sometimes changing "just one thing" can make all the difference. Installing a big skylight, for example, can turn the dull heart of a home into a gloriously lit family space, or extending a side return can transform your kitchen. Handsome wood floors turn a tired property into a chic one – and for a really inexpensive makeover, simply change the lighting. Now, in a new occasional series, we ask Londoners what one thing they have changed to make the greatest difference to their home. We start with bathrooms and business partners Tarek Merlin, 36, and Julia Feix, 35, who run their own architectural practice in south London. The two met while working for internationally

acclaimed London architect Will Alsop, whose colourful public buildings can be found across the capital. The pair founded their own practice in 2006 and this year were shortlisted for the Young Architect of the Year Award. Julia is German, while Tarek – whose mother is a Palestinian brought up in Lebanon – spent his childhood in Tehran and Paris. But they have both developed a love of the classic architectural themes of their adopted Britain. They enjoy reworking and adapting these themes. They both live in south London, and say the one thing in their respective homes that made the biggest difference was the new bathroom they installed. Yet their ideas proved to be very different...



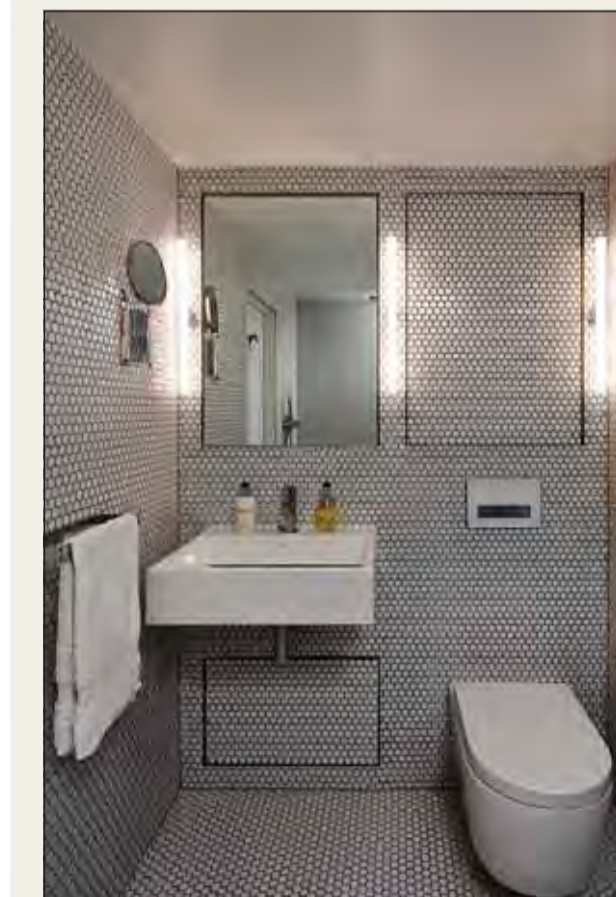
JULIA FEIX: 'THE NEW GLASS WALL WAS OUR BEST IDEA'

Open plans: Julia says the £20,000 she and her partner spent on their new bathroom (they loathed the old one) was worth every penny



JULIA lives with her partner on the top floor of a converted school near Elephant & Castle. "I bought the conversion in 2007, even though my partner and I loathed the bathroom. It was partially screened off from the bedroom with an internal window looking into it. I did a first design. It was Tarek's suggestion to make it all open plan. But my partner didn't like the idea of having the toilet in the bedroom." The solution was to create a step up (which conveniently houses all the plumbing) from the sleeping area into a bathing area. The two areas are then divided by a wall of very-Thirties Crittall (steel) windows, with no handle on the outside. It is complete division, but an entirely see-through one. "The best thing we did was to take that old wall out and put in this glass," says Julia. The Crittall wall was made by a steel-window manufacturer in Bermondsey. The lavatory, with its original Victorian cistern, is hidden behind the shower area; it is all clad in very retro, Victorian-style rectangular white tiles. Julia is immensely proud of their mitred edges. "I chose greys for the walls and the outside of the freestanding Victorian-style bath, and the floor – I particularly love brown greys," she says. The new raised floor is a fine screed that contains a polymer to prevent it cracking. Julia wanted concrete but the weight would have been too great. Its surface looks like a sort of grey flock and it is set off by a grey roller blind, and in the neighbouring bedroom by light-grey pillow cases and a darker grey knitted throw. "We spent our money on that floor, the glass partition and the taps," says Julia. "It cost us £20,000 but it is definitely worth it, having transformed the space and the way we live in it – we love it." ■ Feix & Merlin Architects is at Unit 29, The Paragon, 43 Searles Road, SE1 (07956 550799; feixandmerlin.com)

Enclosed meets open: a bespoke Crittall steel-framed glass wall separates the bedroom from the bathroom



TAREK MERLIN: 'THE BATHROOM WAS THE MOST PROBLEMATIC SPACE IN THE FLAT. IT WAS VILE'



Out with the old: Tarek spent £7,717 on his new bathroom but says it has added at least £12,000 to the value of his flat

TAREK lives in a one-bedroom ground-floor flat in a Victorian terrace in Camberwell. He says: "The bathroom was the most problematic space in the flat – it was vile and I couldn't bear it. Despite having very little money to spend, I knew it all had to go. "The new bathroom is much lighter but has no bath: it's a wetroom with a shower, toilet and basin." Tarek reserves his greatest disgust for the old room's ugly splashback – now gone. The new room's walls, the drain cover and even two cupboards are now covered with small hexagonal

Sleek finish: small hexagonal porcelain tiles greatly increase the sense of space



porcelain tiles, which greatly increase the sense of space. But it was his idea for converting the horrible windows that was truly transforming: he has had them covered with translucent Perspex, set into touch-latched frames, which means they can be opened for ventilation without the feel of the room being spoiled. "Details matter a great deal," he says.



Open to ideas: Tarek replaced the old windows with Perspex versions more in keeping with the new room's character, but which still open for ventilation

"The room is quite a small space – four square metres – so I had to scale down my fittings. I had to really search for a slim, rectangular shower head. I tried all the retailers and suppliers and eventually got one on eBay – it was cheap, too. "And I've always hated seeing the drain set in a central hole in the sink, so I found this basin, which has a much

Right: Tarek searched everywhere for exactly the right shower head – it had to be slim and rectangular. Eventually he found one on eBay "and it was cheap, too"



Far right: the radiator, a copy of a Victorian model, shows Tarek likes to mix old and new

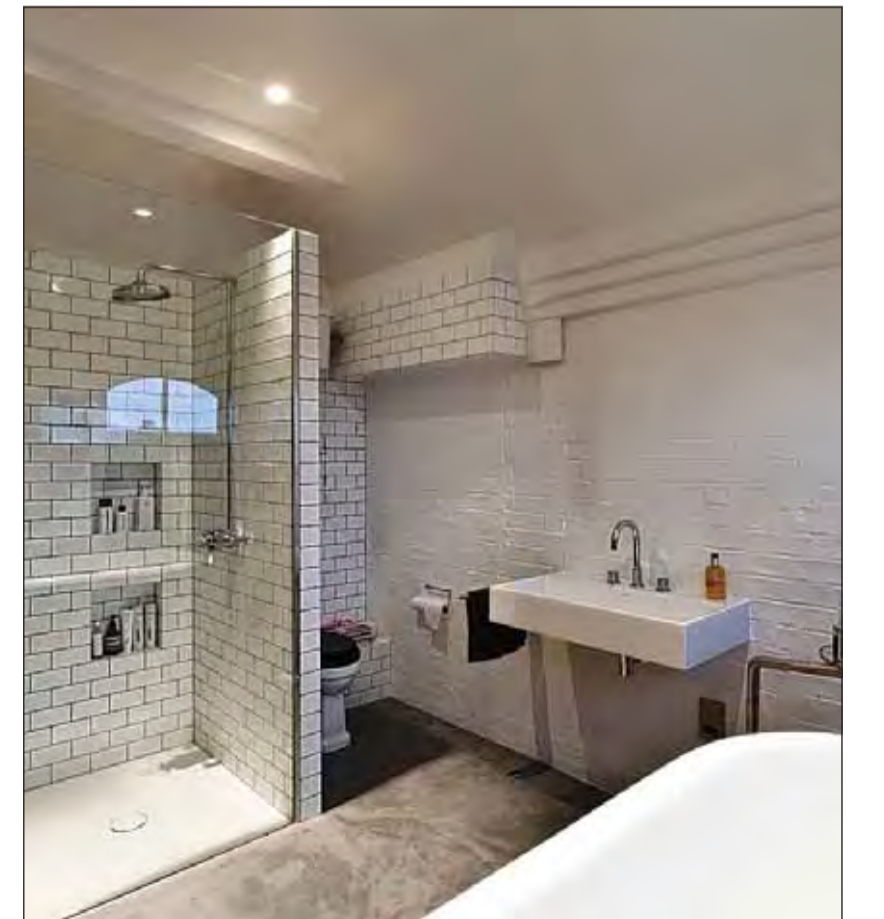


nicer drain slot, at Aston Matthews. I absolutely wanted a wall-hung toilet with no indents and the simplest of flushes. It is hard to find a wall-hung loo that has concealed fittings. Eventually I found one under the arches in Rotherhithe, at Feet International, a great company. "I have always loved those slim light strips that they use for lighting up ads

at bus stops, and I knew they would be perfect, while the radiator is a copy of an ornate Victorian model. The room's finished off with a brass horse's head hook that I found on eBay." And here's the best news: "Having just had the flat revalued," says Tarek, "the £7,717 cost of the bathroom refurbishment has added at least £12,000 to the overall value."

Take two architects, two homes... and get two very distinctive yet equally stunning bathroom makeovers

Photographs by Simon Maxwell



Old-school: white tiles around the shower echo the conversion flat's Victorian heritage