



# The only way is down



**Eric Tingley** decides that the burgeoning demands placed on his home by his family – and the lifestyle he would like to lead – can only be met by dramatically increasing its floor space.

**M**y conversion to conversions of the basement kind – when it came – was almost Damascene.

OK, I wasn't exactly on the road to Damascus. I haven't even been there. But I was on my way to the Promised Land – otherwise known as the pub – having taken flight. So there were parallels.

I had returned home from work, you see, to find my sitting room flooded with teenagers. I say flooded because they were all lachrymose with laughter as they gathered round my newly purchased super-duper flat-screen TV to watch a movie – whereas I...well, I was merely crying. How do you tell half-a-dozen six-foot plus teenagers that you'd really like them to go out and play while you watch your TV? Answer: preferably under your breath and from a distance, in order to avoid "embarrassing" your own progeny.

I'm ashamed that I didn't have the courage to risk the wrath and non-cooperation (I know, I know – like that's ever gonna happen, as he would say!) of my own teenage son, but at least the experience of being unable to, concentrated the mind. Something had to be done – and soon. But traditional extensions, for various reasons, were not on the agenda.

Enter Mr Steven McDicken, for it is he who provided an elegant and financially astute solution to the age-old problem of growing families outgrowing accommodation that was once perfectly suited to their needs.

After a ten-minute chat with him I was converted. The bottom line, so to speak, was apparent: his firm, *Metropolitan Basements* would solve all my problems at a stroke and increase the value of my house by at least 30 per cent. Well, a 20-week stroke anyway – but 20 weeks that would, in addition to solving my space problems, earn me more than £100,000. Because when building costs of around £250 per square foot (for a finish at the lower end of the scale on offer) were taken into consideration, that's the extra equity I would have in my home – at today's prices.

Contrast that with the wallet-busting costs of other methods of obtaining a similar amount of space: buying a bigger home, or indeed another home (for my son and his sister, of course). Mmmm, what should I do? Reduce my equity, by giving some of it to an estate agent, some to a solicitor and a huge chunk to the government in stamp duty. In effect, pay out up to £30,000 and have to move from a house I am totally happy in, or put up with 20 weeks of minor



inconvenience and earn £100,000 plus? Difficult one that...not! Whoops, sorry, I lapsed into teen speak again, must be the company many of us are forced to keep in middle age.

It seems hard to believe, but 20 weeks is all it would take Steven – a quantity surveyor – and his team of architects, engineers and builders to wave their magic wands and design and create a further 480 square feet (that's the size of a one bedroom flat) of living space under my already-extended-to-bursting-point house. I'd already gone up into the roof to create a large bedroom and a bathroom and extending to the rear or side was not an option, given that my end-of-terrace house has a garden the size of, if not a postage stamp, a postie's sack and a side alley that does not belong to me.

What's more, the process would not even be delayed by the machinations of the famed (should that be feared?) planners of Richmond Council, because if the basement remained within the perimeter of the house it would merely need to satisfy buildings regulations and planning permission would not be required. This was a real bonus for me, because having already extended into the loft, I am approaching the limit of my 'permitted development'.

Of course, a party wall agreement would be necessary as my property shared a wall with my neighbours – but that would be a formality and an inexpensive one at that as they can be downloaded for £99 + VAT (<http://www.vincent-brown.co.uk>).

So, with visions of home cinemas, granny/student studios, live-in carers' quarters

(we are all going to need them when we are 150, or whatever age we are expected to live to these days, unless we go into care) I formulated my plan. I, or rather *Metropolitan Basements*, would create a 12m x 4m space under my 1928 mock-Tudor dwelling that blended in with its surroundings in the leafy borough of Richmond upon Thames and contained at least a bedroom, a bathroom and a toilet and, if possible, a kitchenette.

But any future purchasers of the house would be at liberty to use the space for whatever they wished; a wine cellar; a playroom; a cosy, relaxing area; a granny flat; an au-pair's accommodation; a laundry; a utility room; a home cinema; private space for teenagers (come on, don't put your head in the sand, time has moved on – and few schools have bicycle sheds these days); an entertaining room; a swimming pool; a large kitchen; a gym...the list is seemingly endless. And my wife would surely agree to me using it to garage my motorcycle, and as a combined wine cellar/snooker/darts/pinball room when the kids flew the nest, I mused. Yeah, like that's ever gonna happen!



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