

**UNUSED SPACE**

Right The area around the palm tree was green, but somewhat gloomy and unwelcoming



BEFORE

**PICTURESQUE PATHWAY**

Below Clare follows the walkways through the flora. Decking, Travis Perkins



**WILDERNESS WALL**

The Palmeral wallpaper, inspired by Victorian greenhouses, is from the House of Hackney Foliage collection. The hashtag light installation was custom made by Softsign. The whicker chair was a gift from Jamie's sister. Charles & Ray Eames white plastic armchair rocker, Ebay. Screen, Richer Sounds



**THE OWNERS**

Clare Elson, an IT training consultant (pictured left), and husband Jamie, a sales director, live here with their two children Charlie, 18, and Millie, 16

**THE PROPERTY**

A three-bedroom semi-detached home, built around 25 years ago, in Hackney, London

**CLARE LOVES**

Watching films in their 'cinema' Lifestyle store House of Hackney in Shoreditch Food by Yotam Ottolenghi Drinking anything with bubbles The song *Heroes*, by David Bowie The book *The Art of Travel*, by Alain de Botton

*Real Homes*  
**CASE STUDY**

# HI-TECH GARDEN STUDIO

Clare and Jamie Elson have added another dimension to their home with a contemporary garden room

WORDS **SALLY SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **MALCOLM MENZIES**

**W**e have my sister to thank for making us think about the possibility of a garden studio,' says Jamie. 'She had just had one built and it seemed to be the ideal solution for adding some much-needed extra family space without extending the house again. Plus, we had been staring at our old garden shed and a rather uninteresting view of a neighbour's wall for years.'

When Jamie and wife Clare moved into their house in Hackney, just over 17 years ago, the south-facing garden was little more than a pile of earth. 'We went mad and bought a load of plants home from a local flower market in the boot of our car, including a palm tree,' Jamie recalls. 'We wanted really dense planting as I love being right up close to the vegetation.'

The three-bedroom property was once the coach house for the pub next door. 'We still dig up the occasional beer bottle dating back to when it was a pub garden,' says Clare. ➤

Over the years, the couple have extended out to the side return, added a glass conservatory across the back of the house, created an en suite bathroom and a deck on the roof. However, they still didn't feel they had enough space for all the family to spread out. 'Now Charlie and Millie are teenagers, when their friends came round they'd either stay in their bedrooms or hang out in the old playroom,' says Clare. 'It was too expensive for us to move, so we put what we would have had to spend on stamp duty towards the garden room. It's the best money we've ever spent.'

The couple contacted Mark Ramuz, at Garden2Office Ltd, last May, after he'd built Jamie's sister's studio just around the corner. The couple worked with Mark over about four weeks to get their ideal design. Jamie had a list of 'must have' requirements for the garden room. It had to be warm so the family could use it all year round - making underfloor heating a sensible option. There also had to be Wi-Fi and TV aerial, as well as plenty of plug points.

One thing the couple did not want to lose was their precious palm tree. 'Thankfully, Mark said it would be possible to build the studio around it,' says Clare. New uPVC cladding was used to line the panels surrounding the palm trunk, with enough space for someone to climb down and make everything watertight. 'There's a handy storage area around the tree that we can use as a tool shed,' says Jamie.

No planning permission was required for the building

as it is under 2.5 metres high, and was classed as permitted development. 'It's a Swedish modular wall system, which meant we could have the doors and windows where we liked - a bit like putting together a giant Lego set,' says Clare. 'We had the doors slightly offset to account for the palm tree. The bi-folds were an upgrade, but we wanted plenty of glass so we could see as much of the garden as possible.' The feather-edged walls came pre-painted in Satin Black.

The entire project took six weeks in total. Jamie was concerned the building work might damage the tropical micro-climate that he and Clare had created, but they only had to do a little replanting outside the bi-fold doors.

'We ended up adding soundproofing to the spec mid-way through the build, and we hadn't thought where we wanted the projector, screen and wiring to go, so we had quite a lot of bespoke work done,' explains Jamie. 'It wasn't initially designed as a cinema room but has turned into one.'

The hi-tech garden studio was completed last autumn, and the couple couldn't be happier. 'You rarely have the opportunity to build something entirely from scratch,' says Jamie. 'There's nothing we wished we'd done differently. It's the room we use most apart from the kitchen. Watching a film or a TV box set in here feels like a special event.'

'It's a great place to hang out,' adds Clare. 'I feel like I am in the wilderness, which isn't bad considering we are in the middle of urban Hackney.'



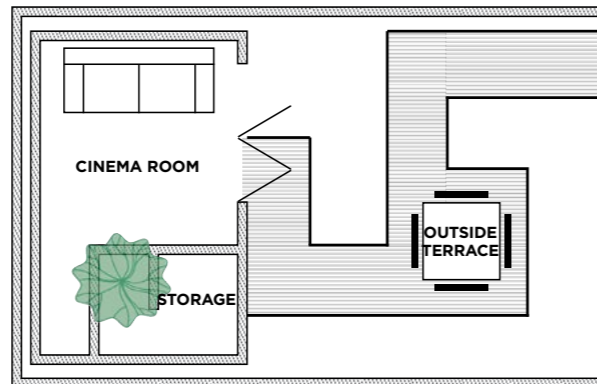
#### OUTDOOR LIVING

This decked area is ideal for sunny days or balmy evenings. Garden furniture, Ebay

#### BESPOKE STUDIO

Below The garden room was designed around the existing palm tree, and even has a storage area for tools

#### AFTER



#### THE COSTS AND CONTACTS

Basic studio  
**£21,000**

Bi-fold doors  
**£2,000**

Home cinema equipment  
**£1,400**

Flooring  
**£450**

Soundproofing  
**£400**

TOTAL  
**£25,250**

Garden Studio Designers,  
Mark Ramuz, Garden2Office,  
0800 612 4371  
garden2office.co.uk

Heating The Underfloor  
Heating Store, theunderfloor  
heatingstore.com

Home cinema equipment  
Richer Sounds,  
richersounds.com



#### BEST SEATS IN THE HOUSE

Clare and daughter Millie find the studio is perfect for family film nights. Laminate flooring, B&Q. Rug, Amazon. Projector, Richer Sounds. Sofa, Muji. Crochet pouffes, Ebay