



New order

Andrew Wallace's extension for a Manchester band manager

Blood simple: Proctor Matthews' studio for artist Marc Quinn

Retail therapist: Vincent van Duysen on why a little goes a long way

Maybe baby: Buschow Henley's north London fertility clinic

The vanishing act

When the manager of Manchester band New Order asked Andrew Wallace to design an extension for her suburban house, he built something so invisible people just couldn't stop looking at it.

MODERNISM HAS CONSISTENTLY RETURNED TO the question of dissolving inside/outside boundaries. The theme of the representation of limitless space is reiterated in Andrew Wallace's extension of a Manchester house owned by New Order manager

The scheme for this extension, which won the Manchester Society of Architects Award 2002, uses existing fabric as a foil for new intervention. Here the context is a typical 'Cheshire' semi-detached house on a suburban street in a conservation area. A frosted glass internal door marks the transition from the house. The dramatic transition from conventional domestic space to the minimalist modernism of the extension shocks. Passing through this door, the back of the house disappears into a continuous space with the garden. It is a theme that reappears at various levels throughout the project.

The architect has taken great care to minimise threshold definition. The ground- to first-floor wall is a frameless glazed surface and the floor indicates demarcation through changes in finish rather than plane. The transition to the garden is marked by a line of pebbles and a strip of underfloor lighting.

The weight of the existing rear projection is supported on a bespoke tapering stainless steel

javelin. It rejects visual mass through its reflective finish and its form, which is reiterated in the supports for a cable-stayed glass-topped dining table. Clear perspex furniture emphasises the effect. The colour and figuration of the garden invade the space, further collapsing the boundary with the house.

Services form a strip along the right-hand wall of the kitchen. A Cumbrian blue-grey slate work surface runs through the glass wall to form a barbecue space outside while white-sprayed low-level storage units form a visually recessive surface, emphasising the horizontal elements connecting interior and garden. To the left wall, floor-to-ceiling shelving comfortably absorbs domestic artefacts and transforms into a bench seat at the garden end. The room widens at the garden end, reinforcing the sense of dissolved threshold.

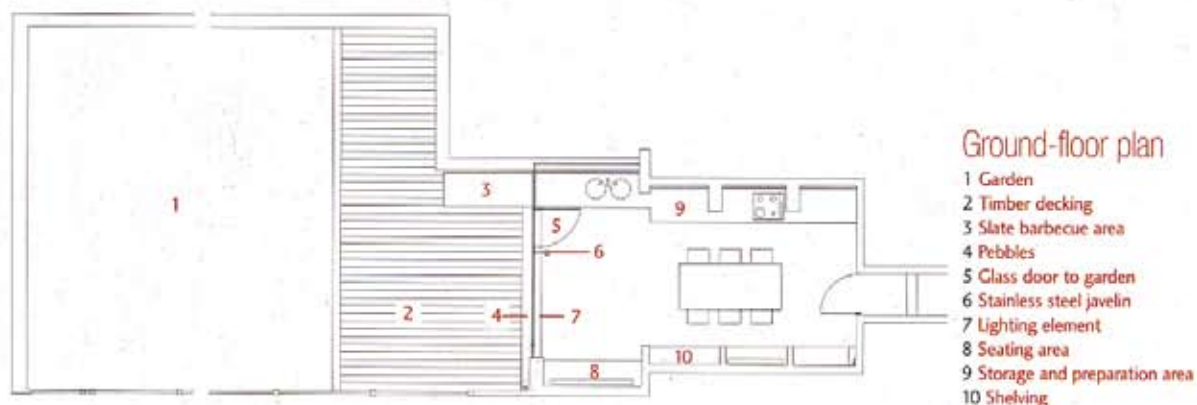
Materially, the scheme stretches the limits of domestic construction. Each element is carefully considered but Andrew Wallace's approach leaves little room for inaccuracy. It works well for elements where high levels of tolerance can be applied. The supporting javelin column and frameless glazing are good examples, developed with structural engineer



Right: The frameless glass wall and the slate slab help to dissolve the boundary between house and garden.

Far right: The steel javelin is just 19mm in diameter at its tips.





Above: A strip of pebbles and lighting mark the threshold to the decking.

▷ The stainless steel column has a diameter of only 19mm at its base and head, and 75mm at its midpoint. Its height is adjusted through an internal screw thread at the midpoint. The result is seamless. Elements such as the floor finish are less successful, owing to their inherent messiness – it is difficult to achieve pinpoint accuracy with materials designed for flooring warehouses.

Externally, the extension presents a visual conundrum. The huge weight of the masonry rear projection apparently rests on nothing. The continuation of a white rendered wall from garden into kitchen reinforces the idea of the scheme as a conceptual emptying of the site. Andrew Wallace has designed a scheme that acts as a mediator, the form of which depends on the position of the viewer. From inside it disappears, drawing the garden into the house. Externally it is read as a voided figure, connecting internal and external space through its continuity of language and form. The paradox of the scheme is that it tries hard to achieve invisibility but in so doing demands that the viewer engages with it more intimately to consider how that invisibility is achieved. It redefines the reading of both old and new elements – an approach that has proved popular despite the conservation area location. Now, the next-door neighbours want one too.