



Totally transformed

INTERVIEW: **DEBBIE JEFFERY**

Describe your childhood home

The first house I remember growing up in was a two-bedroom end terrace in Leeds, near the city centre. Our red brick ex-council house was small – however, there was only me and my mother, so it didn't feel too cramped. My mother was always at work, typically having two different forms of employment at the same time to enable her to pay the bills as a single parent. There was lots of scrub wasteland around the housing estate that I grew up on, which was pretty much all developed into affordable housing by the time we moved.

What inspired you to become an architect?

When I was about seven years old, I woke up one day and told my mother that I wanted to be an architect. From memory, I didn't even know what an architect did, but I still wanted to be one. My mother told me that, from that day, I never said I wanted to do any other job and it was a few years later before I realised what an architect actually did.

As a child, I loved playing with Lego and used to lose myself in building anything, taking it apart and making something completely different with the same pieces. I would ask for new Lego sets whenever the opportunity arose and always had an idea for the next thing I wanted to build. My mother fed my passion for building in Lego and when money permitted she would reward me for hard work at school or around the house and we would go to Woolworths in Leeds city centre, which is where most of my Lego was purchased.



Martin Bell is the managing director of award-winning Yorkshire practice Transform Architects, which specialises in residential architecture, including new build homes, extensions, dramatic makeovers, and disability inclusive designs. Projects have featured widely in the national media and are located all over England, but predominantly in the north.



I liked my own company and was not the type of child to hang out with my friends in the garden or on the housing estate. I also loved drawing, especially buildings. When I was a little older, I would go out on my bicycle and take my sketchbook and just doodle. As I got older, I never wavered away from architecture, I still used to sketch buildings in Leeds city centre on the weekends with my Sony Walkman blasting out tunes.

Once I scraped through my GCSEs at school, I went to the Leeds College of Building to undertake a BTEC National Diploma in Construction, as I knew A-Levels and formal exams were not for me. The BTEC was my first real taste of construction-related study, and I excelled on the course. Naively, I only applied

Pictures:
The ultimate modern revamp and extension to an executive home which has an enclosed courtyard.

to Leeds University to study architecture and didn't even get an interview, despite my excellent grades.

I then went to Leeds Metropolitan University and undertook an HND in Building Studies to bridge the year towards reapplication for university, accepting a conditional offer from Kent Institute of Art & Design. From there I never looked back and progressed through to become a qualified architect.

Tell us about Transform Architects

In 2004, I started the practice, and we now undertake all manner of single residential projects, including extensions, conversions, and new builds, presenting all schemes using a 3D virtual walkthrough model.



An oak-frame glazed extension adds a dramatic dimension to this stone home.



Most tend to be full architectural service projects, from initial design to completion of the build. With 3D design, every member of the construction team can view a highly accurate 3D walkthrough of the project on a phone, tablet or desktop computer. There is such a massive gulf in quality when you see adaptations, extensions and self-builds that are poorly designed. Our clients have total input – my job is to open their minds to available options. It's a bit like buying a car; first they choose the model and then we provide the catalogue of options.

I first got involved with disability adaptations when a private residential client wanted an existing bungalow knocking down and replacing with an accessible new-build bungalow. What we do is more than just designing extensions or new houses for disabled clients, we change people's lives for the better when they have had adversity strike. Your home is your castle, yet for many disabled people it could also be their prison. We strive to achieve the opposite and designing homes that enhance our clients' lives in many ways is what drives us.

Describe your own home

I live with my wife, son, and daughter in a detached, three-storey stone developer house, built in 2005. I spent 13 years designing my ultimate extension, and we completed building the contemporary, single-storey split-level rear extension earlier this year. There are handmade brick interior walls, a vaulted ceiling, black aluminium, stone, and cedar cladding. A full glass façade and sliding door look out onto the landscaped, low-maintenance south-facing garden, all designed by myself. You definitely know which one is mine when entering our cul-de-sac of five homes! Everyone is surprised when they enter my home because the space is not what you expect when looking from the outside – it's much bigger than it looks. The interiors are contemporary – luxury boutique style – with an open-plan kitchen/dining space, a split-level lounge, with a 3.5m-high vaulted ceiling and four roof lights letting in masses of light. Our eldest son will soon be off to university to hopefully study architecture, so the house is more than big enough for our needs and we have no plans to move.

What do you do in your spare time?

I live and breathe what I do as an architect and love designing buildings, working out those awkward junctions and keeping the proportions in check. I also try to keep fit in the gym on a regular basis, as it is good stress relief from the demands of running a business. Kickboxing is my developing passion.



Left and below: A tired brick house is given the Transform treatment, with the addition of modern windows, a canopy entrance and timber and render cladding.



Right and above: A dramatic remodel of a 70s house.



Martin's top tips for selfbuilders

Always design from the inside out, room by room, and then bring it all together. Understand what you really want from the space and never let aesthetics dominate practicality. Create a brief, then challenge and develop that brief, but stick to it to make sure you are achieving your goals. Don't extend for the sake of it. I have been in some really big houses where people only use around 10 to 20 per cent of the space most of the time.

Never forget human scale when creating spaces. Would you want

to sit on a toilet in a room the size of your lounge? Would that feel comfortable? Bigger is not always better. Scale and proportion are so important: larger, open-plan spaces should have a slightly higher ceiling, relative to the size of the room.

Always challenge your architect and push them to get the best design possible, based on site constraints and budget. Do not rush to get to planning – the design is the single most important stage of any project. transformarchitects.com