

# SUNKEN LIVING ROOM

## Garden House

De Matos Ryan

Photography by Hufton + Crow



In this day and age, we've returned to a previous one... with extended families cohabiting residential space. Call it a symptom of economic constraints, or a newfound appreciation for time with loved ones... (or the importance of babysitters), whatever you want, but more and more families are discovering ways to draw close in physical terms. This new dwelling, occupying the rear corner of a decent-sized garden in Battersea, is hardly a crammed cottage or retrofitted attic – its 180sq m provide a fully functional separate lodging for its own generation of the family tree. In this case, it wasn't the conventional married-with-offspring model, but rather the arrival of an eighth sibling that prompted an idea to let parents and toddlers move to the new digs, and the older kids to stay put in the Victorian original.

The project faced a couple of the usual challenges of its type – neighbour nerves regarding privacy and density and the client's wishes for infinite space, but also one particular to this site: floodproofing. This was thanks to its proximity to the River Thames, which has the annoying habit of bursting its banks now and then. Still, the result is hardly a blushing wallflower, with fully five bedrooms, three baths, study and kitchen/living room. The primary site strategy dug out the garden to create a watertight courtyard space that characterised the

adjacent spaces indoors; it feels like an urban oasis, entirely secluded yet not claustrophobic. In fact, the house seems to partake directly of the garden, and vice versa, so that the general sensibility, at least when it's not pouring rain, is almost Mediterranean. By secluding the lower floor section (the public rooms) behind the enclosing white garden wall, and then glazing most of this level, the architects allowed open living without compromising privacy at all. Plus it yielded a relatively modest building height toward neighbours; the largely opaque upper storey reads as a single-storey bungalow above the garden wall. This level is rendered as white cubic boxes that hover over the transparent base, with windows shyly oriented to the side or rear elevations. Skylights and lightwells supplement the natural illumination for these upper rooms.

The interiors follow the cue of the courtyard, with plenty of white surfaces bouncing light around and through glass. The Garden House is all about the courtyard, however, which offers a unique private space to the heart of the bustling city. Within this private world – which doesn't feel at all 'sunken', anyway – it is almost hard to remember that a thrumming urban megalopolis, not to mention another brood of kids, lurks just metres away. Talk about having your scones and eating them, too.

