

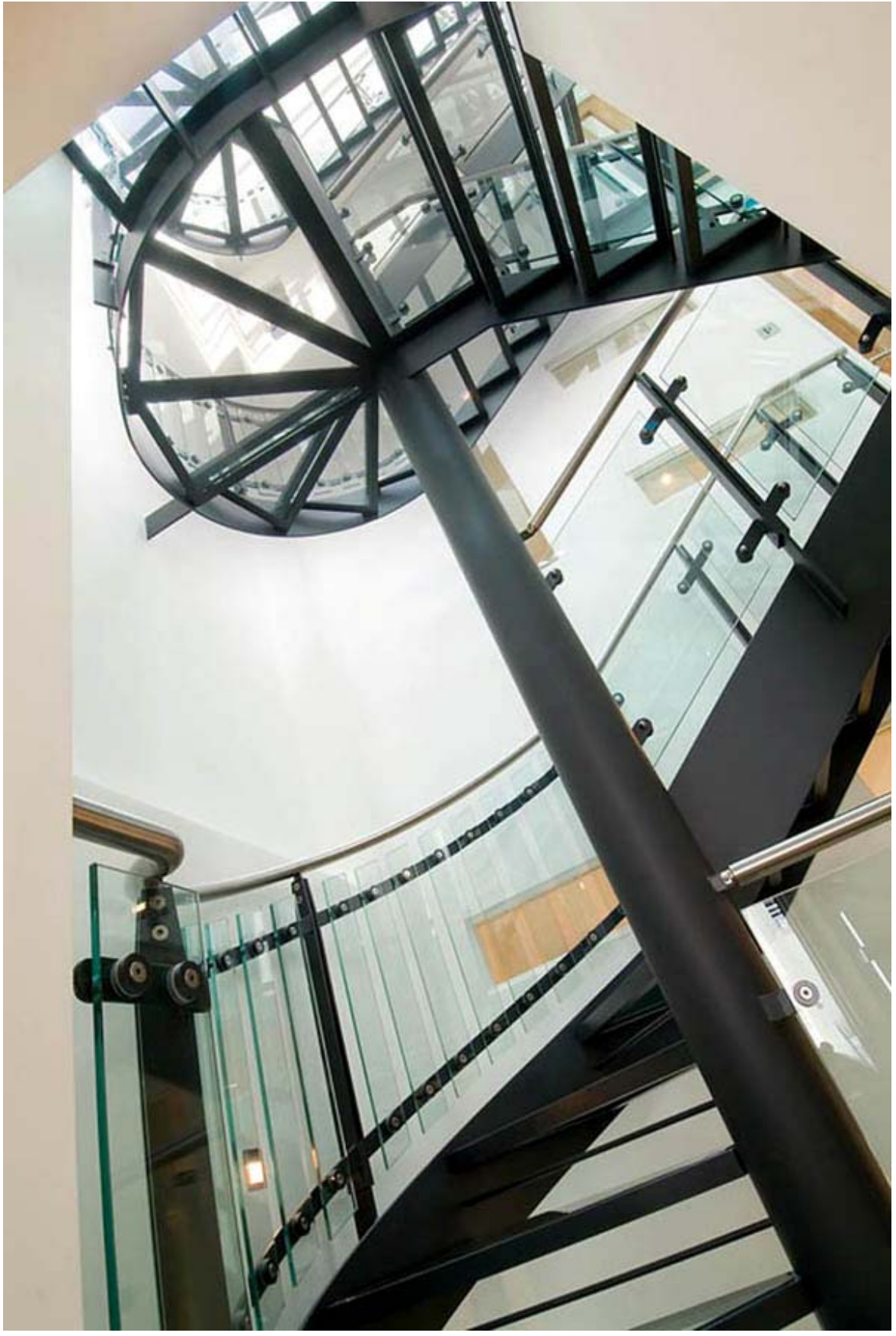
Douglas and King designed the conversion of the stage of the former Queens Theatre in Battersea into a private house. Every brief has its particular challenges and this was a uniquely grim scenario:

- a landlocked site
- a leftover space
- a windowless derelict void

The site is the former stage area with dressing rooms and set storage space. The building form presents a large double height space (the stage) with a large dark undercroft (beneath the stage trapdoor). The existing building has no windows in the external walls and a flat roof sits above.

The dispersion of natural light within the space had to be engineered by the manipulation of natural light sources – all located overhead. This has been achieved through the combination of a 3-storey light well, vertical sun pipes and an internal courtyard at lower ground floor level. An outdoor garden room will be created on the roof.

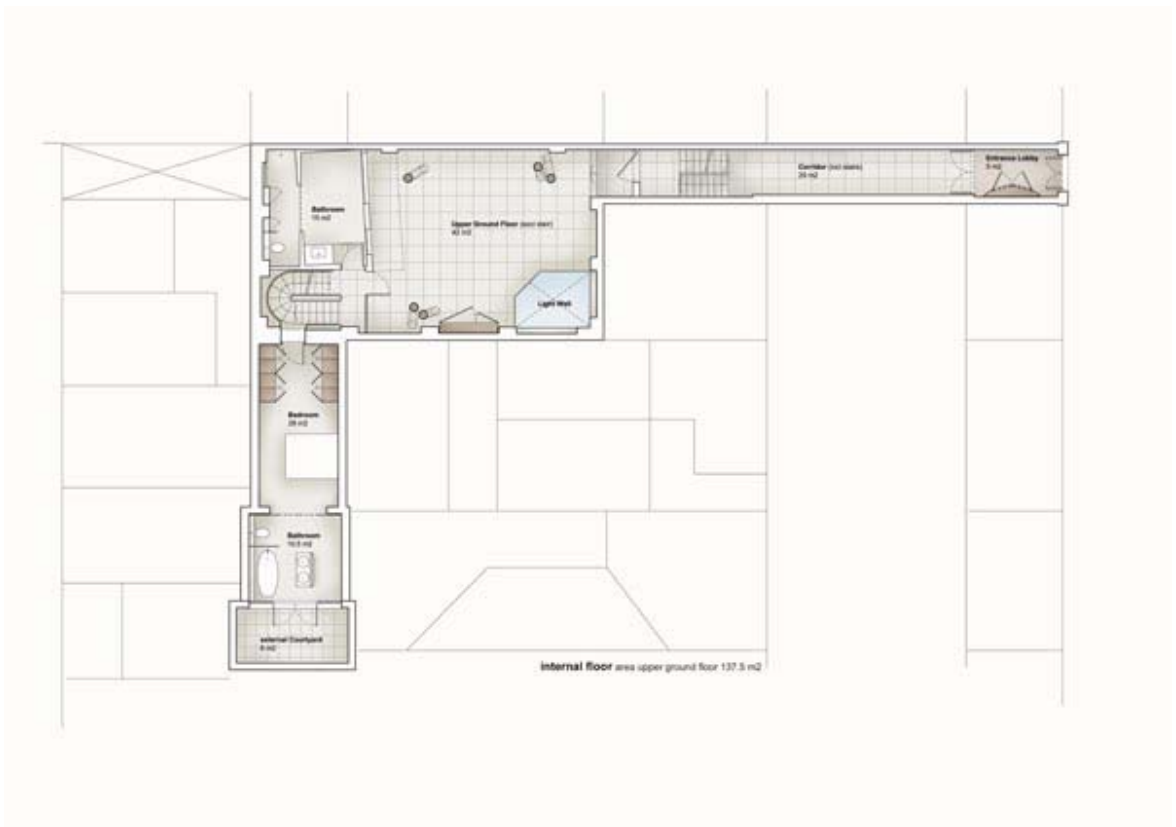
The practice commenced working on the project in April 2004, it started on site in September 2004 and was completed in March 2006.

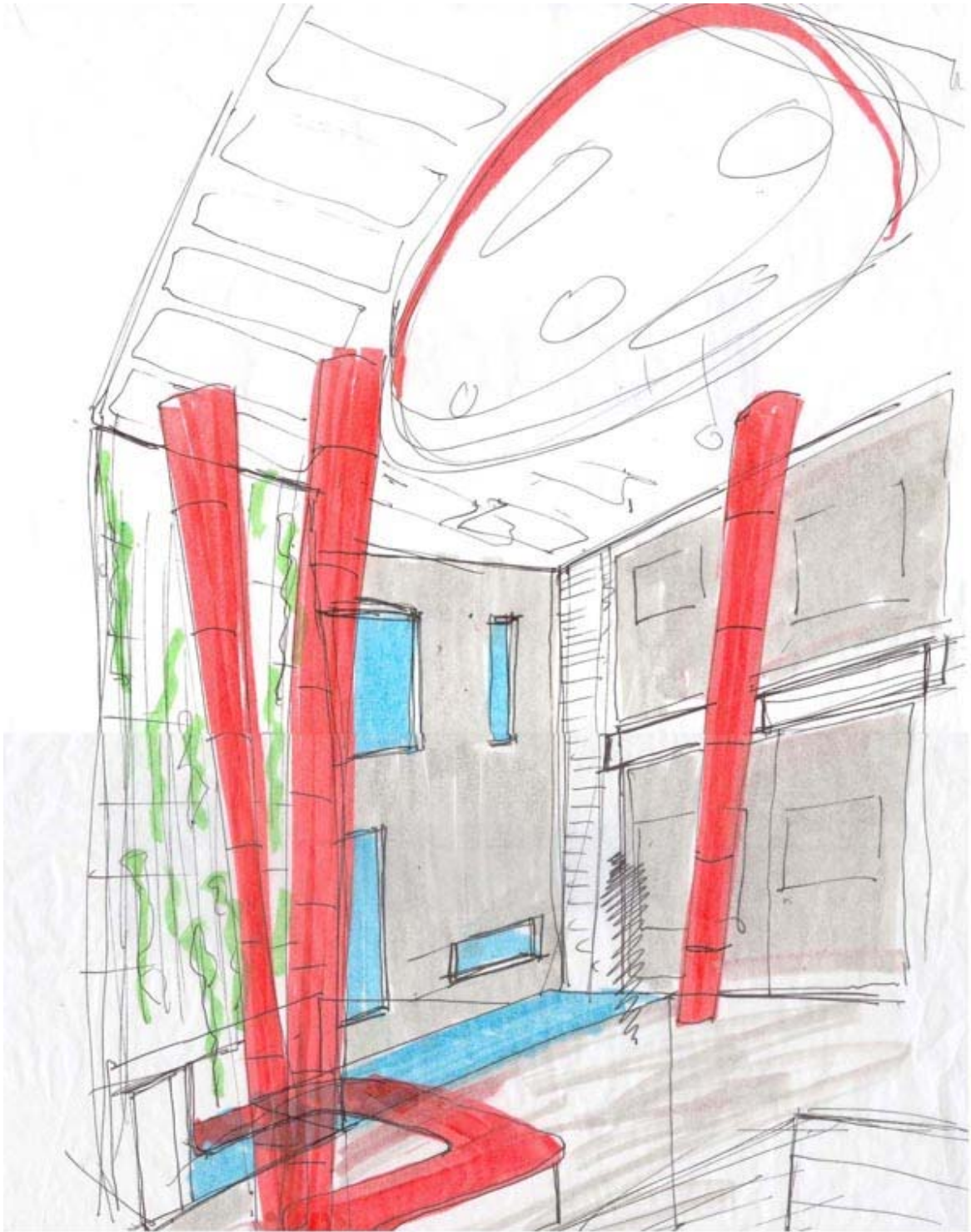












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The Sunday Times

May 28, 2006

## Theatre of dreams

It could be a first in London: a former palace of burlesque transformed into a stunning home. Sian Griffiths reports

Close your eyes for a moment and it doesn't take too much imaginative horsepower to picture Charlie Chaplin waddling his way across the tiled "entertainment space" of 123B Queenstown Road in south London. The slapstick comedian might even have worked in a gag about the goings-on in the adjacent bathroom, clearly visible through a spotless internal window in the dividing wall.

It has become old hat to transform London's churches, schools, even fire stations into homes, but now Roger Wills, 38, an Essex-based developer, has gone one better, converting a Victorian theatre and claiming it as a first for the capital. "I've been working in London for years and I've never before heard of a theatre being made into a house," he says.

The Queen's Theatre in Battersea pulled in the crowds with risqué burlesques such as *Fun on the Bristol* and *Lost by Drink* before it went dark in the early 20th century. When he bought the building for £610,000 at auction two years ago, Wills was told that Chaplin and Lillie Langtry were among those who trod its boards.

"It's a story that needs researching," he says, with refreshing honesty, as he

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shows me around the three-bed house he has created. "But bearing in mind that Langtry lived nearby in Sloane Street and Chaplin in Vauxhall, it's possible that even if they didn't play here, they might have watched a show."

Wills's imagination has been fired by the building, where Macbeth and musicals, as well as burlesques, attracted 500-strong audiences before competition from the Shakespeare Theatre, which opened in nearby Lavender Hill in 1896, hastened its closure. During the past two years, he has driven to the site each weekday from his home in Braintree, a 2½-hour journey. The project, he says, has become a labour of love.

The theatre had been used for commercial storage for years before Wills bought it and was, he says, in a sorry state. According to Douglas and King, the firm of architects hired by Wills: "It was a uniquely grim scenario: a former stage area with dressing rooms and a large, dark undercroft (space beneath the stage)." The biggest handicap was huge: no windows.

This week, though, the home goes on the market as a dramatic (no pun intended) four-level house with light flooding down through a glass roof that purrs open at the touch of a button, sun pipes disguised as leaning theatrical columns and a triangular light well in the corner of each floor.

Wills, who says he has spent about £600,000 on the conversion, is hoping the property will fetch at least £2m and be bought — almost inevitably — by "a media type".

There are nods to the past in every corner: the original tip-up seats in plush velvet have gone, but theatrical lights on gantries illuminate the double-height entertaining space where the stage once stood. You enter along a brick corridor that opens off the discreet front door, just as you would have done 100 years ago.

In the study area, a beam and pulley recall how props were once lifted into place. And there are the aforementioned internal windows, which allow people lounging in the entertainment area a glimpse of antics in the bathroom — apparently in a bid to continue a sense of "theatrical viewing and voyeurism".

"Of course," says Wills, "a more private owner could fit frosted glass."

From the roof terrace, with its views over Battersea power station, down to the home cinema in the basement — all linked by an open tread glass and steel staircase — it's a house for an extrovert with a taste for display. Chaplin would feel thoroughly at home here. And Wills may just have started a trend.

*The Old Theatre is for sale for £2m with Cluttons, 020 7228 0023, [www.cluttons.com](http://www.cluttons.com)*



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