

**KITCHENS**  
HOW TO CREATE THE  
PERFECT FAMILY ROOM

**BATHROOMS**  
EASY SPACE-SAVING  
SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

**BEDROOMS**  
TOP TIPS TO MAKE THE  
MOST OF ANY BOX ROOM

# Real Homes

HELPING YOU MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR HOME

OCTOBER 2007 £2.75

## 189 BRILLIANT BUYS

Must-have  
shopping for  
every room,  
from vases to  
sideboards

At home with  
**Sophie Conran**  
(Pottery, pies and all!)

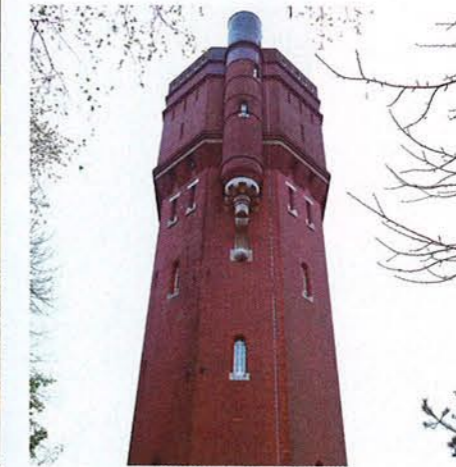


## RECLAIM YOUR SPACE!

Quick-fix storage ideas; 16 ways to hide your stuff

**FIRST  
IMPRESSIONS  
COUNT!**  
19 CLEVER IDEAS  
FOR HALLWAYS

**PLUS! EVERYTHING YOU NEED FOR A STRESS-FREE HOUSE MOVE**



**FACT FILE**

**THE OWNERS**  
 Elspeth Beard, an architect with her own business, lives here with her partner Paul and son Tom (16)

**THE PROPERTY**  
 A converted Victorian water tower that dates back to 1898. It's 4,500sqft divided over five floors

**THE LOCATION**  
 Godalming, Surrey

**THE VALUE**  
 Elspeth paid £121,000 for the property in 1989. It's now worth approximately £1 million

**T**his 130ft-tall Victorian water tower in Surrey is the first home architect Elspeth Beard ever bought. It's probably going to be her last too, she says. 'It's all I've ever wanted – except for the 141 stairs! They're a pain, but I've got used to them now.'

Elspeth first viewed the water tower in 1989 and loved it straight away. Although bidding at the auction began at £50,000, she found herself pitted against a determined bidder and got it only after offering more than double that figure. Buying the tower was a huge risk as Elspeth, then 29, had not yet qualified as an architect and didn't have planning permission to convert the Grade II-listed building into a home. The tower had stood neglected for 25 years – an empty

shell with large cracks down the sides and broken windows, it had become a home for birds. 'It was like a huge octagonal dovecote with 64 openings framed in cast iron,' says Elspeth. 'It basically consisted of a void for four storeys until you reached the riveted-steel plate base of the water tank at the top.'

The major problems concerned planning permission and building regulations. 'Any building over a certain height must have two protected staircases, but I only wanted one,' explains Elspeth. 'If I'd put in a second staircase there wouldn't have been any room left.' So after appealing for and winning a relaxation of the building regulations, she had to go to the planners for listed-building consent and planning approval for change of use. This process lasted a year. ▶

# 'I TURNED A WATER TOWER INTO MY DREAM HOME'

Many of us have imagined taking on an unusual property and making it work as a home, but is it a practical reality? We visited Elspeth Beard's unconventional water-tower home to find out

WORDS VICTORIA JENKINS PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID YEO

**Above** The kitchen units follow the octagonal shape of the building. The brick walls are painted in Brilliant White by Dulux to contrast with the black lacquered cupboard doors. Elspeth inherited the table and chairs from her mother

**Right** Elspeth relaxes in the kitchen. The yellow and orange painting is by artist Michael Coulson who Elspeth met at Chelsea Arts College





**1** Elspeth moved into the property when it was still a building site. With nowhere to wash, no hot water, a full-time job and a baby son to look after, it was hard work

It then took a further three years to make the building waterproof by re-screeding the roof, putting in new double-glazed windows and repointing the external brick walls. Four years later, having installed new steel and maple stairs, plumbing, electricity, gas, five new timber floors, internal plasterboard walls, a new kitchen, three bathrooms and five lavatories, the water tower was finally finished.

Elspeth actually moved into the property in the third year, when it was still a building site. With nowhere to wash, no hot water, a full-time job and a baby son to look after, it was hard going. 'I'd never do it again,' says Elspeth, 'unless someone else did the work and I lived elsewhere. I was the main contractor and tendered out what work I couldn't do. In fact, I completed 40% of it, including laying the timber floors and washing down the exterior of the tower with a high-pressure hose – that

alone took five months. I also had the building sprayed with silicone to improve its waterproof properties. I put in a new rainwater pipe, laid the drains, put in a soakaway and septic tank... if there was a job I could do, then I did it.'

As a result of Elspeth's hard work and determination, the water tower has won four awards: the Downland Design, the Royal Institute of British Architects Regional Award, the Surrey Historical Buildings Trust Award 1993 and the 25th Anniversary Award for the Surrey Historical Buildings Trust.

The way Elspeth has utilised the space in the tower pays testament to her architectural talents. Clever ideas include three en-suite bathrooms set on mezzanine levels in the bedrooms, which are accessed by open-plan stairs. Plus, in such a tall building and without a lift, Elspeth made sure she included a lavatory on every floor. ▶

**Left** This staircase in the living area leads up to a mezzanine level. It was designed so that it doesn't cross the windows, allowing the maximum amount of light to enter the room. Made of iron, it adds a decorative element to the space. Oakleaf Industries sells similar designs and also offers a bespoke service

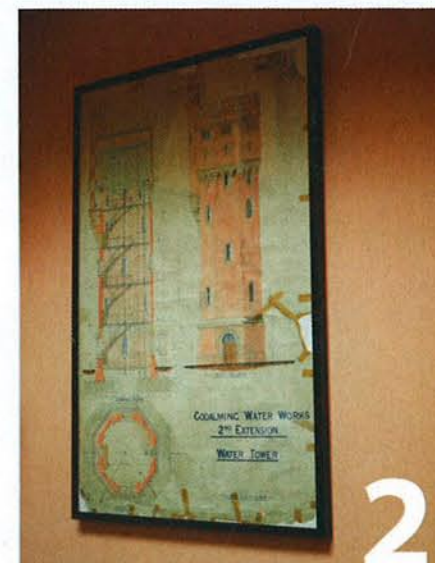
## DESIGN IDEAS

### 1. ALL CLEAR

A glass-topped coffee table is a great way to increase the sense of space, as your eye can see through it to the furniture beyond. In this instance, the glass top makes the most of the patterned rug on which it stands

### 2. MASTERPLAN

Hanging framed architectural plans of your house is an easy way to create a unique piece of artwork and add a personal touch to your home

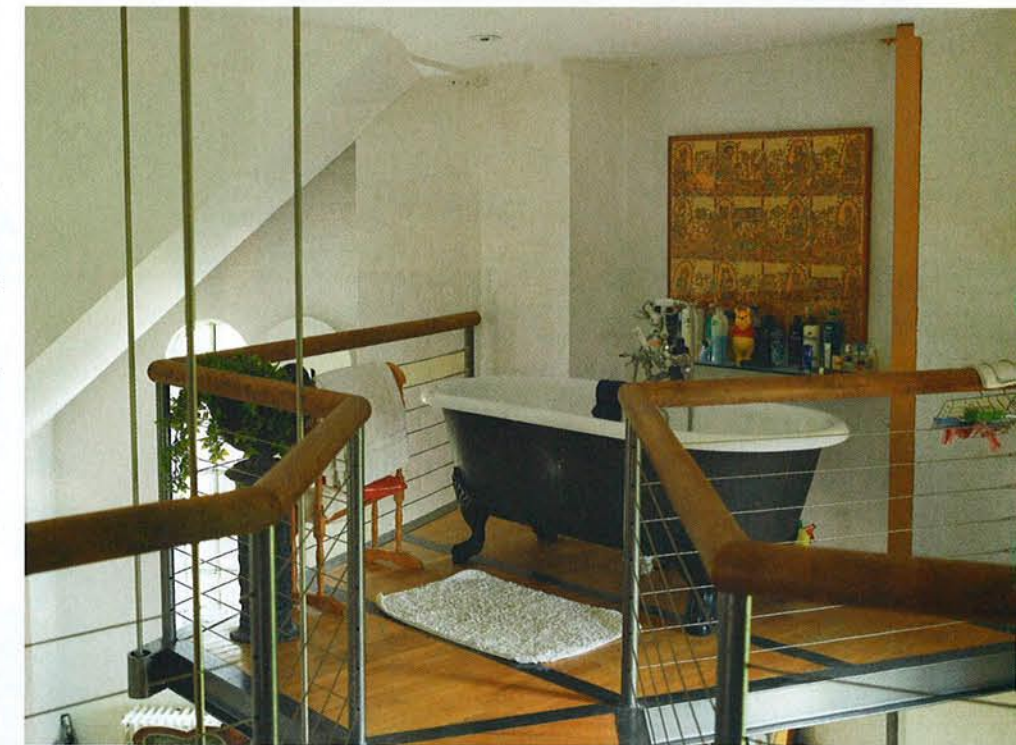




The planners insisted that the kitchen had to be on the fourth floor above the bedrooms as it constituted a fire risk. There are also smoke detectors, self-closing fire doors, fire alarms and a fire-protected staircase. The octagonal space meant the kitchen units and worktops had to be designed with great care. 'My main problem was that the kitchen company went bust halfway through,' says Elspeth. 'They installed the unit carcasses but another company had to fit the black lacquered doors and someone else made the templates for the green slate worktops. When the finished worktops arrived I had to carry them up the stairs myself before another company fitted them!' The kitchen ceiling is the base of the riveted-steel water tank (the tank itself was removed) and above that sits the enormous octagonal living room. Here, light filters in through the large roof window and 28 narrow ones around the walls.

'I've been offered over £1 million for my home, but I'd never sell it,' says Elspeth. 'My partner Paul and son Tom agree that nothing could beat the view of 50 miles in all directions from the roof terrace and we have masses of space. After all, how many people can say they live in a 100-year-old dwelling and yet be the first ever occupants?' ■

**'I completed 40% of the work, including laying the timber floors and washing down the exterior of the tower with a high-pressure hose – that alone took five months'**



**Far and near left** The cherrywood sleigh bed is from The Bed Centre Bramley. Elspeth replaced the original cast-iron glazing bars at the windows with steel reproductions

**Above** Each bedroom features a mezzanine, which houses an en suite. For roll-top baths, we recommend Catchpole & Rye; the bath taps are from N Froy and Sons