

# Now you see it...

High-tech glass that goes opaque or heats the room at the touch of a button will transform the way we live

## KATRINA BURROUGHS



The glass-box extension has been at the top of everyone's fantasy home improvements list for a decade: the stylish solution to scarcity of space and light, creating a wholesome, roomy feel. Yet architectural glass isn't restricted to garden rooms. Developers are using it in stairs and flooring. High-tech varieties can go opaque at the flick of a switch, or help to heat an eco-home. And for those who want to add a dash of crystalline glamour to their interiors without undertaking a mammoth building project, there are glamorous new Italian glass furnishings, from sleek bookcases to extravagant Murano tables.

Carolyn Trevor, 50, is an ardent fan of the material. "As an architect, you love glass, because it brings space and light, showing off your work to its best advantage," she says. Before setting up her own practice in 1995 with her husband, Patrick Lahiff, 47, she worked for Rick Mather, the architect responsible for

creating the Zen chain of restaurants in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as the extension to the Dulwich Picture Gallery, with its double-height glass elevations, roofs, sculptures and water features. Trevor herself, between working on high-end residential projects from Mayfair to the Isle of Man, has been making over her own family home in south London, incorporating eye-catching glass features.

Although her sprawling Victorian detached house may look as if it is designed with only style in mind, it is, says Trevor, an exercise in practicality: with five children (ranging from Max, 19, to Matilda, 9, via Jack, 18, Oscar, 15, and Felix, 13), she can't afford to indulge in high-maintenance flourishes. "There are some things I'd do for a client that I'd never do at home, because I know my children would wreck it — like polished plaster walls. Glass is much more practical. And the kids think the house is really cool."

The basement is fronted with four sliding glass panels, eight metres wide, allowing daylight from the scooped-out terrace to flood into the studio. To maximise the light, Trevor has used pale Chinese limestone paving outside and light-coloured ceramic tiles indoors. "And on the bookshelves, we always use white files, never black or red," she says.

Directly above the studio, Trevor has built a sun-trap deck, wrapped around with glazed balustrade and decorative glass handrail, and accessed by glass steps. The open treads are sandblasted to make them opaque and laminated for strength and safety. Two narrow roof lights are set into the decking floor: these too are opaque, with light that



Carolyn Trevor loves the material for its practicality and stylishness



Julian Andrews



Glass is used to striking effect in many high-end modern homes, such as the Mansion, in north London



The developer Finchamton has flooded this £3.75m London townhouse with light



Gran Canal side tables by Anna Casa

filters up from the studio a pearly glow, and to withstand the daily pacing of the family's five cats without showing any scratches.

Trevor has even solved the condensation problem that can afflict people who dwell in glass houses, thanks

to the clever regulation of heat and cold. "We use trench heaters — grilles in the floor under the big windows — that deal with cold areas."

All this doesn't come cheap. A staircase like Trevor's might set you back about £3,000, the two roof lights that stretch the length of her deck £7,000. Another point to remember: if

there are significant expanses of glass, your design can't just be based on aesthetic appeal. It must conform to Part L of the building regulations (for the latest version, visit [planningportal.gov.uk](http://planningportal.gov.uk)), which increasingly tends to restrict the use of conventional glass surfaces in buildings, in the interests of energy efficiency and green targets.

Yet the expense and complexity of using architectural glass aren't deterring property developers who specialise in the prime postcodes: they are continually adding twists to tried and tested designs. The primary use is to bring light into the property, but for Alex Michelin, director of Finchamton, a bespoke developer and design firm, the internal view is sometimes overlooked.

"Incorporating glass creates better

views within the property," he says. "Instead of looking at a wall, for instance, people can see through into the next room, or the room below, or through to the garden."

Surprise sightlines are the highlight of Finchamton's latest project, a four-storey townhouse in Belgravia, central London, where natural light cascades from the roofline to the lower ground floor, with glass walls, flooring, balustrades, a staircase and double-height mirrors. It is on the market for £5.75m ([weilbelove-quested.com](http://weilbelove-quested.com)).

Many new projects are incorporating technically advanced glass, such as panes with the ability to turn from clear to an opaque milky white at the flick of a switch. The laminate in Blink glass contains liquid-crystal polymers, connected to an electric current. When the current is on, the liquid crystals are clear, but when it's turned off, the UV-filtering, high-insulation panes take less than a second to switch to privacy mode (£1,000-£1,500 per square metre, including installation; 0045 290 3107, [blinkglass.com](http://blinkglass.com)). Cantifix, a firm that specialises in structural glazing, has been using blink intelligent panes in projects from sliding doors and bathroom walls to entire glass extensions (020 8203 6203, [cantifix.co.uk](http://cantifix.co.uk)).

The newest smart products to reach these shores are glazed units called Eglas. Developed in Finland for marine

use, they have built-in heating components that stop condensation and save energy by allowing the homeowner to turn down the central heating (0161 309 9498, [finnglasstul.co.uk](http://finnglasstul.co.uk)).

Eglas came to the UK this year and is already a hit with self-builders. The New Build Group UK ([newbuildgroupuk.co.uk](http://newbuildgroupuk.co.uk)) is pioneering its use in combination with high-insulation products in its eco-developments, with radiant heat from the windows as the primary heat source.

If your finances don't stretch to structural change, there are decorative furnishings that will bring glass into your home on a tighter budget. Italian designs stand out, including the smart Mondovisione wall unit by Tonelli, with eight transparent tempered shelves on a column of mirrored steel (22xcm x 195cm x 44cm, £2,095, from Mac & Mac Interiors; 01252 71771, [macandmacinteriors.com](http://macandmacinteriors.com)). Anna Casa, an Italian specialist, recently launched the lovely Gran Canal range, with coffee tables set on three red Murano glass legs (125cm x 70cm x 40cm, £3,685) and side tables (pictured left; 60cm x 60cm x 55cm, £990 each; 020 7352 8353, [annacasa.net](http://annacasa.net)).

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