

Home Improve

# INNER PEACE

Architects are opening up homes, using glazed courtyards to create serene spaces that are bathed in natural light, says *Cherry Maslen*

The hottest trend in modern architecture takes its cue from antiquity. To get more light and air into homes, architects are emulating the Romans: internal courtyards not only flood the middle of your house with light, but bring the outside in more effectively than the standard glass box/bifold doors at the back, creating an oasis of calm, health-giving greenery.

"We often use internal courtyards for extension projects in the middle of a

home," says Simon Graham, director of Yard Architects. "In a typical Victorian terrace, you often end up with a fantastic new space at the back, but the centre of the house becomes gloomy and underused. Internal glazed courtyards can be small spaces, but they bring huge benefits."

More and more architects are designing them into new homes, particularly on confined urban sites where daylight and greenery are at a premium. They are also being used to bring light into basements, either by sinking

a glass cube or incorporating glazed sections in a courtyard floor above.

These spaces can also be a design focus, creating a sense of openness and vistas through the house, one that changes with the seasons according to plantings. Add a sculpture, a water feature or beautiful floor tiles for a personalised retreat.

"They can make your home a more pleasant and healthier place to live," adds the architect Jonathan Nicholls, of Hayhurst & Co, who used a courtyard to bring light into a windowless home, below.

## GRAND CENTRAL

There's plenty of garden outside this black modernist house in the Kent countryside, an AR Design Studio project, but the large courtyard at its centre adds a sheltered outdoor space where the owners can sit year-round. Surrounded by full-height glazing, it both divides and connects the living spaces in this single-storey home, allowing light and air into the centre. The red House by John Lewis Salsa chairs bring an Almodovar vibe. [ar.designstudio.co.uk](http://ar.designstudio.co.uk)



### PLANT A TREE

In the conservation area of Canonbury, north London, this Riba award-winning house makes the best of significant design constraints: it adjoins a tall listed building and is enclosed by a high garden wall. To get light into the ground floor, Mitzman Architects designed a courtyard with full-height glazing off the dining and living rooms. From the front door, you can see into the courtyard, adding an element of surprise. [mitzmanarchitects.com](http://mitzmanarchitects.com)



### DINING IN STYLE

Even developers are getting in on the courtyard craze: the three- and four-storey terraced townhouses at Crest Nicholson's Halo development, in Cambridge, have been designed with courtyards and roof terraces to maximise outdoor space. The four-bedroom Gallagher has a courtyard between the open-plan kitchen, the dining room and the garage wall, creating a private outdoor dining space. Four-bedroom houses start at £800,000 (01223 656701, [crestnicholson.com/halo](http://crestnicholson.com/halo)).



## GLASS BRICKS

This two-bedroom house on a cramped infill site in Clapham, south London, is something of a design miracle: it has no windows, but is filled with light from a central glazed courtyard. Glass bricks in its floor let light into the master bedroom on the lower ground floor; and the ground floor is even brighter, thanks to skylights at each of the home's four corners. Designed by the architects Hayhurst & Co, the house won a Riba award in 2017.



## RETRACTABLE WALLS

This internal courtyard on Old Church Street, in west London, was landscaped by the Chelsea gold medalist Tom Stuart-Smith, no less. The architect, Philip Gumuchdjian, says he took inspiration for the house from the inviting privacy of the courtyard gardens of Paris's *hôtels particuliers*. The library/study and the dining room, with a retractable glass wall, open onto this private green space. [gumuchdjian.com](http://gumuchdjian.com)



## FRAME THE SKY

In a former pianola factory in Kentish Town, north London, this first-floor courtyard is part of a huge five-bedroom live-work home with studios and a workshop at ground level, and living space on the first floor. The courtyard terrace is reached via bifold doors from the landing, as well as through doors from the kitchen/living space and one of the bedrooms. The false window framing the sky and the black and white tiles on the wall add to the bohemian vibe. The property is on sale for £4.5m (020 3795 5920, [themodernhouse.com](http://themodernhouse.com)).



## LIGHT UP BELOW DECK

This four-storey Victorian terrace in north London has been transformed to allow light into the ground and basement levels through an internal courtyard: the ground floor had previously been extended into the garden, leaving the middle of the house dark. AY Architects created a courtyard in the centre, between the living room at the front and the guest bedroom at the back. A huge tree fern reaches up to the terrace off the first floor, adding an exotic touch. [ayarchitects.com](http://ayarchitects.com)



## DOUBLE EXPOSURE

Built in 2004, this semi has a decked courtyard garden between the kitchen and the sitting room. Bifold doors at either end of the courtyard let in masses of light at both ends of the house. Bamboo brings greenery into the heart of the three-bedroom home — it's a tranquil retreat from the urban grit of nearby Deptford High Street, in southeast London.



## HERE COMES THE SUN

Perfect for fans of design and the Beatles, two high-spec new houses on Abbey Road, northwest London, have been designed with the kitchen/dining room and drawing room opening onto an inner courtyard. The three-bedroom Manor Mews homes are on the ground and lower ground levels; full-height sliding glazing in both rooms brings natural light down below. The properties are on sale for £3.495m each (020 7483 6300, [dexters.co.uk](http://dexters.co.uk)).



## COVER ALL ANGLES

On the end of a south London terrace, this contemporary home had to match the dimensions of its Victorian neighbours while making the most of an awkward plot: it was once the site of a garage and is on a kink in the road. Designed by 31/44 Architects, the Red House has a small central glazed courtyard that brings light deep into three rooms — the kitchen, dining and living space. Ferns add a little bit of jungle fever. [3144architects.com](http://3144architects.com)