

Renovation of the 1936  
family home of Architect  
**Mary Medd**  
By Tom Rigden  
Photography Marcus Peel

# Queen of Herts





Above: external view from back.

**W**hen Heidi Lightfoot, co-founder of graphic design agency *Together Design*, and her husband Steve Gibbons, Head of User Experience and Design at the BBC, began the hunt for a mid-century house within easy reach of their London jobs, they never dreamed they'd find somewhere as special as the Grade II listed five bedroom family home in Hertfordshire that they finally bought. One year on, this stunning example of 1930s British architecture has been treated to a sympathetic but extensive renovation and now forms the backdrop to the family life they share with their two young children, Riley and Jackson.

Arriving at the house, you quickly spot its most striking features: the unusual monopitch roof, sloping up towards the rear of the property, and the neat row of ten windows that run along the first floor, like square portholes. And at the back, the roofline rises dramatically, creating a deep soffit with overhanging rafters. The house was designed by renowned public sector architect Mary Medd, one of the first women to graduate from the Architectural Association, for her parents in 1934 and built in 1936. She designed three houses on the generous plot, all of which survive. This was one of the few residential projects she worked on, her first commission in fact; she went on to make her name with her pioneering designs for schools. She was inspired by continental Modernism, in particular the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition of Arts and Crafts and Home Industries, which she visited just prior to designing the house, and it's only perhaps the later Ernő Goldfinger terrace of houses on London's Willow Road that bear any stylistic comparison. This may not be entirely coincidental, as Goldfinger and Medd collaborated on a number of projects.





Above: external view from front.  
Right: dining room, black stained oak 'Bella' desk table by Hay; vintage 'Grand Prix' dining chairs by Arne

Jacobsen; Santa & Cole 'GT7' ceiling lamp; vintage Jens Risom side table; Murano glass lamp base with orange shade; Vitra Wooden Dolls by Alexander Girard.





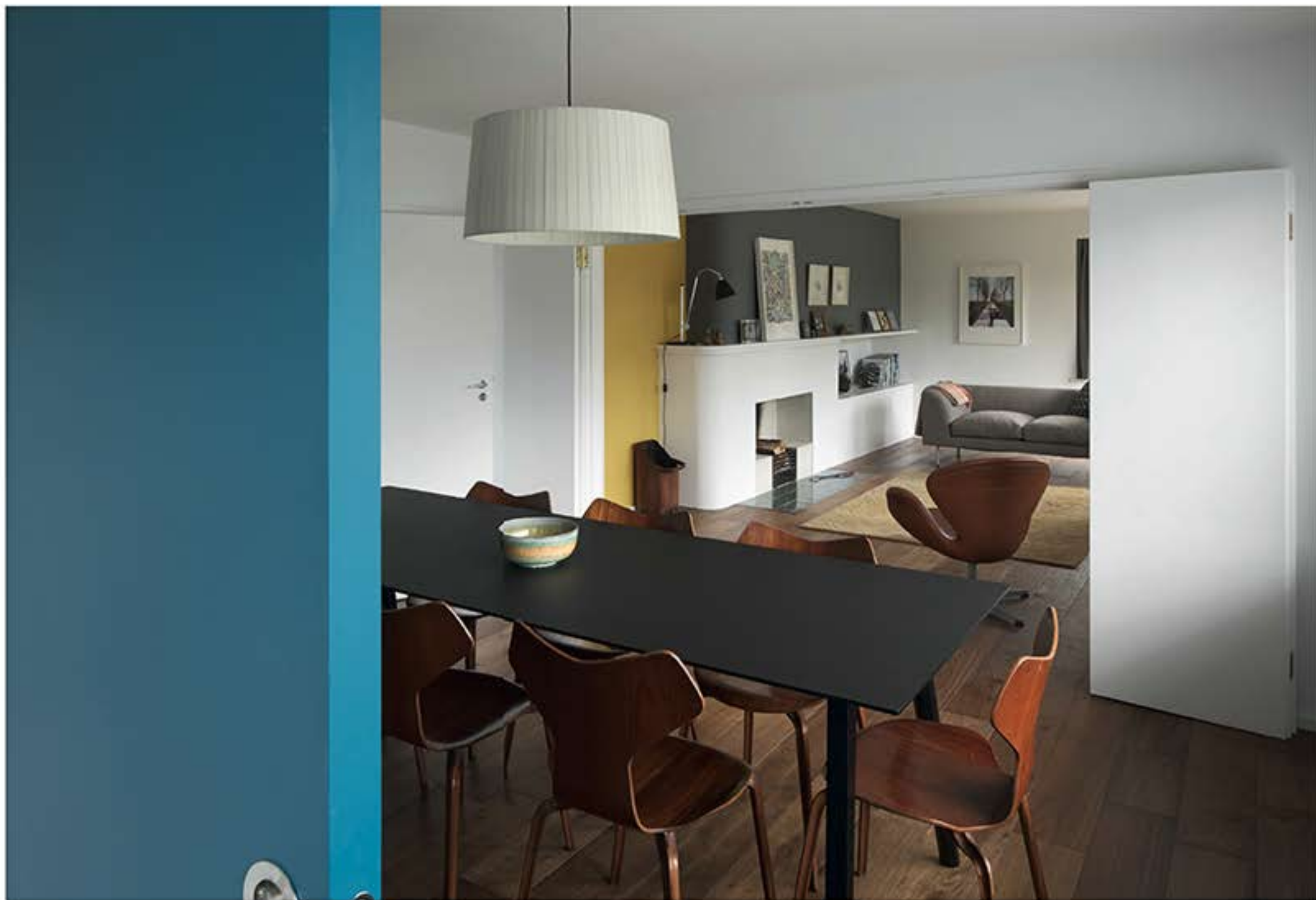




Steve and Heidi tell me how they found the place. With the arrival of their second son, they decided that it was time to look for a home outside of London, and what's more, it needed to be mid-century! Heidi explains, "Living for years in Victorian terraces, we realised that mid-century was the style that attracted us most: the wider spaces, the lighter rooms, lower living, and a space we could all grow into". The Mary Medd house ended up being one of the first properties they viewed.

The renovation was going to be challenging. The couple aimed to remain sympathetic to the original design, link in an adjoining 1970s annexe, and put their own stamp on the place. They needed an architect, and as the house is Grade II listed, finding the right architect was important. Heidi explains, "I made a shortlist, and one of them was John Pardey. When I called him I knew straight away that he was the one. Coincidentally he had met David Medd, Mary's husband, and had worked on a school that they'd designed. He was really enthusiastic about the house."

Most of the reconfiguring has taken place at the back of the property. Heidi explains that the original kitchen felt isolated. "When we were in the kitchen, we couldn't see anyone, and we had this amazing garden that we couldn't access easily", Steve tells me. With Pardey's help, they have created a much more open feel; the kitchen is now a gateway to the other ground floor rooms, with views of the garden to boot. The 1970s annexe has been integrated into the house. Accessed via the kitchen, it consists of a guest bedroom with ensuite, and a large family room, which opens to the garden via glass sliding doors along one wall. The removal of the internal walls that separated the dining room and kitchen



Previous: family room, Naviglio sofa by Umberto Asnago for Arflex; Parker Knoll armchairs rescued from a skip and reupholstered; Ernest pouffe by Donna Wilson; Vitsoe 606 Universal Shelving

System by Dieter Rams; ceramic table lamp (on shelves) from Berlin fleamarket; Ercol drop-leaf coffee table; Santa & Cole 'GT7' ceiling lamp. Above: view from dining room to sitting room.





Left: Ercol Plank table;  
Ercol stacking chairs;  
Knot floor cushions  
from Habitat; Orsjo  
Lean Wall Lights.  
Above: kitchen, Zodiac  
mugs by John Clappison  
for Hornsea Pottery.





Above: kitchen, 1966  
Polish Wälzlager  
poster; Helgo Astack  
candleholders  
(on windowsill).

means that it's now possible to look down the length of the ground floor, from the sitting room at one end, which opens into the dining room via the original 1930s concertina doors, through the kitchen, to the family room at the other end. Making this radical change to the internal structure took some persuasion though. Heidi admits, "We probably would have naturally veered towards the 'museum' approach, recreating the layout as accurately as possible, and that was one of the great benefits of working with John, who encouraged us to think of the space afresh and not get too hung up on the way it used to be."

Steve and Heidi have taken care to preserve or reinstall the original features. In the entrance hall they have uncovered the tiled concrete staircase and commissioned a reproduction of the long-since-removed thin metal bannister, using one from a neighbouring house for reference. The couple have also reinstated the elegantly curved plastered fireplace in the sitting room, and the beautiful original door handles, which they got recast from the few remaining authentic ones in the house.

The hallway now leads into a beautifully contemporary kitchen, designed and built by bespoke kitchen makers Kraftwork, from birch ply. Floor-to-ceiling units fill one wall and open shelves the other, displaying a collection of Hornsea Zodiac mugs that Heidi admits have become something of an eBay obsession! In the middle of the room, a large ply-sided island unit with steel hoop legs and a grey Corian® surface creates the hub, over which a lowered ceiling cleverly hides the cooker extractor.

To date the upstairs has remained relatively untouched; four bedrooms and a bathroom lie off a long corridor that runs along the front of the building.





Above: bedroom,  
Vintage chest of drawers  
for Heal's; 'Galy Tots'  
print, Galt Toys catalogue  
cover, 1969/70; ceramic  
table lamp base from a

flea market; Artek 60  
stool; Modernica Saucer  
Bubble Pendant light  
by George Nelson.  
Right: Victorian  
haberdashery cabinet.







Above: sitting room, Woodgate sofas by Terence Woodgate for SCP; Ercol pebble table; vintage Swan chair by Arne Jacobsen; Santa &

Cole 'Tripode G5' floor lamp; Bestlite 'BL1' table lamp, originally designed by Robert Dudley Best in 1930, manufactured by Gubi; vintage coal scuttle.

This houses the row of ten square windows and Steve tells me, "It's so light up there in the morning, it's almost blinding when you get up!"

One year on, Heidi and Steve have restored the integrity of the original design while introducing their own signature touches, like the brightly coloured feature walls. The colours were very much inspired by a 1930s palette of vivid blue, yellow and grey. Heidi says, "The idea is that you see the accent colours through the windows when you're in the back garden. We created a mood board based on the colours from the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930."

The furnishings combine mid-century and contemporary designs. I spot a set of vintage Arne Jacobsen Grand Prix dining chairs, dramatically set off by a contemporary Danish black stained oak dining table. There's a stunning Arne Jacobsen 'Swan' chair and a well-stocked design library is housed on a wall-wide Dieter Rams Vitsoe shelving unit. The British mid-century manufacturers are well represented too, with Parker Knoll armchairs that the couple rescued from a skip, an Ercol Plank table and stacking chairs, and a beautiful 1940s G A Jenkins 'Cromerwood' chair, complete with its original vibrant blue upholstery. Steve tells me that it was heartening to find a couple of pieces they owned, namely an Artek 60 stool and a Bestlite 'BL1' table lamp, in archive photographs of the interior taken shortly after the house was built! The couple's love of graphic art is evident, with virtually every wall surface given over to their vast collection, from vintage posters to Paolozzi collages.

Steve and Heidi's research has allowed the building to retain its architectural integrity, while functioning as a space for the 21st century, communicating their personalities, and above all making for a very cool family home.





Above: staircase with original tiles.  
Right: hallway, Cromerwood chair for the Tecta series, designed in 1948 by G A Jenkins,

with original fabric; Benjamin Benflux pendant lights, found in the garage when they moved in and now re-enamelled.

