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Your home, your life

Exclusive interview

Tom HUGHES

The star talks stepping off the world
and trying out new genres



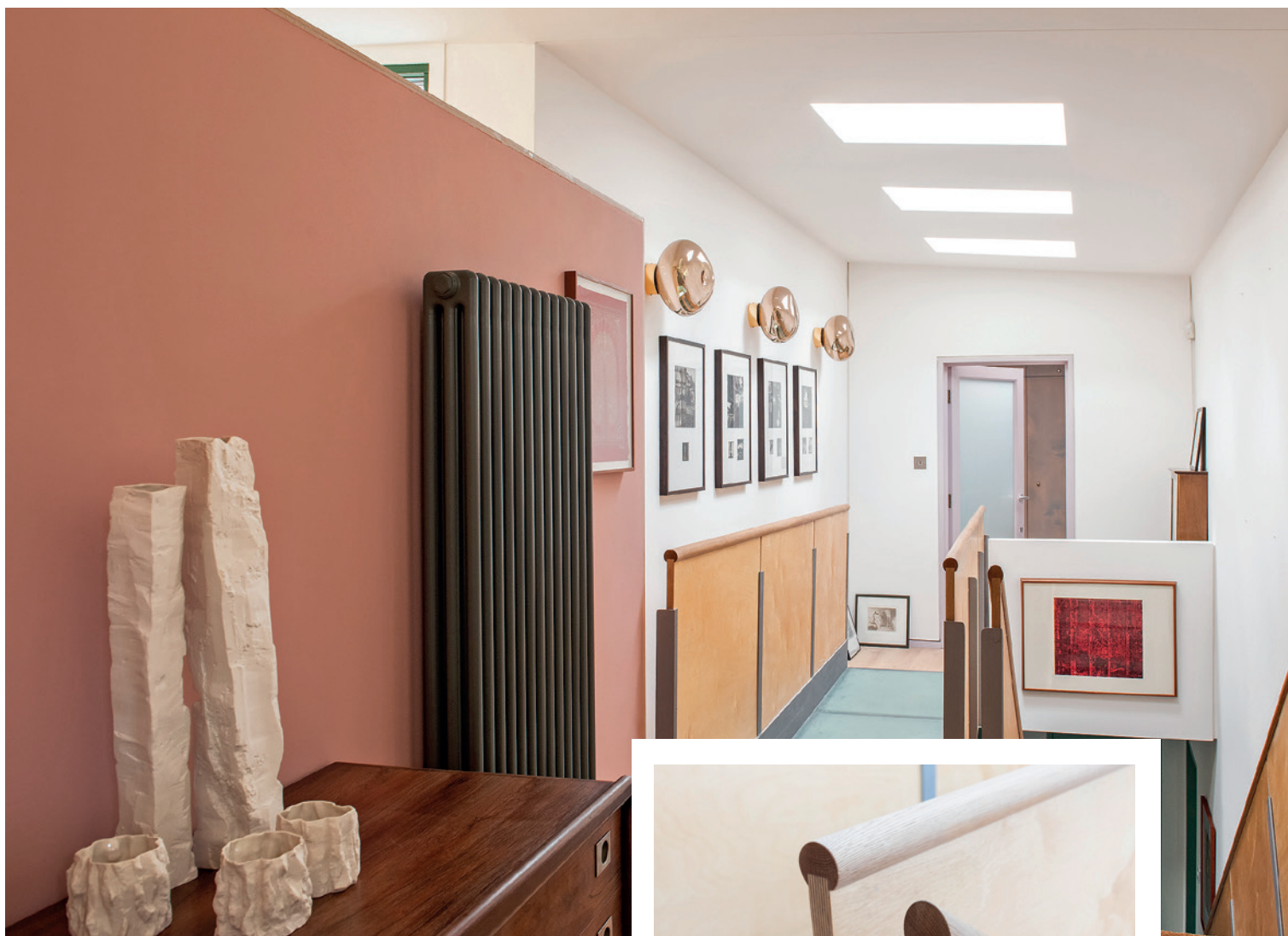
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FEBRUARY 2021



At home with
**SARAH
WIGGLESWORTH**

This acclaimed architect wanted her own build to be both eco-friendly and future proof. Two decades on, it's as fresh as ever

WORDS *by* ALI HOWARD
PHOTOGRAPHY *by* IVAN JONES

Tucked away in a side street off Caledonian Road is this award-winning mixed-use complex, which Sarah has shared with partner Jeremy Till for 21 years – not counting the nine months spent in an on-site caravan while the ambitious project came to life. The ground breaking property, which comprises one and a half levels of live/work space, three bedrooms and a five storey tower, is a masterclass in modern sustainable living.

What were the main reasons behind the retrofit?

The retrofit had two aims: one was to improve the building's energy efficiency and the second was to make it age-friendly, so we could continue to live here safe and well into our 'fourth age'.

How have you upped the property's eco-credentials?

The eco work mainly comprised improving the building's external envelope. Specifically, this meant improving the levels of insulation in certain places, increasing air tightness throughout the building, replacing some old and malfunctioning windows, and replacing the heating and the mechanical ventilation and heat recovery systems. As a result, we've improved its energy efficiency by 62 per cent.

And how have you future-proofed? I love the idea of a property that can, in time, adapt to the resident's needs.

Buildings should never stay still. The building was designed for us in our 40s and now we're in our 60s and want to stay here for as long as possible. Needs change and our knowledge and outlook are different now. Having lived here for 20 years, we knew which bits we liked best and which bits worked less well, and we thought about how best to convert what we had to address our future needs. One area that saw the most change was the utility room. The removal of the composting toilet released a fair bit of space and we converted it into a new kitchen for a future carer. Now the entire ground floor is almost a self-contained apartment, ready for someone in case we need live-in help in future.

Tell me about some of the playful elements

The most playful are the red staircase and the mezzanine, and the tower room. The red stair has treads large enough to sit in and read a book; the mezzanine balustrades are made of rubber bungees so it looks a bit like a boxing ring. Here we have scatter cushions. The tower is a place of dreams – there's a day bed for that! It's used for writing and has a tiny window for spying on the street below.



“Living in the tree tops we definitely wanted to bring nature in and the colours reflect that”



How would you describe your interiors style? And how have you personalised the space?

A bit eclectic. The off-white walls and ceiling are a quiet backdrop to our furnishings and pictures. Quite a few items were inherited from my father who bought nice pieces in the '50s and '60s. Some pieces were commissioned by us and are built in, such as the kitchen table made of recycled glass and the 'Welsh dresser' that we commissioned for the living room. We designed this along with other bespoke fittings and they were made specially for the building out of birch plywood. All the movable furniture was repaired or re-covered in new fabric when we renovated.

The house is filled with earthy colour pops both in the décor and within the structure of the building itself – was this a deliberate move to connect with nature, to bring the outside in? Our favourite new colour is a pale, earthy pink. Somehow it works



AT HOME WITH



With its rubber bungee balustrades, the mezzanine looks like a boxing ring

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really well. Other colours pick up on the living room carpet or the pictures we have. Living in the tree tops, we definitely wanted to bring nature in and the colours reflect that. We're on stilts, but in nature.

You have an abundance of natural light flooding in. How does this evolve from day to night, and through the seasons?

Light is a very important determinant of mood and wellbeing. This is another connection to nature. There's a huge difference between summer and winter, day and evening, or even overcast and sunny. The curved larder wall captures this beautifully – it's a canvas for moving sunlight. My favourite place is sitting in the living room in the month of May, looking out over the tree canopy in the garden when the leaves are brightest, newest green and the sky is blue. Can't beat it! ♦

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GET THE LOOK

1. Furniture pieces in earthy pink tones bring nature-inspired colour pops to the living space. Ebern Designs Holubice sofa bed, salmon, £989.99 (wayfair.co.uk)

2. This hand-spun aluminium pendant echoes the property's industrial structure, whilst borrowing from nature's colour palette. Rhyl pendant light, green, £75 (welshotter.co.uk)

3. There's nothing like a shaggy rug to give homely warmth and texture – especially in a room with a double

height ceiling. Icelandic sheepskin rug, rusty brown, £80 (mylittlewish.com)

4. Artisanal stoneware pieces bring sculptural interest and a craft-driven aesthetic. Dipped drip glazed single stem tall vase, £18 (rockettstgeorge.co.uk)

5. Hand-woven in jute and water hyacinth, this versatile storage basket adds rustic charm to a contemporary set-up. Village log basket in Olive, £55 (braided-rug.co.uk)