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We've heard of seeing the potential in a property, but an old warehouse with no electricity and just one tap? Eelke Bles wasn't deterred, though, as his cool and inspiring home proves.

SOLED

Words **Andréa Childs** Photography **Daniel Farmer** Styling **Amanda Talbot**

The buffalo skull has been "metallized" in bronze; Eelke is in search to sell similar; at Solid Floor, where you can also get the three-step Anglepoise lamp. Eelke made the table out of reclaimed timber from a French church. The vases on

the table are by designer Annabel Faraday, and the granite columns were bought in India. Retrouvius carries a range of reclaimed pieces. OPPOSITE The bench is by Eelke and is available at Store, Solid Floor and No Eight

The property

TYPE Converted Victorian warehouse, set back from the street behind a large yard (10 x 30m).

SPACE Large main room incorporating kitchen, dining and living area, plus two bedrooms, wetroom and walk-in wardrobe.

LOCATION Spitalfields in East London.

COST Bought for £140,000 in 2000, with £60,000 spent on renovation. Value today: £450,000.

Eelke made the kitchen units from lamboyc and walnut, and the table from walnut and steel. All furniture made by Eelke can be commissioned at Solid Floor. Eames chairs are available

at Vitra. The film-set light was found at an antiques market. Find one at One Stop Film Shop. The cooker is by Smeg and the kettle and coffee pots are Picquot Ware, which Eelke buys whenever he spots an item.

Kitchen

'Food and friends are important to me, so I had to get the kitchen right,' Eelke says. The units and shelving are dark wenge wood and bamboo. 'People are scared of mixing woods, but they'd have no problem combining tiles, steel and wood in a kitchen,' says Eelke. 'I simply used different colours so it wouldn't look boring.'



However property savvy we like to think we are, most of us would probably have missed the potential of a dilapidated old garment factory fronted by a dark yard where prostitutes took their clients at night. Not Eelke Bles. In 1997, the bespoke wooden flooring designer from The Netherlands left Amsterdam, where he'd run his business, Solid Floor, because it was 'too pretty and safe'. Returning to the East End of London, where he'd studied when he was younger, he rented a house in Shoreditch. But it was nearby Spitalfields that stole his heart, where a mix of grit and Georgian buildings rubbed shoulders with City slickers making millions in the

adjacent Square Mile. 'The area seemed to reflect who I am, and then I saw this building,' Eelke says. 'I waited three years for it to go on the market and would come over just to look at it.' When the building finally went up for sale in 2000, Eelke bought the ground-floor apartment. 'Now, it looks like a bargain, but back then it was just a bricked-up box with no amenities and a dodgy reputation.'

In the six years since, both Spitalfields and the Victorian warehouse have enjoyed a renaissance. The area's urban edge is still there, but the streets around Eelke's home are now buzzing with bars, galleries and designer delis. And the building has been so >

Bedroom

'When I wake up, it's like the art just smiles at me,' says Eelke of his bedroom. 'I love it in here – the white walls help to make it feel serene, and it's a real contrast to the warm, natural tones in the rest of the apartment.' Eelke used wood panelling on the walls as a modern update of the Georgian rooms in his previous home, and has some of his favourite artworks on display against them. 'I love textures – even the paintings I choose have a 3D quality, with raised surfaces of box frames,' he says.

Eelke made the limed oak bookcase, but Stor does one. The reconditioned Forties light is available from Solid Floor. He bought the wooden phone in France, and he collects stones with holes in them and threads them onto string to hang up at home.



Living area

This room changes all the time, because I can't help bringing things home – even from a holiday in India. That's exactly where the rosewood columns that flank the bedroom doors came from. Other purchases include the Tibetan chest and the Turkish rug. Unlike most of us, Eelke doesn't have the problem of where to put the TV (he doesn't have one), so he's made an at-home gallery that shows off his art collection instead.

The stone mirror is actually a roof window from a French chateau, with the glass replaced by mirror. Go to www.salvo.co.uk for your local salvage yard. The vessels on the chest are made by Indian monks and the

chest is another holiday buy. Bhatik does a range of pieces from the east and India. The Eames chairs are from a vintage shop. The metal table is by a local artist. The Boxes Square Rug at Next is like this,

transformed that passers-by now stop and take photos of it. And Eelke is not immune to the charms of gentrification. 'I'm vain enough to enjoy it when people like what I've done with my home,' he laughs.

The changes began with that seedy yard, now transformed into an oasis of plants. Inside, new windows and basic amenities were the first to go in – and a single wall, to divide the bathroom and dressing area from the rest of the flat. The refit took four months, and the only blip was a new damp course, which had to be replaced. 'When I first lived here, I was reacting to the small rooms in my previous house, so I kept it open plan,' remembers Eelke. 'Three years on, I missed having a separate room to sleep in, so I put up a

wall [now covered in art] to divide off a guest room and one for me. I've definitely slept better since. I think I feel safer.'

Today, Eelke describes his home as a sanctuary. 'I don't have a TV, because if I did I'd just slump in front of it,' he says. Instead, he's filled his home with artworks, and entertainment comes courtesy of friends over for dinner. 'I have a vision of living in a minimalist pad,' he says, 'but then I see something I love and bring it home.' It's that energy that makes his home so special. 'When I'm bored with something, I'll move it or sell it. Nothing stays the same for long. It's an attitude we could learn from. So, fancy moving the furniture around this weekend? For more on Eelke's wooden floors, log onto www.solidfloor.co.uk. >



What Eelke did

- Completely renovated the property, which had been unoccupied, with all its windows bricked up and just one bid bringing water into the whole building
- Replaced the roof with reclaimed slate tiles
- Put up gates and laid granite in the yard
- Hung double doors made from ash with wood veneer at the entrance to the warehouse
- Installed amenities: gas, electricity, water
- Knocked out the brick blocking the window spaces and installed metal-framed windows
- Plastered walls to half height and laid wooden flooring throughout – a mix of black pine, panga and merbau to add blocks of lighter colour
- Put up a dividing wall in the main living space and installed a walk-in wardrobe/washroom behind
- Three years later, backed two bedrooms with walls covered in wooden panelling

Eelke made the chopping boards himself, from offcuts of oak and wenge. He collects wooden spoons and spatulas and the vase they're displayed in is from an art fair. The glasses are Duralex and the plaque is a roof tile brought back from Vietnam.

Wetroom

The enormous wetroom is large enough to fit a bath – except Eddie didn't want one. Baths are very English, not European, he says. And this design means he doesn't have to worry about pecky shower curtains, either. I'm a tall guy, and when I have a shower anywhere else there's never enough room to move. Here, I can dance around if I want to! Although the room is incredibly simple, I like wanted a warm feel for the walls. They're made from concrete, with coarse sand mixed in to give a golden glow.

Home truths

What are the ingredients for a perfect party? A big group of blue people, drinks, food and music – you can't go wrong.

Favourite comfort food? Vietnamese chicken noodle soup.

Do you have a nickname? Someone once described my house as 'uber cool', so now friends tease me and call me 'ubie'.

Do you play any instruments? Not any more. I used to play the drums, though.

What's your favourite radio show? PM: Tony's Essential Selection.

Jazz or classical? Hootie and classical.

Where do you think you'll retire to? France. I spend a lot of weekends there at the moment.

Favourite holiday destination? India. But I might have to stop going as I like too many things home.

Which is your favourite gallery? The White Cube in Hoxton. And my favourite magazine is *Tale Modern*.

The shower mixer and taps are by Vola and the showerhead is by Philippe Starck. The heater is from Bisque. Eelke made the lighting system here and in the kitchen by

sinking halogen spotlights into industrial metal fittings. Consult the National Federation of Builders to find a qualified electrician in your area.

On the floor

Eelke has laid his wooden parquet floor so that it adds a sense of space to the room, placing the blocks lengthways rather than in the more traditional herringbone style. The linear pattern also complements the tongue-and-groove wall panels, which help create an illusion of height. James Mayor Furniture can supply panelling kits for you, from £65.



ideas to steal
FROM EELKE'S FLAT



Recess time

Open up your kitchen storage space by installing rows of shelves rather than cupboards. Painting them the same colour as the wall will make the latter appear recessed, giving the illusion of more space. The lower shelves are easiest to access, so use them for everyday glassware and mugs.

1 Steel wheels. Sheffield table, £595, The Conran Shop. 2 Square deal. Ceramic glasson table, £261, Ligne Roset. 3 Time for a brew. Bombe tea pot, £135; sugar bowl, £90; milk jug, £90; tray, £80; all Alessi. 4 Concrete chic. Urn, £180, Kaffiy Dalwood at

Cast. 5 Drinks on the. Glasses, £1.49 for six, Ikea. 6 Sofa dreams. Lobby chair, £3,308, Charles and Ray Eames for Vitra at Heal's. 7 Show your bones. Skull, £899, Wilde Ones. 8 Bit on the side. Z-Board sideboard in walnut, £3,200, Fisher ID.