

HEADLINERS

At home with architects

Architects' children discuss living in homes designed by their parents.

Jay Foster

Sir Norman Foster's controversial plans to build Europe's tallest tower on the site of the Baltic Exchange inspired many column inches in the past few weeks. While debate raged as to the wisdom of the ambitious project, Children's Express reporters canvassed opinion closer to home – by finding out what Sir Norman's son Jay thought of the family home, which overlooks Battersea Bridge on the Thames.

The Fosters live on top of Sir Norman's London office, as Jay explained: "We used to live in Kensington, but I think Dad wanted to get to work quickly and not waste a lot of time. He wanted to spend more time at home, and not have to wait around in his Porsche all the time."

Describing it as a 'luxurious home for all', Jay went on to say: "I've lived in this house for six years, and after a while I think it gets very boring. My Dad had this thing where he painted all the walls white. After a while you get so bored. My friends love the house, though, and they always want to come here whenever it's possible. I know my dad's friends like the house as well."

"I don't really like the buildings my dad designs. They're all so boring - made of glass and steel and that's it. I'd prefer it if this was a normal house like the one over the road."

"When I'm in the mood I say, 'Dad, tell me about architecture.' There's not a lot to it. You've just got to get a piece of paper and a pencil. He wants me to grow up to be an architect, but I don't. It's boring. I want to be in something like the police force, something exciting."

"I wouldn't like to build a house when I'm older. I don't see any fun in putting a brick on another brick and then a brick on another brick. I'd quite like to design a house myself, though. I'd put a go-kart course around it and have a big satellite dish."

Having a successful architect for a father can have hidden pluses, as Jay explained: "Dad gives me a lot of spare drawings that cost zillions of pounds when he auctions them."

Alex, Louis and Robin Hudson

Alex, 10, Louis, 7, and Robin, 5, live in a Victorian four-storey end-terrace house in Islington, North London. The house has been renovated by their father, Anthony Hudson.

"I think my house is brilliant," said Louis. "It's a lot different from the other houses in the street." "We've had one major change," explains Alex. "We moved the kitchen upstairs to where our bedroom use to be. We had to bring everything up from the kitchen and nail it in again on the first floor."

"I like the kitchen now. We run around the table trying to chase each other when we're annoyed with one another" said Louis, "But I'd change our bedroom because it's underneath the ground. I don't think enough light comes through."

A metal staircase leads from the kitchen to their parents' bedroom and the roof garden, which was the only criticism Alex had of his home: "I don't like the stairs because when I fall down I can really hurt myself."

Alex and Louis are allowed to have their friends over but it's their parents' friends who admire their home. "We have a lot of fun. We mess up the bedroom a lot and then we tidy it up," said Alex. "None of my friends say, 'I'd like to live in your house'" adds Louis, "But I have heard quite a few grown ups say it."

Their father added a conservatory on to the back of the house ten years ago. "I woke up one morning not so long ago to find a stream running through our house. We've got a gutter in the conservatory, which hasn't been properly secured. Water trickles into the conservatory and causes a flood," said Louis. "It got into Louis' bedroom as well," adds Alex.

"The best thing about having a dad who is an architect is that it's fun when he makes houses and then we can go and visit them," said Alex. "I wouldn't like to build a house - I'm not good at making things." "I might like to build a house when I'm older to see whether it falls down or not," said Louis. "I think I'm pretty good at making models so it might be quite interesting."

The worst thing about having a dad as an architect, explains Louis, is that he goes away for long periods of time. "I don't like it," he said.

Alex said: "I wouldn't want to change house because I really like this one, unless it was a much bigger house with a big garden."

Mellis Haward

Mellis Haward, 14, lives in Kentish Town, North London, in a four-storey house designed and built by her parents, Joanna van Heyningen and Birkin Haward. Their home won a national RIBA award. Her parents work from home.

It's a special house, said Mellis, because it's designed for our family. It's better if they're designed custom for you. I don't think that ordinary houses are as personal as houses you've made for yourself.

There is a balcony and staircase leading on to the garden at the back of the house. The top two floors serve as the office for Birkin and Joanna. The sitting room is double-height with the master bedroom overlooking the lounge area. The children's bedrooms are in the basement.

If I had designed it I'd make a few changes - I'd have a bigger room for a start. I think upstairs is too noisy. We have metal stairs and in the morning you get woken up by them. When you fall down the stairs it hurts a lot because there's no carpet and they're really painful.



My bedroom is the most important room to me because it's mine. I think that the sitting room is great because it's such a huge room, she said.

My friends think that the house is fun, tall and different but somehow they don't see the point of some of the things. Whereas I do think about it, I think about space, light, ventilation and all that kind of thing.

My parents spend a lot of time talking about architecture and I pick a lot up from them. It gives me a view on architecture, I've probably become accustomed to some sort of style. I wouldn't like to be an architect as an occupation. I've had so many years of architecture I think it would be nice to get a different job.

My parents give guided tours but they don't go over the top. We don't have to make a special effort because it's a different house. They are proud of the house because it takes a lot of work. I don't think people realise how much goes into a house when they pass it.

Milo, Frankie, Johnny and Magda Cullinan

Milo, 10, Frankie, 8, Johnny, 6, and Magda, 4, live in Stoke Newington, North London, in a single-storey wooden house. Their father, Dominic Cullinan, is building a four-storey semi-detached house on the site that will eventually become their home.

The family are living in a wooden house at the bottom of the garden while the building work takes place at the opposite end. The house has one room which serves as a kitchen, living room, dining room and bedroom for everyone.

We have lived here for four or five years, explains Milo. Its rather exciting living in a small place but with loads of different places to put things that you wouldn't usually have in a normal house.

The home that is being built is semi-attached with the exterior walls made of glass. The two homes are divided by two enclosed spiral staircases.

I've helped design my bedroom, said Frankie. I wanted a sink in my bedroom but my dad said I didn't need one. I've helped to build it as well.

We're very lucky because many people wouldn't be able to do stuff like that, added Milo, But I wouldn't want to be an architect because it's very hard and you spend a lot of time on things that just make the place even more uncomfortable.

The best thing about our new home is that you can see lots of things like skyscrapers from the very top, said Johnny.

I'm looking forward to living there because it's nice and big and I can put my toys everywhere, added Magda.

When we move we might be able to use the old house to play hockey or baseball, said Milo. The name that best describes our new home is boat house or harbour house. Because the top looks like a boat.

All the children agreed that the worst thing about having a dad as an architect was that they didn't get to spend much time with him. We don't see him other than at the weekend, explained Frankie.

The best thing about having a dad as an architect is that you get loads of friends and you end up having lots of parties, said Milo. He doesn't win awards but he shouldn't because he's putting buildings up for a serious reason so it's like getting a medal for writing an MP's speech.

About the team

Mellis Haward interviewed by editors Camilla Richards, 14 and Anastasia Thomas, 14. The Cullinans interviewed by editor Anastasia Thomas, 14, and reporter Eugene Asare, 11. This article was published in the [Architects' Journal](#), in a special youth edition guest-edited by Children's Express.

0 comments

- [Add a comment to this page](#)

Related Links

More from Headliners

[The Architect's Journal](#) Children's Express members introduce the October 1996 edition of The Architects Journal, for which they were the guest editors

Built on [Cubik](#)
©2012 Headliners

Registered Charity Number 1043300. Supported by the [Department for Children, Schools and Families](#)