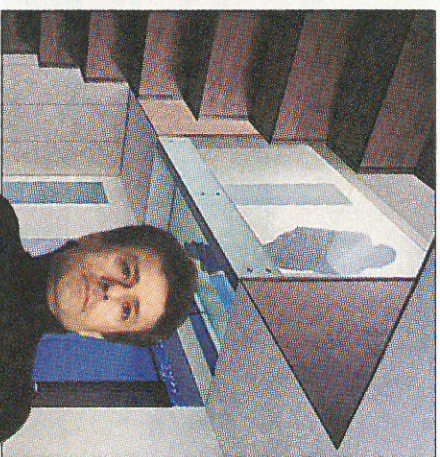
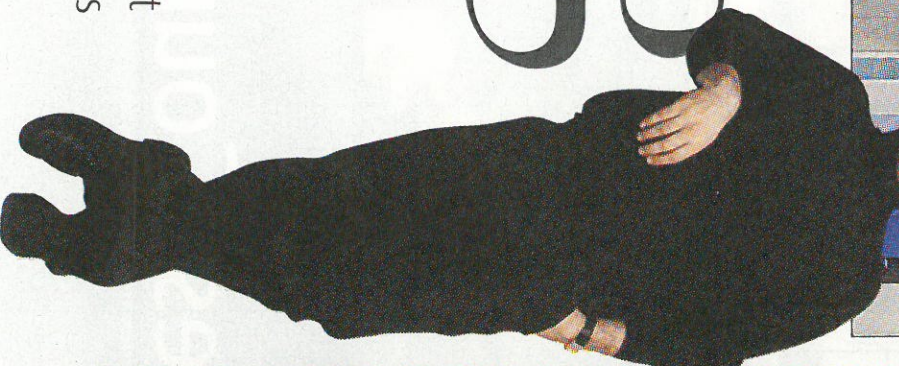


Left, while planning regulations limited changes to the outside of this Nash terrace house near Regent's Park, the dining room, a side extension built later than the original house, was transformed by Belsize Architects with a stunning glass roof-light as part of a £700,000 remodelling. Below, inset: Shahriar Nasser included glass walkways in his £500,000 design for this Hampstead home (below)



Kings of Cool

If you want something fabulous, architect Shahriar Nasser brings stunning solutions to the trickiest of design problems



IN AN ideal world, going to work should cause a palpable sense of excitement. So, for a man mad about property, a career as an architect would seem to be a perfect choice. Shahriar Nasser, of Belsize Architects, now has some 50 domestic projects under his belt, mostly in London, each of which he remembers every last detail of with a fondness and enthusiasm almost unknown.

Shahriar has had an appreciation of buildings since his interest in art led him to study architecture as a schoolboy in Iran. He came to London in 1981, did a further two years at the Architecture Association and then started in practice. Even with so many projects completed, he still relishes the moment when he first sees a prospective property to transform. "Sometimes I see a building and I know straight away that I can do something exciting with it," he says. "At other times, such as in the case of the

house that I went to see today, it is quite a challenge to turn it into something very special. This was a listed building so to get an exciting home is always going to be a lot more tricky."

It is not impossible, though. Having worked his way around the Nash Terraces of Regent's Park, he has managed to keep both the planners and the heritage lobby happy without compromising either his or his clients' desire for modernity. In fact, The Crown Estate decided that one of his projects was a model of how the Nash houses — in what is a very distinctive part of London — could be refurbished.

While refurbishment makes up a large part of his practice, Shahriar enjoys the challenges of new build, too, his first being an extraordinary state-of-the-art house sitting in a sedate neighbourhood in leafy Highgate.

When it appeared on the list for last year's Open House, people queued around the block in the pouring rain to visit its cavernous glassy interior. From the street, the Sheldon Avenue house is a low-key, two-storey contemporary house.

Go around to the back, though, and it somehow grows to four storeys, with a huge wall of glass cascading from the roof to the swimming pool in the basement. Internally, there are surprises around every corner, as



PICTURES BY DAVID GEORGE

The difference is clear: a £500,000 makeover of this Hampstead home, formerly two properties, features a wall of glass connecting living room, dining room and kitchen to the outside, allowing light to flood in



'When I start a project, my mood swings from feeling feverish to wonderful and back again three times in one day'



Shahriar used glass for both walls and floors, and a sublime view to the rear.

That is not to say that refurbishment doesn't have its moments. "The initial scheme excites me a lot but is also the most painful part of the job to get right," confesses Shahriar. "I go up and down, my mood changes quite a lot. When I am starting on a project I swing between feeling feverish to wonderful and back again three times in one day."

One of Shahriar's most recent projects was to turn three Hampstead flats into a family home and to give the interior a "wow" factor. This he has managed with an enormous double reception room with a huge leather storage unit, the focal point of a space looking out on to an immaculate, contemporary garden behind.

DOWNSTAIRS, the basement has been opened up and extensively dug out to bring an enormous amount of light in: it now looks out on to a small courtyard and its boundary is a huge wall of water, lit up to startling effect at night. Just down the road, an unexceptional house from the front has been completely remodelled at the back to reflect the tropical planting of the garden in the house. All of these projects have one thing in common — joyfulness. Shahriar introduces some real fun into previously quite unremarkable buildings and often gives his clients something they never really knew they wanted. And it

Top: Shahriar's £3.2 million project turned this narrow house in Sheldon Avenue, Highgate, into a U-shaped home based around a central meeting area by using a glazed, triple-height cascading atrium. This allows light into the heart of the house and offers views from all floors to the rear garden and the golf course beyond. According to the architect, the design was inspired by the layout of a chapter house, with each room acting as a "cell" for retreat, contemplation, rest and sleep

is that ability that fires him up every time. "When the project is ready and completed, it is exciting in a different way and worrying at the same time. It is also quite an emotional time. I feel more emotional about the buildings than anything else, really. It is difficult to have nothing to do with the building afterwards. Sometimes, I keep in touch with clients. I wonder whether I do this to maintain my connection with the buildings."

Belsize Architects, 48 Parkhill Road, NW3 (020 7462 4420, www.belsizearchitects.com).

Angela Linforth