



MARK THOMPSON

Mark Thompson, a theatre designer, has worked extensively with the Royal National Theatre and RSC, as well as on several West End hits including Art, The Blue Room and Arcadia.

“ I was designing *The Unexpected Man* at the RSC when I met Justin Bere. The set design incorporated a glass floor, and since he specialises in glass he became involved. He found it intriguing as he'd never worked in theatre before. We got on immediately; when my partner, Anthony Ward (also a designer), and I bought our house in Kent, it seemed mad to keep a large flat on in town. A smaller place with a studio was ideal, and when we found this shell in an old Scholl shoe factory, we thought of Justin.

I was very keen to have something modern. Our previous flat was full of antiques and I was fed up with the 1980s cosy, chintzy look. I wanted the new flat to be all white, clean and urban, partly also as a contrast to our house in Kent. I'd seen enough of Justin's work to know he was the right choice.

My father was an architect, so I know the language. I think some people view architects as the enemy. I don't. You do need to question them, though, and Justin is great – he respects that. He made sketches and I'd say yes or no. On the lower level he designed a light, white, open space for the studio and two offices. It provides a blank canvas for all our designs. Theatre is messy; we work with so many different styles. His kitchen, also on the lower level, is very sleek and modern. On the mezzanine, he has neatly fitted in the living area at the front and the bedroom and bathroom behind.

I didn't realise it was going to turn into such an epic project. But as Justin says, the best buildings are those that are built slowly, even if it makes them more expensive. It looked a simple job, but it was fiddly – as a theatre designer I realise that the simpler a design is, the more you notice if it's not perfect. Justin's attention to detail is fantastic; he is also very tough. When the glass for the staircase and mezzanine arrived, he didn't think it was the right specification, so he took a hammer to it and it shattered. He was livid. It was nice to know he was on our side. I'm quite a nag and can be a bit impetuous, but I was pleased Justin wanted to let the design evolve. And he was flexible – he agreed to a white resin floor I'd seen, even though he wanted concrete. There is one thing architects are hopeless at, though: storage. He didn't provide us with enough cupboards.

Moving from a large flat, we have had to change our values on space, but this flat together with the studio are lovely. I do get a bit blasé about it and have itchy feet already. But I really enjoyed the whole process and Justin and I get on terribly well. We've even talked about setting up a project as developers together.

Justin Bere, 020-7837 9333

