



INTERVIEW: DEBBIE JEFFERY

Above: Gus and Roger in the Zog House.
Right: Gus has just got planning permission for 12 custom build homes at Pound Lane, Basildon.
Below: Weston Street SE1, a development of eight split-level apartments designed by AHMM Architects.

PROFILE: Roger & Gus Zogolovitch

Level headed

Father and son **Roger and Gus Zogolovitch** are leading lights in the London new-build property scene, having recently set up Developer Collective with Amanda Baillieu, ex-editor of Building Design magazine, to teach professionals how to become design-led property developers and to give them the contacts and resources to deliver their projects.

Roger, 72, is an architect who has spent a lifetime in design and property development. In 2003 he founded Solidspace, an architect-developer making carefully crafted homes and unlocking the potential of small, overlooked sites. Roger lectures widely and has served as president to the Architectural Association. He was a working group member of the government's Urban Task Force and has been appointed honorary surveyor to the Royal Academy. He contributes regularly to the architectural press and is the author of *Shouldn't We All Be Developers?* which examines the role that small developers should play in building new homes.

Gus Zogolovitch (48) started his career as an equity analyst at Goldman Sachs before joining his father's business, where he pioneered the Solidspace split-level model by building his own home in north-west London. More recently, Gus set up Unboxed Homes, London's first custom-build developer, which helps people build their own grand designs while also selling some of the most desirable new-builds in London.



PICTURES RORY GARDNER



PICTURE BEN BLOSSOM

Essex Mews SE19, a development of three split-level houses. designed by MWA Architects.



PICTURE PHYLIS HO

How did you come to work together
Gus: Growing up, living with my mum in various homes in London, I didn't really have a great deal of interest in houses or architecture. We lived in a basement flat, and also a council flat in a huge old Victorian house which once belonged to Michael Foot.

When Mum remarried and moved to Bath, I stayed in London and moved in with Dad. He had a Victorian

CONTACTS

Solidspace: solidspace.co.uk

Unboxed Homes: unboxedhomes.com

Developer Collective: developercollective.co

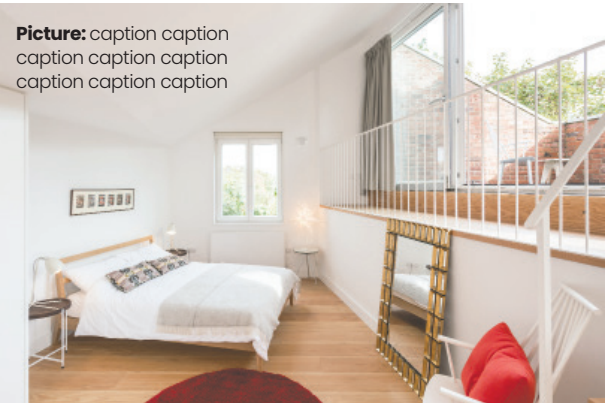
The Houseboat: seaside-retreat.co.uk

Rare Space: rarespace.co

Gus & Roger's top tips for selfbuilders

Gus: The government has finally realised that volume housebuilders can't deliver the number of homes we need. The great thing about self build is getting involved and designing what you want, rather than what a developer assumes you want. It's very hard work, especially when it comes to buying a plot, so custom build offers another approach where all the initial work is done. It's really worth considering, because finding an affordable plot can be so hard.

Roger: I would recommend approaching younger architects, who may be more enthusiastic and glad of the opportunity to develop their talents. Challenge your architect to come up with a design within a limited footprint, rather than being over-ambitious and building too much floor space. It's better to start off small and give your architect a tight brief, which allows their imagination to work harder.



house in Notting Hill and was much more design-focused and an early adopter of technology. We would drive around endlessly looking at building plots and properties, with me rolling my eyes in the back of the car!

Subliminally, something must have stuck, though. After university, where I studied maths and philosophy, Dad persuaded me to buy a flat with potential while I was working in the City. When I was made redundant, I went travelling, met my wife in Australia and then returned with her to live in the flat. We project managed a loft conversion there, which was my first foray into property development at the age of thirty. It was pretty painful and we overcame all sorts of problems, but based on that I decided to set up my own property refurbishment business.

At the same time, Dad was working on Centaur Street and needed some help, so I brought in my team to assist with snagging and my role grew until I was working full time at Solidspace. We bought a couple of sites and I oversaw gaining planning permission and project managing the developments.

In the beginning it was Dad teaching me, but over the years as I gained knowledge I gained an opinion! It made sense for me to take my own direction, although we still work together on projects and catch up regularly.

Roger: It was a kind of delight for me that Gus wanted to follow a little in my direction, although he has also carved out his own territory. All his work has been with very good architects, and he's embraced design quality, which is something I feel strongly about too. He did a wonderful job building his own house, and we have shared information and learnt from one other along the way.

Tell us more about your careers

Roger: It's been a long career, as I started out in my



Pictures: Gus inherited an enthusiasm for property development from his architect father, Roger. His own three-bedroom home, Zog House, has smooth white external render and aluminium grey panels which contrast with the rough concrete interior.

twenties, and the high points are always starting and finishing a project. It's a creative journey, which takes time, but the results will stand for many years. Every single day of my life my pen is out and I'm sketching and painting watercolours, wherever I am.

Solidspace has been going for sixteen years now, and we started off with a building called One Centaur Street. We bought the site at auction and appointed dRMM Architects. After three planning applications we built a four-storey, four-unit building constructed around three zones, including balconies, winter gardens and double-height living spaces. It's a completely new concept, with voids allowing you to see through the space.

We've just launched our campaign for small sites, to demonstrate to local authorities that there is an opportunity for them to use gap sites to provide more housing; and we're great advocates of independent house building, which gives people the chance to put their own stamp and personality on a home.



Gus: Building my own home was a real turning point in many ways. Our site helped to dictate the shape and layout, with storeys offset by half levels. Solidspace calls this the split-section, and it has become the DNA to all its designs, with a flexible layout incorporating voids and galleries, creating a sense of space and connection between the rooms.

I'd always been frustrated because people weren't willing to pay more to live in environmentally friendly developments, making them commercially hard to justify. Self-builders are prepared to spend more on making their homes sustainable, and I became involved with the National Custom and Self Build Association (NaCSBA) and was elected to the committee.

Dad and I carried on doing projects at Solidspace together and brought in some other investors. I then went to the London Business School to study for an MBA and really wanted to take the business much more along the self-build route, so I decided to set up a new company with the idea of offering more self-build and custom build projects.

Above: Built in 2016 by Roger Zogolovitch in Poole, The Houseboat was an experimental design. The split-levels use the Solidspace DNA, with the eat/live/work sectional arrangement maintained, making a single volume under the upturned hulls.

Over the past few years we've acquired several sites and have almost finished Blenheim Grove, our first project. Custom build is basically self-build made easy. We find the land, get planning and build the shells of the houses, then people can design the interiors exactly as they wish – working with their own designers and bringing in builders to do the work.

Describe your own homes

Gus: My wife, Patti, and I spent years waiting to build on a plot of land in Queen's Park, north-west London. There were some rundown garages on the overgrown site, which had already been refused planning permission on four occasions, with a legal condition that it should remain as parking space. Most people would have run a mile, but fortunately my dad is an optimist who felt that good design would win through in the end.

Our split-level home was built using prefabricated concrete panels, imported from Germany, and when we told people that we were building a concrete house some felt it would be really impractical for a young family. The last thing we wanted was to build a cold, soulless concrete box, though, so we chose fixtures and fittings which would soften the effect.

Roger: I'm based in London and we built The Houseboat on a site overlooking Poole Harbour as a holiday home. The site and home relieve the pressures and stresses of the city. We'd owned the plot for a long time and invited several architects to look at it, before deciding to collaborate with Meredith Bowles of Mole Architects.

The design was inspired by upturned boat hulls, propped together on a sea wall, and was built with an in-situ concrete base and a curved upper shell made from Douglas fir, reaching to the sky.

The butterfly-shaped plan splits accommodation between two wings, connected with steps and landings which bridge the voids. Using the Solidspace split-section DNA of eat-live-work allows privacy within an open-plan layout. It's so difficult with families these days where children are often quite isolated, and this layout brings everyone together.

The Houseboat has won several awards, including the RIBA Stephen Lawrence Award in 2017, and we now rent it out as a holiday home. We bought some more land, and I'm currently designing and building a little art studio as well as another holiday let house, so there are plans afoot.