



PAUL LEACH PHOTOGRAPHY

## The Glass-Encased Stairwell

Architect Martin Bell of Transform Architects shares one of his favourite design ideas



**Martin Bell**

Martin Bell is a RIBA chartered architect and director of Transform Architects ([transformarchitects.com](http://transformarchitects.com))

In this project, there was a split level on the ground floor of the building caused by the half basement below. It made sense to continue the main staircase directly above the basement staircase — however, that meant cutting through the middle of the living space on the ground floor.

When we designed the concept, the client looked at the 3D model and was concerned that having the staircase in the middle of the plan would obstruct the views and light from the 3.5m-high open plan spaces. Instead, by introducing structural glazing to encase the stairs, the views from the rooms aren't restricted and the staircase becomes a lightweight, contemporary acoustic divider between the zones in the open

plan space. The wooden treads are suspended into the glass and the sheets of glass are triple-laminated to take the weight of the stairs.

Including this type of design feature requires consideration though, especially with projects such as this where the ceilings are so high. Staircases are put in typically once the windows and doors are in, and so getting the large expanses of glass (which obviously don't bend) into the house requires a specialist stair company. Here, the longest panel of glass was 5.6m long, running between floors.

My advice would firstly be to keep the building floor to ceiling heights a standard height, and then pay close attention to the design for access and installation, as mistakes can be costly. **H**