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Patrick Ellard lives and breathes Span. His parents moved to New Ash Green, Kent, the only entire village to be planned by Span, in 1969. The family moved to Manchester in 1979 but five years later they packed up and, you guessed it, moved back. Patrick was a Span kid. 'I just saw everywhere else as unusual. I lived in a Span house, went shopping in a Span shopping centre and went to school in a Span school,' he tells me. It wasn't long before he was lured back. After years of renting grotty accommodation in London, Patrick and his partner, Alison Oakley, moved into their charming bungalow in New Ash Green.

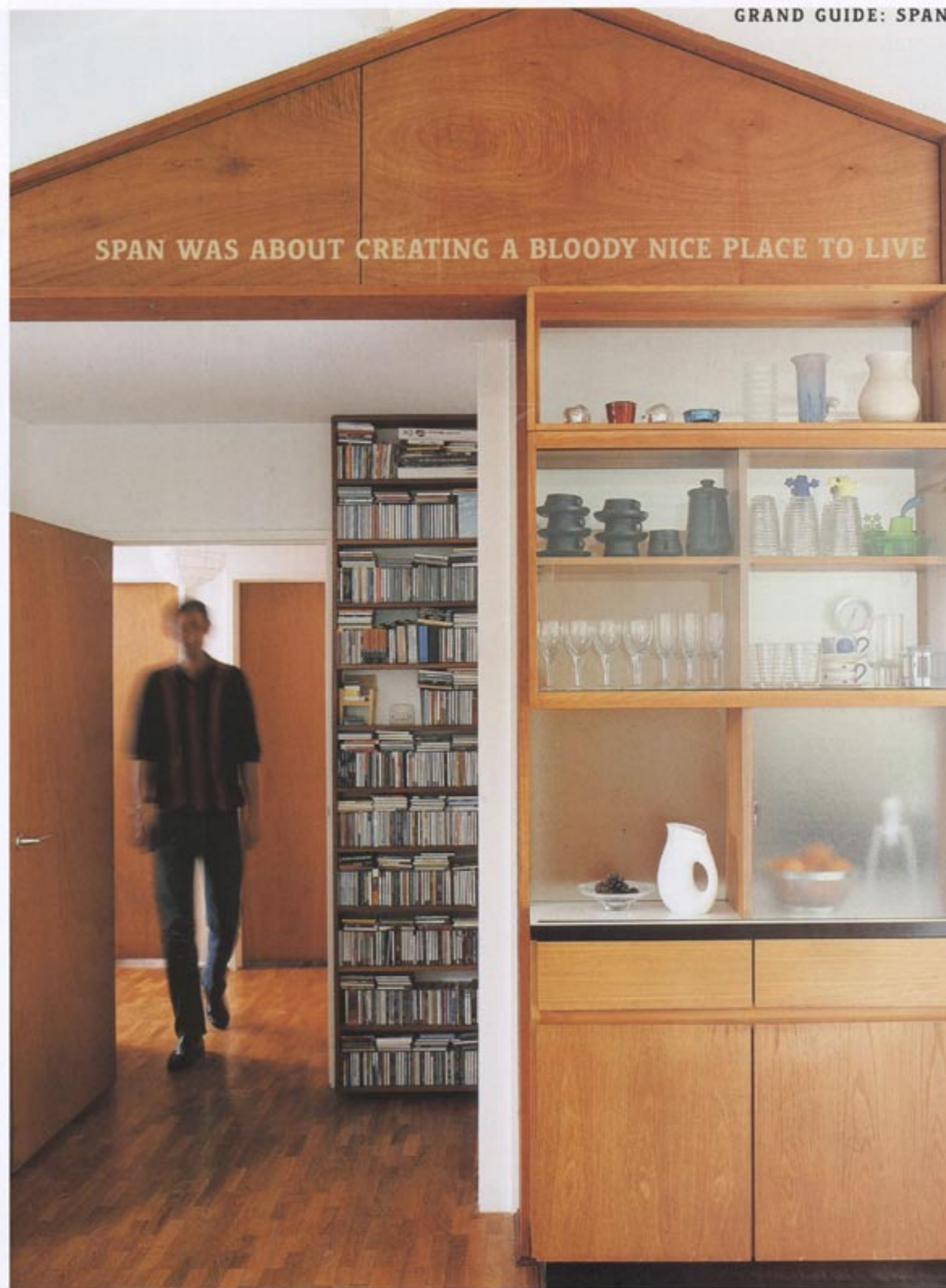
But Patrick's interest in the scheme doesn't stop there. He really is 'Mr Span' and must be the authority on its history. Having begun his own research into the period in 1997 (Patrick is an architecture and design historian and lecturer), he's now working on a book and exhibition on the subject (alongside Neil Bingham, among others, whose house also features in this issue). It therefore comes as no surprise that Patrick would want to live in a Span house. But going back to where you've grown up? It's not for everyone. 'There were questions,' he says. 'Should I go back to my old village? We weighed up what we could afford to buy in and out of London, as well as knowing that this was our only chance to buy an architect-designed house.' So, like many, Patrick and Alison decided to take their highfalutin standards outside London and Span fitted the bill.

Their exacting expectations led to the choice of a bungalow. The couple could afford a three-bed house in the village but they plumped for a two-bed semi-detached bungalow. They passed up more space as well as an upstairs. Why? The bungalow had had one owner who was a Span devotee, meaning that all the original fittings were intact. Patrick and Alison didn't want a house that had been stripped of all its good bits. There were original doors, windows, taps, tiles, handles and a parquet floor that had been hidden under Axminster for 30 years. Patrick's grin says it all. The original kitchen still exists, as does the original bathroom suite (made by Royal Doulton, meaning it still looks brand new), except for the toilet seat, which is a story in itself.

Recently, the seat finally caved in and had to be replaced. Easy, you think. Pop down to the local DIY store. But things are never that easy where Span and Patrick are concerned. He was after a replica. It had to be black and look pretty much the same as the last one. 'You can't buy black toilet seats these days,' he says, 'well, ones that haven't got scalloped edges!' Ooh, Span and scalloped edges. Any true devotee knows that the two just don't go. So Patrick got on the web. The old toilet seat still had its original maker's stamp and he traced the company, still in business in Manchester. Remarkably, it ▶



This page, clockwise from above, Patrick and Alison at the entrance to their Span bungalow; the doors, handles and wood floor are all original; landscape is an important element of the Span vision; Span employed graphic designers to create house numbers. Opposite page, an integral storage unit divides the open-plan living room and kitchen



SPAN WAS ABOUT CREATING A BLOODY NICE PLACE TO LIVE