

THE HOME FRONT

A Bachelor Reboots

A London executive replaces a traditional home with a modern white loft



HIDE AND SEEK The living room has a television behind what appears to be a mirror, far left; the kitchen's center island, top; the master bedroom has a glass wall that turns opaque with the flip of a switch, center above; the building is in London's Shad Thames neighborhood, known for a growing number of art galleries, above; Sean Ramsden, left; the dining room is surrounded by glass on three sides, below left.

BY CANDACE JACKSON

AFTER YEARS IN a traditional English flat, Sean Ramsden decided to clean house.

Moving from a home with a Georgian pedigree, ornate woodwork, carpeting and old-world art, Mr. Ramsden switched to a minimalist white cube-like loft in London's trendy Shad Thames neighborhood. Filled inside and out with large glass windows, it has a funky inverted layout and is decorated with contemporary abstract artworks and some modular furniture.

The 41-year-old CEO of a British food-export company, who is divorced, said his ex-wife picked out the old place. The spare aesthetic fits better with his detail-oriented, "ordered and tidy" tendencies. "This place suits his personality more," said Alexandra Sterling, a friend who works at a contemporary-art gallery and helped him choose several of his pieces. "If you know Sean, you know instantly that this is his spot." Plus, the space is well suited for hosting dinner parties and larger gatherings given his bachelor lifestyle.

The 2,700-square-foot, two-bedroom flat is spread across three levels. The first floor holds the bedrooms, including a cube-like guest room decorated with a double bed and bright red chair as an accent. The master bedroom and bathroom are one big space with their own entryway that opens up to a central glass atrium that stretches to the

second story. Initially open with glass walls, the master-bedroom suite can be closed off from the rest of the home with a type of glass that turns from clear to opaque at the flip of a switch.

On the second floor, the living room has white walls, vaulted ceilings with blonde wood support beams, wide-plank, dark wood floors and a second entryway. The room doesn't have much more than a U-shaped modular couch accented with a handful of colorful pillows and a glass coffee table. Art includes a huge abstract painting of mostly black and white splatters of paint by British artist Kate Palmer. On the wall directly opposite are the heads of two large springboks, a species of gazelle, hunted on an annual big game trip to South Africa.

"I'm going back in a couple months and am aiming to get a zebra," joked Mr. Ramsden. "I think the color scheme would go quite well."

Also on the second level is a contemporary-looking kitchen with a curved white wall and three wine refrigerators. A space-age-looking toaster and a coffee maker sit on the otherwise-empty stone countertops. Mr. Ramsden, who said he entertains about once a month, admitted the kitchen is mostly used by caterers. Upstairs, on the third floor, there's a dining room surrounded by windows on three sides, overlooking the shingled rooftops and gardens below. Upholstered chairs surround a long black table overlooking a manicured row of trees on one side and a sculptural black-and-white fossil on the other.



As much as Mr. Ramsden loved the open living plan, he found elements of it a bit too open for his tastes. He enlisted architect and friend Paul McAneary for an extensive remodel, including helping him find more privacy in the glass-filled apartment. At the time, a central master bathroom was visible from the living room and kitchen through glass walls. The solution was the electronic glass which becomes opaque. Usually used for smaller windows or glass doors, the glass also divides the master bedroom and kitchen areas. "The flat doesn't really work otherwise," said Mr. Ramsden. Plus, "it's quite a bit of fun."

Mr. Ramsden declined to say what

he paid for his place, which he purchased in 2010 with a 70-year lease. A local estate agent said a similar apartment in the neighborhood could cost as much as £2 million (\$3.1 million) today if it had a long land-lease (typical arrangements in the neighborhood are for 100 years or more). Mr. McAneary said the redo has cost roughly £250,000 so far. Nearby, a 2,900-square-foot, three-bedroom flat with direct river views is currently on the market for £3.3 million.

When it came time to shop for a place of his own, Mr. Ramsden brought along Mr. McAneary to help him find an apartment that would fit his minimalist, contemporary aes-

thetic. When he first looked at this place, most of the walls were painted a deep burgundy and much of the woodwork was varnished in gold. Mr. McAneary, whom Mr. Ramsden met about 15 years ago on a ski vacation, said one of the biggest challenges in the redesign was choosing the right shade of white, the color that now dominates the monochromatic space. After watching how light hit various test swatches of white at different times of day, he selected a hue he said has warmer pigments and wasn't overpoweringly bright.

Mr. Ramsden, who travels frequently for business, said he now spends about four nights a week in London when he's in the U.K. (He spends the balance of his time in Lincolnshire, a county about 150 miles outside of London, where his business is based.) In the mornings, he'll jog along a nearby path along the River Thames and in the evenings, he'll dine at one of his neighborhood's many restaurants.

His apartment has also become central to his social life. The living room shifts from a gallery-like space to a movie theater when the lights are dimmed and a hidden surround sound system is turned on. What appears to be a large, wood-framed mirror is actually a hidden television screen, only visible when switched on. Upstairs, dinner gatherings are held around the dining room table in the glass room, to which he plans to add an outdoor terrace with a hot tub that will have views of the city.

"My social life is based around my home now," he said.

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Private Properties



Craig and Susan McCaw List a Private Island for \$75 Million

Craig and Susan McCaw have listed their 780-acre private island off the coast of Vancouver, British Columbia, for \$75 million.

Known as James Island, the property is about a mile off the coast of Vancouver Island and has a private Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course, sandy beaches, an airstrip and a marina. There is a four-bedroom, 5,000-square-foot main residence built from reclaimed cedar, a large warehouse that has been converted into an entertainment center, a gym, a store, staff accommodations

and six guest cottages. Formerly the site of a World War II-era dynamite plant, the island once had a population of roughly 800. In the 1980s it was partially developed into a resort. Mr. McCaw, the cellphone-industry pioneer, purchased the island in 1994.

Mr. McCaw said in an email that his family "adores being on the island" but are selling now because they "have the perfect storm of kids' activities and no one wants to be left behind."

Mark Lester of Sotheby's International Realty in Vancouver has the listing.



A Beverly Hills Estate Goes Back on the Market for \$39 Million

A 10.5-acre Beverly Hills, Calif., equestrian estate is back on the market for \$39 million, a 30% discount from its most recent asking price of \$54.9 million late last year. The property is owned by Bo Zarnegin, who built the Peninsula Hotel in Beverly Hills with his brother Robert.

The large property is on a hilltop off Coldwater Canyon with views of the city and ocean and is zoned for horses, with equestrian facilities including eight stables and offices. The 6,377-square-foot, five-bedroom, five-bathroom Colonial-style main house was built in 1939 and

was recently restored. There's also a large guesthouse with two bedrooms, a kitchen and a living room that opens onto an outdoor swimming pool.

The home was previously owned by Warner Bros. Pictures chief John Calley and later, Dawn Steel, who ran Columbia Pictures. Mr. Zarnegin purchased the house seven years ago from Ms. Steel's estate. Listing broker Barry Peele, of Sotheby's International Realty in Beverly Hills, says the home is not Mr. Zarnegin's primary residence. Mr. Peele shares the listing with Robin Greer, also of Sotheby's.



Lake Tahoe Waterfront Home Lists for \$20 Million

The Lake Tahoe, Calif., home of Richard and Mary Lou Johnson has listed for \$20 million.

The 4,000-square-foot home has six bedrooms and five baths. It is on 400 feet of lakefront and is adjacent to 350 acres of private meadows and forest. It was designed in 1939 by Julia Morgan, the architect of the Hearst Castle.

The Johnsons purchased the home in 1976. Mr. Johnson, the co-founder of an electronics and semiconductor company, says he's selling because he and his wife are assembling a financial estate to be left to their children.

Christy Curtis and Dwight McCarthy of Coldwell Banker have the listing.

—Candace Jackson

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