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THE GREAT ESCAPE

This converted mill house in London’s Shad Thames has been transformed into a sleek contemporary space, perfect for entertaining.

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had Thames, London is a relatively small but exclusive slice of the city, home to warehouses and granaries that sprang up during the era of the Industrial Revolution and have since been converted into stunning apartments for the city’s well-heeled. Among them is Sean Ramsden, CEO of Ramsden International, a specialty wholesale exporter of British and Italian groceries and recipient of the Queen’s Award for International Trade. Business keeps Sean out of town for the majority of the week, but on weekends, he heads back to his Shad Thames loft apartment that occupies the top two floors of a converted mill house.
Much has changed since Sean’s arrival. A beautifully executed design has transformed the apartment from a dolls’ house to a palace. “Sean wanted a space for entertaining, for showcasing objects of art, but also wanted to create privacy and intimacy in what is basically an open loft,” recalls Paul McNeary, award-winning practice Paul McNeary Architects, who was responsible for transforming Sean’s vision into reality. He designed a dramatic, sophisticated scheme that worked with the existing elements of the space but incorporated interventions in many different forms of glass, ceramics, and light to create a monochromatic wonder, perfect for Sean’s needs.”
Smart Glass is used throughout Sean’s apartment, a relatively new arrival to the residential market that enables open or instantly transform any glass surface from clear to opaque and back again. “It is a perfect product for this project,” continue Paul. “We used the largest sheets of Smart Glass in order to create visual connections between spaces separated by partitions. Looking through the atrium, it is possible to see views from living room to kitchen and dining rooms to living room. However, if a more intimate private setting is needed, the glass can be switched off to achieve the opaque finish.”

Sean enjoys being in front of a good film, but did not want the television to become the focus of the space. In the living room, Paul successfully disguised the television using Mirona glass, which looks like a mirror until the television is switched on, and the picture appears. A similar technique has been put into practice in the master bedroom, where a bronze wall conceals the television. “In the centre, we have fitted a TV, only visible when switched on, while the rest of the Mirona glass is back painted,” explains Paul. “The smoky, dark effect of the bronzing helps screen the stark qualities of a normal mirror, achieving a softer feeling for the bedroom.”

Sean’s apartment enjoys a masculine vibe, owing to its monochrome colour palette of black, white and bronze. The floor is timber but finished in a matte black paint by Farrow & Ball. Thisbrowse choice is that beautifully offsets the crisp white walls. “We spent a lot of time getting the colour scheme right,” says Paul. “Choosing the white paint for the walls was not easy. We wanted it to complement the lighting and the floor to create a space that feels incredibly warm, rather than stark. So we eventually used an extremely pigmented white paint from Farrow & Ball. People say, ‘paint is paint’ but, in reality, that’s not true; it’s important to take the time to find exactly the right one.”

The plain white walls create the perfect blank canvas for Sean’s impressive collection of contemporary art. As a student of art at Cambridge University where he studied the History of Art, eye-catching pieces include works by renowned British artists Damien Hirst and Harland Miller, which instantly inject a pop of colour and texture into the otherwise neutral scheme.

In the living room, Paul successfully disguised the television using Mirona glass, which looks like a mirror until the television is switched on, and the picture appears.
In keeping with Sean’s brief, furniture is kept to a bare minimum, allowing plenty of room for entertaining. Dominating the living room is Jasper Morrison’s modern classic Place sofa for Vitra, a low-slung design that can be adapted, owing to its modular structure. "Basically, the modular pieces clip together so Sean can arrange it how he wants," explains Paul. "We reviewed a number of different sofas and in the end, we took Sean along and only showed him this one because we were so confident that he would like it. He did!"

In relation to the living room, the connecting bespoke kitchen is comparatively small, defined by smart white cabinets teamed with a stunning balck worktop. The layout is simple but effective, base units line the back wall and are fitted with a hob and double sink. The adjacent island is well-equipped, with the usual assortment of high-end appliances, and lit by a trio of Halo pendant lights. A breakfast bar at one end creates a casual eating area, complemented by sculptural bar stools that add the finishing flourish.

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Commenting on the size of the kitchen, Paul says, “This is not a chef’s kitchen, nor does it need to be. When Sean throws parties, he has outside caterers. This kitchen is simply used for preparing hors d’oeuvres.”

The master bedroom is located downstairs and was originally open to the ensuite bathroom, but Paul decided to keep the existing layout, but installed a Smart Glass wall to create a sense of privacy. Smart Glass is also used to partially separate the luxurious bedroom (complete with an enormous Harrods bed dressed in Fendi Casa bedding) from the dressing room. Here, wall-in-wardrobes in western red cedar make a style statement and help to maintain a minimalist and clutter-free space.

“Sean travels a lot during the week and he looks forward to coming home,” says Paul. “We have created the perfect place for him to escape the stresses of the week and have a good time entertaining friends.”

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**Legend**
1. Dining
2. Storage
3. Light well
4. Kitchen
5. Bathroom
6. Entry
7. Living
8. Bedroom
9. Hall to stairs
10. Study
11. Bedroom
12. Walk-in robe
13. Balcony

**project particulars**

This project was designed by Paul McAnear of Paul McAnear Architects
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**LIVING ROOM**

Sofa: Vitra (Vitra.com)
Coffee table & drinks cabinet: Bespoke
Floor: Timber with Farrow & Ball finish (farrow-ballroom.com)

**WALLS**
Farrow & Ball (farrow-ballroom.com)

**MINI-IN-TELEVISION**
Moreno Glasses by Schott (schott.com)

**KITCHEN**

Cabinetry: Bespoke lacquered units from Paul McAnear Architects
Worktop: Slate from Paul McAnear Architects
Tap: Vola (volacom.com.au)
Lights: Flos (flos.com.au)

**FLOOR**
Timber with Farrow & Ball finish (farrow-ballroom.com)

**BEDROOM**
Bed: Harrods (harrods.com)
Bedding: Fendi Casa (baseluxury.com.au)