

# DESIGNING WAYS

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*for people in the world of design*

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**Trehotel** in harmony with nature • **Pez Vela** beach restaurant in Barcelona • multi-functional **Shanghai Oriental Sports Center** • **Tex-Tonic House** – two apartments on post office building • **Steel Awards 2011** honour excellence in engineering • Celebrate summer in **On the Terrace**

plus **Controlling the Light** windows supplement





# Tex-Tonic House

a double-height penthouse apartment in Victoria, London

*The client's brief in this invited competition was to design two apartments on the top floor of an existing Central London post office and Phillips de Pury art auction house in Victoria, London. The client expressed a wish for large volume 'loft' spaces and his desire for a contemporary design and functionality. Paul McAnearny Architects' response won the competition with a proposal for expressed natural tectonics through numerous new details, and even developing a new material type – of cast timber bronze.*





### Design concept

Because the two apartments are situated on top of an existing Central London post office, the postal delivery system was the inspirational source of the concept design. Paul McAnearney Architects responded to the brief by expressing and magnifying the 'post box component-concept-element' into large boxes of natural materials.

Three boxes were placed within the large double-height loft space to provide bedrooms. They also provide space for the master bedroom walk-in wardrobe, an *en suite* bathroom and a shared bathroom. In line with contemporary domesticity, the private area is relatively modest in size. The client expressed the desire to have a large versatile living space – perfect for relaxation and entertainment, which is why the living area is spacious and is suitable for multipurpose events.

The overall architectural language is modest and dramatic at the same time: mixed timber tectonics were applied with an emphasis on their texture and intrinsic beauty. The amount of 'vertical natural light' flooding through the large skylights, glass walkways and the horizontal curtain walling maximise the exquisite effect of the natural grain and pattern of the timber ceiling, oak beams and floor as well as the bronze 'timber texture'.

### Private accommodation boxes

The boxes of the Tex-Tonic House feature natural textured materials. The thick, chunky oak sections were designed to express the depth of the sand-blasted oak with an expressed 'finger' or 'comb' joining detail. The array of boxes is illuminated from below to bring out the natural texture of the material to the full. For the box in the centre a new material was developed – a cast bronze timber cladding. To articulate the texture of the timber optimally, the summer growth was brushed out when preparing the timber



for the cast. The timber was then burnt to remove the timber's hair. An acid solution treatment was applied to the bronze cast to achieve a blackened finish. Finally the ridges were brushed to highlight the woodlike texture of the bronze.

### Suspended timber mezzanine floor

The aim was for the mezzanine floor plate to appear floating: the structural challenge was to reduce floor thickness to the minimum possible, as a result it is only 95 mm thick.

This was technically achieved by suspending the floor from the steel roof

structure. Slender 50 mm bars support the exceptionally thin floor. The chilled wine store is supported by 10 mm thin fins which, apart from their structural purpose, function together with the 2 268 metre tension wire as shelving for up to 3 200 bottles.

### Cantilevered stairs

The cantilevered solid oak stair treads lead to a structural glass floor which provides natural light and a transparent connection between the lower kitchen and dining areas as well as the office area and wine store on the mezzanine level.

### Fireplace

The large open-plan main living area is broken up by a freestanding sculptural concrete fireplace, serving both the living as well as the dining area. The *in situ* cast concrete fireplace with exposed timber plank shuttering combines both the natural concrete and natural texture of timber. The result is a raw material with a very natural texture – a simply beautiful product.

### Front door

The entrance to the Tex-Tonic House is made of 200-year-old Rhodesian Teak. It





measures  $3.70 \times 1.40$  metres and weighs approximately 450 kilograms. Illuminated from above to emphasise the beautiful texture of this precious wood, this oversized door heightens the visitor's expectation for the interior.

#### Dining table

The dining table is also made of 200-year-old Rhodesian Teak. It is surrounded by twelve mahogany Chippendale dining chairs.

#### Lighting

The lighting philosophy was to provide numerous options that could be tuned to different settings and saved to facilitate the multitude of uses of the space at any time. Apart from the lighting for the

kitchen and dining table, all light fittings are concealed and are, therefore, indirect resulting in a minimalistic atmosphere. The settings can be adjusted from dim to bright, enabling a dramatic use of light.

#### Roof garden

The client is passionate about gardening and vegetation. Therefore a 21-metre-long vertical living wall was designed: a self-contained and irrigated planting system incorporating an acid yellow, green and white planting scheme.

The long horizontal curtain walling maximises the perception of spatial continuity between the interior and the exterior so that the external roof garden becomes a vital ingredient of the internal living space.

#### Technology

The aim was to hide the technology as much as possible, to fully integrate all requirements so as the space could remain as calm, uncluttered and contemplative as possible.

The space has a fully integrated AV system including B&W surround-sound speakers. An integrated monitor in the storage wall facilitates the numerous and ever increasing variety of media.

The KNX system that was installed allows the occupier of the spaces to operate light, sound, heating, alarm, blinds, internet and TV from any space within the apartment, from an iPad. **DW**







Completion date – November 2010  
 Area – 466 m<sup>2</sup>  
 Client – Private  
 Design team – Paul McAneary Architects Ltd  
 Contractor – LS Construction  
 Suppliers – The Plank Co, Black Isle Bronze Ltd, DirectStone Ltd and Palmalisa Zantetedeschi  
 Photographer – Paul McAneary Architects Ltd  
 Award – Shortlisted for the Structural Category of the Wood Awards 2011  
 Longlisted for the European Copper in Architecture Awards 2011  
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