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FIRST CLASS STAMP

Formerly a Royal Mail sorting office, this Victoria penthouse has been wonderfully transformed

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A TOUCH OF CLASS

A stunning appliance wall is just one of the masterstrokes in this Northern Irish hideaway

From the EDITOR



COVER STORY

Turn to page 16 to discover how a former Royal Mail sorting office has been beautifully transformed.

Welcome to 2012 and a whole new year of *Kitchens Bedrooms & Bathrooms*. Our February feature home (p16) is a former sorting office that has been transformed into a jaw-dropping architectural abode. Ambitious in scope and scale, the story of how it was reborn as a stunningly minimalist house is an absorbing one.

We also aim to surprise you this month. You might not think that kitchen storage is the most exciting subject, but a system that works perfectly in harmony with the way you like to use your kitchen could save your sanity in the months and years to come – flick to page 67. Equally, a good night's sleep can make the difference between vitality and lethargy, so if you're waking up more fatigued than when you turned in, it could be time to invest in a new bed (p116). And if you still think washing up by hand is better than using a dishwasher, prepare to be convinced otherwise on page 124.

If that's not enough, there's a host of other ideas to inspire. Mark time with our Shortlist of clocks on page 28, ensure your windows are dressed to impress on page 140 and find out how our designers came up with the ideal bachelor's bathroom on page 161.

See you next month.

RUTH BELL, EDITOR



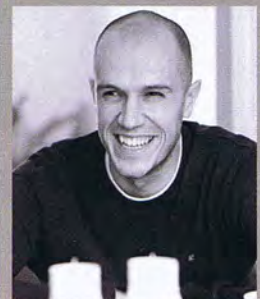
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Sub Editor



SHOPPING (p86)

FIRST CLASS STAMP

The state-of-the-art design of this sensational penthouse apartment in the heart of London's Victoria draws inspiration from the imposing building's former purpose as a Royal Mail sorting office

Report: Alison Nicholls Photography: Paul McAnearney Architects Ltd



Above: The casual dining area sits below the lowest part of the mezzanine for an enclosed, intimate mood, while the space opens up to a stunning Rhodesian teak table which marks a more formal dining area. Antique Chippendale chairs add a pleasingly traditional twist in an otherwise contemporary scheme.

Previous pages (p16-17): The simple, angular forms and clean lines of the design remain true to minimalist principles yet the home avoids feeling cold and unwelcoming through the intrinsic beauty of natural materials.

Right: Chic and simple bespoke cabinetry in the open-plan kitchen combines lightly panelled units with brushed stainless-steel appliances for a utilitarian edge.

Thinking outside the box' is a phrase often associated with the creative design process and proves very fitting indeed for Paul McAnearney Architects's solution to a fascinating brief. Following a competition from clients Nicholas and Sarah Jeffrey – to design a luxury penthouse apartment in a minimalist style – Paul and his team created a concept that saw them win the tender over four other firms.

“The fact that the building had once been a sorting office gave us the idea for the interior scheme. The notion of postal packages became the inspiration to hide the private spaces of the home – the bedrooms and ensuite bathrooms – within ‘boxes’ made of beautiful textured natural materials,” says Paul, who has named the project ‘Tex Tonic’. “‘Tex’ signifies the textures of these wonderful organic surfaces, while ‘Tonic’ (from tectonic) represents the visual and tactile enjoyment of their sensory properties,” he reveals.

“From day one the clients had expressed a love of natural materials so we wanted to really push this by using new techniques to emphasise and enhance their aesthetic qualities in contrast to the stark white walls and planes that minimalist architecture has,” Paul continues. “One of ►





The aim with the mezzanine was for it to appear to be floating. This was another technical challenge that was achieved using the thinnest floor possible at just 95mm thick and suspending it from the steel roof structure.



Above left: Built into the side of the oak block that faces into the kitchen, a larder cupboard provides essential storage but melts into its surroundings when closed.

Above right: The central section of the 'post box component concept' is made using a new material of timber cast in bronze which is then treated with an acid solution to create a blackened finish.



the biggest criticisms of minimalism is that it can feel quite cold and sterile so our competition entry centred on experimenting with natural materials to create a warmer minimalism."

Thus a crude empty shell evolved to become an awe-inspiring open-plan living space with a loft-style roof expressed through a network of exposed oak beams and posts, while massive walls of striking timber in contrasting finishes conceal the bedrooms and ensuite bathrooms. Suspended up in the eaves, a glass-sided mezzanine boasts an office and library, yet the turn of a corner reveals another visually arresting feature of this remarkable home – an amazing, floating wine cellar.

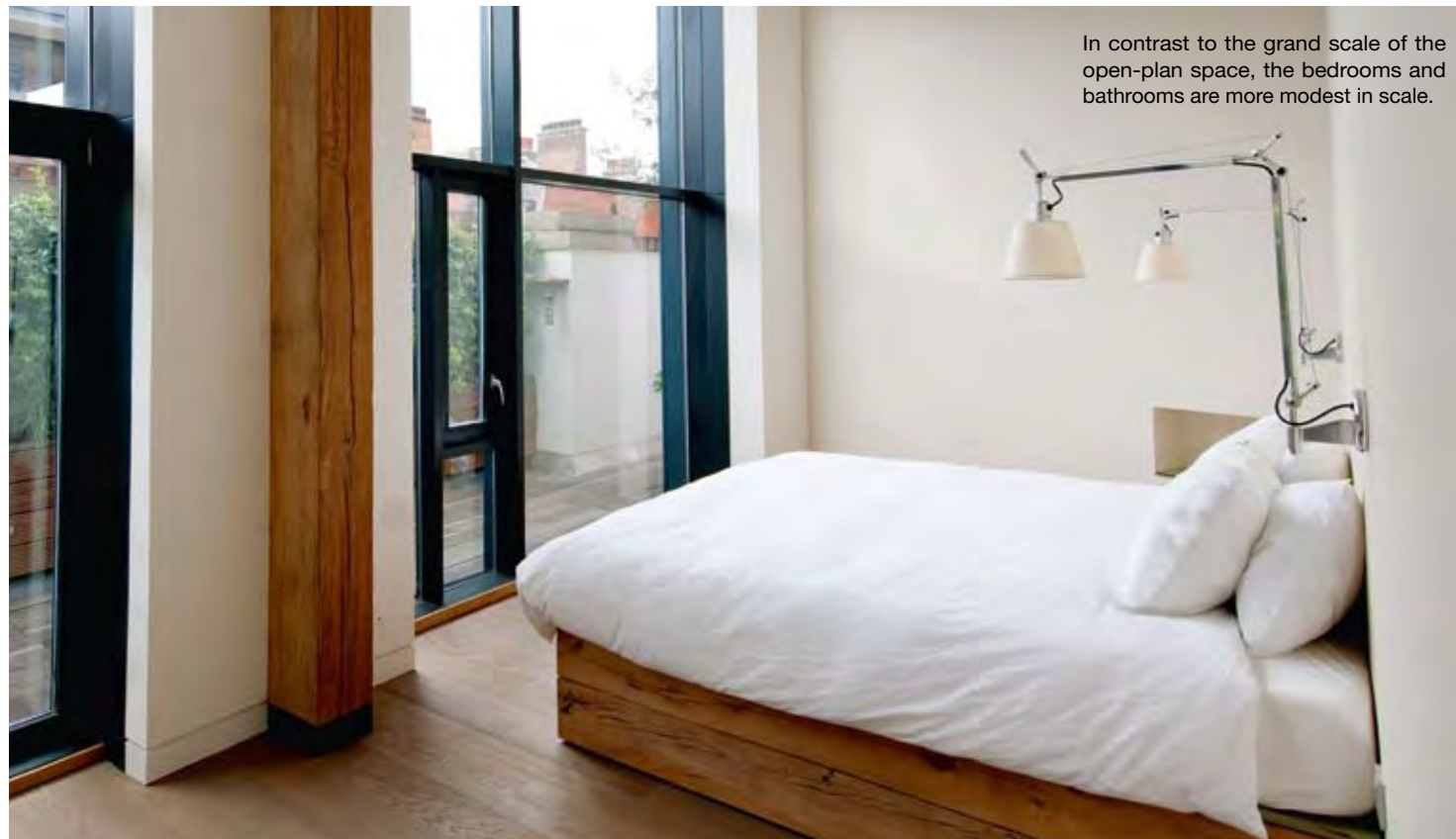
Think of a wine cellar and you imagine a gloomy underground vault, but Paul wanted to turn this idea on its head. "We had some fun with this!" he smiles. "Wine is a big part of the clients' lives so we wanted to give the wine this hierarchy by placing it at the apex of the house, awarding it an elevated position that's unexpected but also making it more of a feature by displaying the bottles lengthways so you can view the shapes and the labels rather than just seeing the ends of the bottles."

The wine storage area is not only innovative in its design but also progressive in the technology involved. From the insulation and air movements required to create a temperature-controlled environment to the tension wires that are carefully calibrated to bear the weight of the bottles on top of the entire structure being suspended from the roof, it is indeed an impressive feat of precision engineering.

The stairs from the mezzanine lead down to the kitchen where the evidence of Nicholas and Sarah's oenophilic interest continues. Along one wall is a wine serving system by Enomatic. This allows opened bottles of wine to be drunk by the glass, while the rest is stored without oxidation by replacing the volume poured (via a spout and the touch of a button) with an inert gas that effectively re-seals the bottle. Alongside, open shelving displays other tipples and an array of glassware.

Facing the huge windows, the sink is positioned to take in the impressive views over London's rooftops and along the sill Paul has created a living herb garden with some added technical wizardry in the form of an integrated irrigation system – a necessity as Nicholas and Sarah are often out of the country for long periods. A bank of bespoke cabinetry with brushed stainless-steel Gaggenau appliances sits on the opposite wall, and in the centre of the floor area an island unit features an induction hob, teppan yaki plate and pop-up sockets set into a reconstituted stone worktop. Underneath, the clean white cupboard doors contrast with warmer wood and basket-ware storage detailing.

"One thing that's absolutely pivotal in all our projects is storage," says Paul. In addition to the kitchen units, storage is a feature throughout the space with walls and surfaces full of concealed cupboards. "With a minimalist design there has to be a place for everything so storage walls exist to provide more storage than you'd reasonably need, which is essential for any space to be both functional and minimal," he affirms. ►



In contrast to the grand scale of the open-plan space, the bedrooms and bathrooms are more modest in scale.

Right: The cantilevered staircase is made of textural chunky oak treads that lead to the mezzanine level above. Each pair of treads has a tiny glass slot on the wall with a light source behind that not only safely illuminates the staircase but washes the surface with light, enhancing the wonderful quality of the wood.

Opposite page: Nicholas's impressive wine collection enjoys an elevated status, as the storage area sits in the highest point of the roof, flipping the traditional idea of a wine cellar on its head. The bottles are displayed on finely calibrated tension wires engineered which can bear the weight of up to 3200 bottles.

From the kitchen a robust dining table with simple bench seating leads into the living space, marking the transition from practical to social functions. The table sits beneath a bridge area that forms the lower section of the mezzanine; this acts like a ceiling overhead, giving a sense of enclosure and creating a more intimate ambience for informal dining.

As the space opens out, a formal dining table made of exquisite 200-year-old reclaimed Rhodesian teak is positioned in the centre of the room, running parallel with the wine storage area that traverses above. The glass wall that marks the end of the mezzanine gives over at the acme of the roof to reveal the magnificent height of the ceiling and a stunning dual-aspect fireplace partitions the formal and casual sitting areas. This is formed from concrete that has been cast with timber to maintain fluency with the natural elements.

As entertaining is an important part of Nicholas and Sarah's lives and such gatherings are often lavish affairs, tucked within the storage wall adjacent to the main kitchen is a concealed doorway into a secondary 'back-of-house' kitchen that can be accessed from a separate private entrance to the apartment. This solution allows outside caterers to discreetly arrive and prepare food with minimal disruption to guests, keeping any catering hubbub and untidiness out of view.

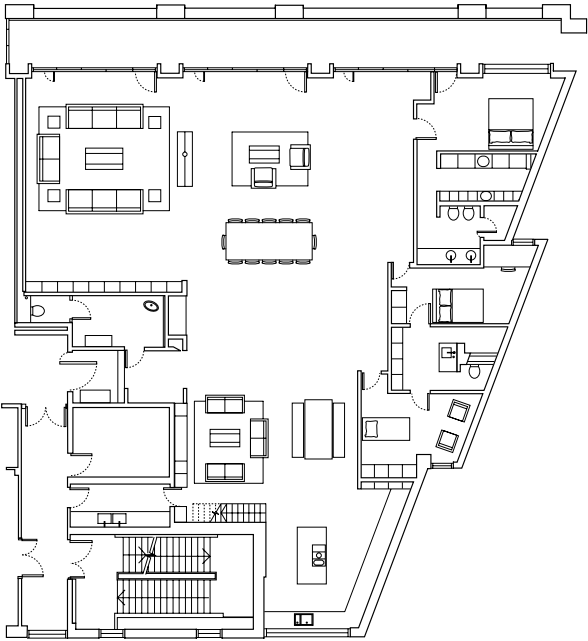
In addition to this there's also a guest washroom complete with a fine laser-cut feature wall in beautiful Italian lava stone, a fabulously sculptural hand basin with a long, sleek, spotlit spout tap descending from the ceiling, and even a sofa where guests can stop for a chat.

"Anything on the social side was always designed to be grander in scale. The proportions are deliberately smaller in the private area," ►



Right: The ensuite shower room is a serene and functional space in a warm-coloured natural stone with clean, minimal fittings and brassware.

Below: Twin basins sit in a wall-mounted vanity unit with oak-fronted drawers full of essential sockets and storage to hide all the bathroom paraphernalia. A large mirror reflects the rugged surface of the feature wall, meaning it can be seen from all angles.



Paul elaborates, “which is unusual in such a luxurious home, but it was part of their brief to us that they spent very little time in these rooms. Therefore the priority for them was maximising the area which they wanted to enjoy the most, which of course was the living space. Initially I had concerns and made sure throughout that they understood how small these spaces were in comparison but they were resolute and it was certainly a risk that paid off as it is a truly rare thing to have such an incredible space in central London.”

A three-section stepped design in two stunning timber finishes has been used to form the huge wooden ‘boxes’ that lead via concealed doorways to the three bedrooms and two bathrooms. On either side, 100mm chunky English oak has been wire brushed and sandblasted to maximise the beautiful rugged texture that forms the façade. For the central section Paul and his team developed a striking new material, created by casting wood into bronze and resulting in an incredible blackened grainy finish that will age to produce a bronzed patina.

“With this project we wanted to push the boundaries with new technology to create something of real architectural depth,” explains Paul. “The design intent with all the natural materials is that they will change with wear, becoming more beautiful with time.”

In contrast to the main living space, the bedrooms have a pared-down simplicity. The master bedroom has the tallest ceiling height and the largest proportions of the three bedrooms as it is the one that is most lived in. It benefits from a walk-in wardrobe lit by a skylight and access through floor-to-ceiling sliding doors to the exterior deck with its lush ‘living wall’ that runs in a ribbon all around the outside of the building.

The ensuite shower room is a sharp, contemporary design that contrasts two finishes of the same stone – a smooth finish for practical areas and a chiselled finish forming a feature wall that reflects in the mirror, magnifying its visual impact. Twin basins with minimal brassware are fitted into a suspended unit, maximising the floor space in this compact scheme. Warm oak-fronted drawers create a link with the timber theme throughout and provide essential storage for hiding shaver sockets and toothbrush chargers and general clutter. ▶

A fabulously sculptural basin with a tap that descends from the ceiling makes a real conversation piece in the guest washroom. Lighting in the floor creates a dramatic effect on the stacked lava stone feature wall.



Right: The roof garden wraps in a 21m-long curtain around the building. A verdant living wall with touches of acid yellow and white complete with irrigated planting system ensure low-maintenance, year-round foliage.

Apart from a few key task lights the rest of the lighting is concealed, washing light over the surfaces and enhancing the warmth and textures of the beautiful materials. Meanwhile, above the shower, a light well provides a source of natural daylight. "This is one of the fundamental things that we try and do in all our bathrooms to provide a private source of light. We do this by installing 'sky showers' – slots between the ceiling and skylight in the roof directly above the shower that provide more light than a window can," says Paul.

Indeed throughout the project lighting is a vital ingredient in achieving the effect of 'warmer minimalism'. "We spent a lot of time developing the detail of every single light," explains Paul. "They had to have the right position, the right angle to enhance the textures, the right colour temperature – which was always from a warm spectrum – and there are different settings for different moods and times of the day." All of these are controlled by the latest technology and have been integrated with the other systems in the apartment including heating, cooling and security.

With such inspiring creativity and the ability to push ideas beyond the boundaries of convention it's no wonder that Paul McAnear Architects's concept for this incredible project not only won the pitch but also scooped the Living Space Design Award at the 2011 Design Awards. "There were so many elements in this project that were new and involved in-depth research and development. There's a great deal of design work behind them but that's the kind of practice we are – we like to push the boundaries," concludes Paul. **[KBB]**

SourceBook

DESIGN

Architect Paul McAnear Architects (020 7240 0500 or www.paulmcaneary.com)

KITCHEN

Cabinetry and worktops Bespoke by Quantum (020 8892 6430 or www.quantumfittedfurniture.com)

Sink Franke (0161 436 6280 or www.franke.co.uk)

Sink tap and mixer Dornbracht (024 7671 7129 or www.dornbracht.com)

Appliances Fridge-freezer, ovens, warming drawer, dishwasher, hob and teppan yaki, Gaggenau (0844 892 8988 or www.gaggenau.com); Wine serving system, Enomatic (01603 821032 or www.enomatic.co.uk)

Boiling and filtered water tap Quooker (020 7923 3355 or www.quooker.co.uk)

Extractor Sub-Zero (020 8418 3800 or www.westy.co.uk)

MASTER ENSUITE BATHROOM

Basins Villeroy & Boch (020 8875 6006 or www.villeroy-boch.com)

WC Astro, Aston Matthews (020 7226 7220 or www.astonmatthews.co.uk)

Showerhead and controls Hansgrohe (01372 465655 or www.hansgrohe.co.uk)

Taps Dornbracht, as before

Stone Direct Stone (01727 731248 or www.directstone.co.uk)

GUEST WASHROOM

Basin Matteo Thun (+39 26556911 or www.matteothun.com)

WC Astro, Aston Matthews, as before

Ceiling-mounted tap Frau J Collection from Signorini (+39 574597521 or www.signorinirubINETTERIE.it)

Lava stone Palmalisa Zantedeschi (+39 45626434 or www.palmalisazantedeschi.it)

COST

A similar kitchen would start from around £60,000. A similar ensuite bathroom would start from around £10,000 (excluding structural work)



February SOURCED

Uncover the most beautiful
real-life homes, learn to store
in style in the kitchen, discover
the best basins and taps, and find
out what's hot in the bedroom...





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