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From the Editor

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
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 McAneary Architects Ltd
Thinking outside the box is a phrase often associated with the creative design process and proved very fitting indeed for Paul McAneary 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.

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.
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, spotlight 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.”
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.

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 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...
February

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