

Love light

Text
Fiona Crosswell

Nestled in the high density housing complex of the Barbican in London, amongst the brutalist architecture of the 1960s, is a little slice of Australia. Interior Designers, Gavin Harris and Henrietta Reed took a 70m² former cleaners storeroom in one of the 160-apartment housing blocks and transformed it into a surprisingly open, light-filled one bedroom apartment.

The original space was small and dark, with minimal light and low ceilings. In order to transform the cramped site, husband and wife team Harris and Reed began by lining the exposed brickwork in plasterboard, removing the ceiling and transforming the redundant kitchen into a bathroom. They then split the long rectangle, logically, into a sleeping area at one end and entertaining at the other, with a long hall linking the two.

Lack of space was a problem, so Harris and Reed installed tricks such as a pivoting dining table concealed behind mirrored doors. The bathroom is also hidden behind mirrored walls. Mirror-lined cupboards along the hall, while narrowing the apartment, also had the affect of making the space seem longer, with the lines in the floorboards adding to the sense of elongation.

Another challenge was to provide a sense of light, with only a single window at either end of the space bringing daylight into the apartment. In order to make the most of this light, mirrors and reflective surfaces were used throughout the apartment. Says Harris, "to encourage an atmosphere of light and air, the apartment palette is simple (generally white) and the surfaces hard and smooth." Adding to this, the electric lighting is concealed and unobtrusive, giving the apartment the impression of being naturally lit, even during the dull London winter.

The focus on light and space was vital for Harris and Reed, who see these two elements as key in Australian design. It was also significant as they designed the space for themselves, being the owner/occupiers of the completed apartment. Says Harris: "[We wanted] to provide the opposite to what London offers, it was to be light, open, modern and clean in detail – to be relaxing to live in without activity, London is always on the go and it becomes tiring after a while."

As an added bonus, the mirrors which reflect natural light into the apartment during the day also shine artificial lighting outside, so that, from below, the apartment sparkles in the night sky. Gavin says that

"the apartment has become a multi-faceted gem hidden within the solidity of the Barbican City".

Architect Mackay + Partners LLP Gavin Harris/Henrietta Reed
Interior Designers
Project Manager Mackay + Partners LLP
Main Contractor SouthCo Limited
Specialist Joinery/Timber & MDF lacquer panelling Frank & Whittome
Polished Plaster Wall Finish Richard Cotgrave Design
Metal Bead Screen Edge Interiors
Artwork Henrietta Reed
Mackay + Partners LLP
(44) 20 7608 1177
contact@mackayandpartners.co.uk, mackayandpartners.co.uk

Furniture

Custom laminate dining table top is from Formica Digital Laminate Printing. Knoll Bertoni 'Bird' lounge chair and foot stool, with Knoll textiles 'In the Loop' upholstery in 'Fuschia', available in Australia from dedecor. Patricia Urquiola 'Lowland' lounge by Moroso, available in Australia through Hub Furniture. Panton chair in white and Eames lounge chair from the 'Plywood Group' in cow hide for the study/living chairs by Vitra, available in Australia through Living Edge. B&B Italia 'Metropolitan' bed and 'Atlante' wardrobe internals, available in Australia through Space Furniture.
Formica 13 21 36
dedecor (61 2) 9000 2722
Hub Furniture (61 3) 9550 1366
Living Edge (61 2) 9596 9828
Space Furniture (61 2) 9067 8200

Lighting

Flos floor lamps are Philippe Starck 'Cicatrices de Luxe F', available in Australia from Eurofase. 'Ruler' and 'Baseline' lighting in vertical format from Modular Lighting.
Eurofase (61 2) 9380 6222
Modular Lighting Australasia (61 2) 9571 8800

Finishes

Bathroom tiling is in 'Summer Flowers' from Bisazza.
Bisazza (61 2) 9838 9223

Fittings and Fixtures

Custom handles, designed by Gavin Harris, and door stops, including 'Stop It!' from the White Collection, designed by Gavin Harris, supplied by Allgood. Kitchen and bathroom tops with integral basins are Corian, available in Australia through CASF. Kitchen, bathroom and shower taps are the MEM Collection from Dornbracht, available in Australia through MECO Australia. Bath is 'Dellarco' from Duravit, available in Australia through MECO Australia. Window roller blinds by Silent Glass. Cooktop, oven and dishwasher are Gaggenau, available in Australia through Sampford & Staff.
Allgood (44 20) 7367 9951
CASF (61 2) 9037 7077
MECO Australia (61 2) 9618 6999
Silent Glass (61 2) 9810 4300
Sampford & Staff 1300 727 421

