



## CONCRETE PLANS

The double-height living room is furnished with an 'Andy' sofa by B&B Italia and side tables by Warren Platner for Knoll

Opposite, the off-white leather 'pad' play area was designed by Moltzen & C





# Out of office

Two London architects have converted an empty workspace in the Barbican into a hi-tech family home that's still in keeping with the functional spirit of the original 1970s building

PHOTOGRAPHER: DOUGLAS FRIEDMAN. WRITER: EMMA O'KELLY



**KITCHEN SYNC**  
Wiles designed the 7m-long Corian kitchen, which is flanked by cabinets for storage



about the deal until it had gone through,' says Mackay. 'Clerkenwell has more architects per square mile than any other district in Europe, and they would have all loved to get their hands on it.' The sale involved a year of negotiations during which time Mackay and his architect partner Tracey Wiles had to change the building's use from commercial to residential, apply for an address and design a home within the restrictions of the building's Grade II-listed status.

'The first time I saw the space, it was obvious what the layout would be and how the rooms would work,' says Wiles, who created 80-odd drawings for the renovation. An associate partner at Foster and Partners, she has worked on numerous private houses and knew exactly what she wanted. 'We had a very strong concept. The only thing Ken and I argued over was the admin. The property had no services, carpets throughout and a spiral staircase that we wanted out.' Demolition took three months and reduced the office to a shell. Mackay and Wiles wanted their interior to be in the spirit of the original building, with its giant bush-hammered concrete pillars, timber floors and concrete ceilings, and designed the space along 'large plains'.

Around 50 per cent of the interior was built off site and inserted through the front courtyard. 'We wanted as few walls as possible, in order to highlight the original features,' explains Wiles. Then came the detailing, a painstaking process, aided by a fleet of builders from Italy. The couple ordered acres of bespoke cabinets from Molteni & C, worked with the biggest sizes they could and stretched the materials to the limit. 'It had to look effortless,' says Wiles. They kept materials simple, opting for one type of timber veneer, matt and gloss finishes and a black, white and grey colour scheme; 'Grey to make things disappear,' says Wiles, 'and white in areas we wanted to stand out.' The result is a space that respects the no-frills brutalism of the original building, but functions as a comfortable family home. 'My favourite thing is that it's open plan' >>

Considering that the Barbican is home to more architects than anywhere else in London, it's astonishing to think that one of its peachiest spaces, the Estate Office, was unoccupied for almost a decade. Completed in 1974, more than ten years after the first wave of construction on the 40-acre site began, it was the place to go if you wanted to buy one of the Barbican's 2,000 bijou apartments, designed by Chamberlin, Powell & Bon architects. But when the marketing and sales suite moved nine years ago, the office was left empty, colonised only by a few rickety models of the site and a fleet of resident window cleaners. Eagle-eyed architect Ken Mackay, who has lived in the area for more than 20 years, spied that it was vacant and spent months gently haranguing the City of London Corporation to sell it to him. In 2004, they capitulated.

So began the transformation of the former office into a hi-tech home. 'I was tight-lipped

**BARBICAN WORLD**

When Wiles and Mackay were clearing the former Estate Office site, they discovered models and books relating to the original development

of the Barbican, like this one, which features proposals and plans, as well as black and white photography of the area pre-construction. For a virtual tour

by current Barbican resident Tony Chambers, and details about the Barbican arts centre's 25th anniversary, see [www.wallpaper.com](http://www.wallpaper.com) ✪

**CLEAN SWEEP**

Left, Wiles and Mackay's minimal bedroom

Below, pitted concrete walls are a feature throughout, including in the bathroom



and cellular at the same time,' says Wiles. 'It's a normal family house with a front and back door and mess hidden in cupboards,' adds Mackay. Three children's rooms line one side of the house, while on the other side, there's a spare room and the 'pad' – a white padded play area for the children. Upstairs is the master bedroom, with bedside technology that controls all the gadgetry in the house. 'The technology had to be simple enough to be used by Ken's children, who are aged seven and nine, and the grandparents when they stay,' says Wiles. It really is foolproof, consisting of a portable touchpad, operating all three plasma TVs, a projector, a sound system and the lighting. The hub of the house is a 7m-long Corian kitchen, designed by Wiles and flanked by copious storage, while its *pièce de résistance* is the formal double-height living room leading out to a terrace.

Not content with living in the Barbican's equivalent of Buckingham Palace (surprisingly, the Estate Office is larger than any of the



penthouses), Mackay has his eye on renovating further properties above the Barbican arts centre, in Frobisher Crescent. Occupied as offices since their creation in the 1970s, he plans to turn them back into the apartments they were originally designed to be. With his practice, Mackay and Partners, which has a staff of ten, he is also creating a development the size of Canary Wharf in Geneva, for bio-tech giant Serono, and a boutique hotel to be run by hospitality students in central London, called the Edge. For her part, Wiles is running Foster and Partners' design of London's Silken Hotel, sister to Madrid's Hotel Puerta América. Meanwhile, word has spread about the residents of Barbican's hippest house. In the local playground, Wiles has to field requests from mums eager to come round for a coffee and a snoop. 'So far, we've been keeping a low profile,' she says, 'but you never know, maybe one day I'll throw open the doors and have an impromptu open house.'★

[www.mackayandpartners.co.uk](http://www.mackayandpartners.co.uk)