

the white book

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THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION OF STYLISH INTERIORS



THE INTERIORS BIBLE



clear vision

The Corporation of London Barbican Estate Offices, once used to sell flats in the Barbican development, had been empty for a decade before being rescued in 2004. Excited by the unusual spatial volumes, architectural elements and raw materials of the 1960s building, the new owners, both architects, felt they had found a treasure that would make a remarkable central London home.

Ken Mackay and Tracey Wiles are practising architects. Ken runs his own practice, Mackay + Partners and Tracey is a partner with MAKE Architects. Today they live with their family at the renamed 'Apartment 60', formerly known as the Barbican Estate Offices, where they have breathed new life into a forgotten corner of one of London's landmark residential complexes.

Since September 2001, the entire Barbican complex has been Grade II listed and designated a site of special architectural interest. Architecturally important as one of London's principal examples of concrete Brutalist architecture, the estate was a milestone in post-War development in the City. Due to its special status, lengthy and complicated negotiations for the purchase of the property followed the couple's initial offer, with permission for change of use, permission to renovate and even application for a new address all requiring completion prior to sale and construction.

Words: Sit-Yen Hampson / Photography: Nigel Young





Once they had been given the go-ahead, however, Ken and Tracey had a clear vision for their new home – to preserve the existing structure, the various spatial volumes and raw materials with minimal intervention of new building work. Very much guided by the building, the internal plan was drawn up after the initial viewing of the property and thereafter remained unaltered: "The spatial character and the unusual sequence of spaces are so strong that the building dictated the allocation of use", says Ken, explaining that he believes the success of the apartment's layout revolves around these interconnected spatial volumes – narrow and tall spaces link with long and low spaces, all of which surround the communal lift and stair-core penetrating the centre of the apartment.





In order to preserve the existing structure and materials, the apartment layout was designed to reduce the need for traditional construction methods by using joinery elements. Only three plasterboard walls were used to form the family bathroom, two children's rooms, and the mezzanine, which created a master suite. All other spaces were shaped by the existing structure or by the use of joinery which simultaneously separated and informed the function of the space. The original footprint over two levels was increased by portioning off a one-bedroom flat (later sold on) to the upper floor and injecting a mezzanine floor, to form the master suite, creating a 350m² home.

Two corridors connect the main living space to the heart of the building. The rear space is divided by one joinery unit that incorporates kitchen appliances and storage, the entrance to the guest bedroom, laundry and playroom. A sleek Corian kitchen by Dada runs the width of the property between the circular concrete columns, its back wall lined with charcoal grey full height cupboards which conceal the fridges, back door and entry to two additional bedrooms. A 70% gloss finish was chosen to reflect the central kitchen and provide depth to the space. In contrast to the lofty height of the living space, the space here is long and low, framed by the concrete columns and slot windows.



Flanking the central concrete core to one side is a small secondary corridor serving the two children's rooms. On the opposite side is a two metre wide and five metre high corridor punctuated with a leather padded chill-out room inserted into a brick alcove. "We installed the white leather pad as an ideal nine squared cube and added concealed up-lighting and a feature pendant light by Achille Castiglione," explains Ken. Directly opposite, a plasma television is concealed by an engineered black glass, vertical sliding screen.

The mezzanine floor provides an 80m² master suite with study area, sleeping area, and a bathroom pod. A staircase rises up to the study which overlooks the living room with views across the courtyard to the street outside, here a cantilevered bespoke work bench by Molteni & C lines the mezzanine balcony. Apart from the Apple Mac screen, white mesh Eames chairs by Vitra and a vintage desk lamp by Achille Castiglioni and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni are the room's only embellishments.





In the master bedroom a low bed by PORO from Viaduct Furniture was selected to maximise room height. Floor-to-ceiling windows with an exposed chrome handrail allow light to flood in from behind the bed. A flat screen tv is located in the wall of the bathroom pod which houses the WC, shower and wardrobes: the pod separates the living, bathing and dressing areas without touching the existing concrete structure. Again, interior furnishings have been kept simple and appropriate to the lines and textures of the architecture – a white rabbit throw by Molteni & Co softly adorns the bed, while metallic mesh bedside lights by Foscarini and an Eames lounge and stool by Vitra form graceful shapes that catch the eye, yet blend sympathetically with their surroundings.





Outside, Mackay and Wiles have transformed a somewhat dingy courtyard into a private, very urban garden, by introducing the largest structural element which has been added to the Barbican since it became Grade II listed. Where once a vast entry point off the adjacent busy street cavernously beckoned-in potential buyers, a Corten steel structure has been inserted into the existing concrete wall which conceals the courtyard 3 metres below. Designed and installed by Fluid Structures and Silverfern Fabrications, the structure combines gate, stairway and 6m water feature and provides privacy as well as a key design feature of the outside garden space. Self-rusting and continually changing in colour and texture, Corten complements the colour of the Barbican brickwork and rawness of the brush hammered concrete. It also typifies the designers' approach to the project as a whole – to preserve first and then sparingly, sympathetically, to augment.