



All white now

In this cleverly designed newbuild, hidden behind a gate in west London, white walls and oak floors provide an elegantly simple setting for an unusual mix of mid-century furniture and a Victorian art collection

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THIS PAGE A Victorian swagger portrait of the owner's great-grandmother, by her great-grandfather, Théodore Roussel, creates a focal point in the modern, minimally furnished sitting



On a quiet west-London street, a large white gate leads to a small cluster of studios and offices. There is nothing on the outside to suggest that it also leads to this remarkable new house. It is a secret house, a house of surprises.

‘When you come through that gate, you are expecting a tiny cottage,’ says Alex Michaelis, the architect who first spotted the potential of the site when visiting a friend who lived in the previous building here. ‘It was a ramshackle place, with a timber frame and a tin roof,’ he remembers, ‘but I knew it could be amazing.’

Alex, a partner in Michaelis Boyd, is something of an expert at seeing promise in the most unlikely places. As well as being known as the architect of the 2006 eco refit of David Cameron’s Notting Hill house, he is celebrated for his own home in the area: a large underground house, complete with swimming pool, which for planning purposes was allowed to rise no more than six feet above street level.

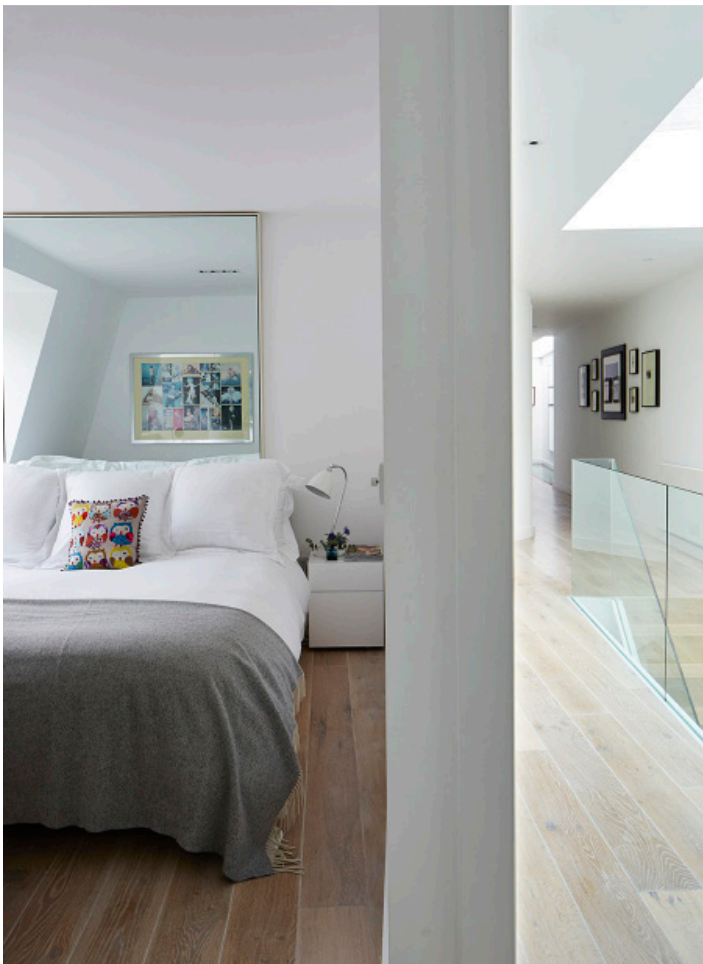
After achieving such a feat, Alex could see that this new project – which is bounded on three sides by other buildings – would be a doddle. So when his friend decided to sell the old building, he persuaded another friend – the current owner – to buy it, knock it down and commission him to design a new house to build in its place.

From the communal gate, a small courtyard leads to the front door. Once inside, the whole ground floor stretches out in front of you like an enormous loft apartment. ‘The challenge,’ explains Alex, ‘was to get as much light in here as possible.’ The solution was to place a huge

FROM LEFT A peaceful garden creates a green space at the heart of this urban building. Sliding french windows open into the L-shape living area. Etchings by Theodore Roussel in original handpainted frames add colour. **OPPOSITE** White walls, limed wood and ebonised, mid-century-style furniture, create a monochrome colour scheme in the open-plan living area







rooflight above the stairs to the first floor and let the light flood in.

Beyond this sunny entrance, with its concealed cloakroom and laundry room, the space flows seamlessly into the long L-shape living space, with the kitchen and dining area tucked into the shorter section. Three sets of sliding doors open on to a pretty garden; another delightful surprise in this otherwise gritty urban setting. Upstairs a long top-lit passage opens on to five bedrooms and three bathrooms, all with windows looking onto the garden. Alex kept the finishes simple: white walls, limed-oak floors, white bathrooms and a smart Bulthaup kitchen.

With the architect's job complete, the challenge for the owner was to furnish the large open-plan space and make the house work for herself and her four children, aged between 15 and 23. 'I was flummoxed,' she says. 'I lived in a tall town house before, so I didn't know what to do with it.'

To help with the task she turned to another friend, interior designer Sarah Delaney, with whom she had worked on her previous house, as well as on her holiday home in France. Sarah began by looking at which existing pieces of the owner's furniture would work in the space, and then to think about how to arrange it. 'I was keen to zone it a bit,' she says, of the huge living room. 'So we put the sitting area at one end around a woodburner.' The sofas from the town house were too small, so Sarah commissioned three larger ones and a set of coffee tables in black basalt. 'You can get about 20 people on the sofas,' says the owner. 'And more can sit on the tables, which are very sturdy. It's great for the children, as this house attracts all their friends.'

In the centre of the living room, Sarah placed a handsome mid-century desk, bought from Fiona McDonald's Fulham shop, which looks out on to the garden. Other pieces supplied by Fiona include a coffee table, a pretty sideboard and a sleek console, all ebonised to a chic black finish. Closer to the entrance hall is a round dining table, which has a new acrylic top made to fit a mid-century base. 'I was keen to give two places to eat,' says Sarah, who also chose a more tailored dining table and chairs by MDF Italia for the kitchen. All the bedrooms are in a classic, contemporary style, with large mirrors and simple white furniture.

The real star of this house, however, is the extraordinary art collection. The owner is a great-granddaughter of the Victorian painter Théodore Roussel, and she has inherited a large number of his works. Roussel, who grew up in France but moved to London in the 1870s, was a friend and follower of Whistler and his paintings are very much in the style of the great American painter. In the sitting room is a set of colourful pictures on an oriental theme, their frames painted in the same exquisite manner as the main subjects. On another wall is a large group of Roussel's etchings, and elsewhere a copy of his painting *The Reading Girl*, the original of which is on display at Tate Britain. Most spectacular of all, however, is the swagger portrait of the owner's great-grandmother, which fills an entire wall. The Victorian paintings work surprisingly well in this modern interior, partly because Delaney has had them reframed in the same simple black style.

Other family heirlooms have also been introduced into the mix, including an ornate mirror the owner was given by her parents for her eighteenth birthday and a gilded clock, which used to sit on her father's desk.

At first the owner was worried about how she would adapt to this secret yet surprisingly spacious house, but now she is completely at home. 'I don't think I could go back to a traditional house,' she says. 'It's the first place I've ever lived that I feel is really mine' □

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THIS PAGE FROM TOP Perspex and limed oak create a simple, minimal staircase. Upstairs, a feeling of space is created in a small bedroom by hanging a large mirror above the headboard. **OPPOSITE** Simple furnishings in the main bedroom are complemented by a mid-century mirror from Fiona McDonald's Fulham shop

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