

Glass with class: left, the aim of architect Mark Smyth, to bring in plenty of space and light, was more than fulfilled

Photographs:
Juliet Murphy
and **Andy Matthews**

View to the terrace: the joined-up Chelsea townhouses are owned by a couple who spend most of their time on the first floor, which holds linked living space, dining room and kitchen



Two into one goes very nicely

When the children left home, a Chelsea couple went for a radical remake with the biggest sash window in the world, discovers **Philippa Stockley**



HOUSES don't always need a total renovation to be transformed. Sometimes a series of good adjustments does the job better.

This was the case with two Victorian Chelsea houses that were joined into one more than 20 years ago. Slightly different levels, and the fact that they were set on a corner, meant there was no back garden. Plus, the original planning decisions had left a few oddities. So once the married owners' two children had grown up, they asked their original architect to take a fresh look.

Architect Jonathan Manser — son of famous RIBA president Michael Manser, who set up the Manser Medal to celebrate house design — connected the two homes for the couple in the Nineties. They owned one and had just bought the other, with its

Man for the job: immaculate detail is all for architect Mark Smyth of Studio Bua in E17

original double-height artist studio. Linking buildings on slightly different levels had made a complicated house with numerous rooms and two roof terraces in the angle behind. The overall high-spec design of oak floors and white walls had aged gracefully. But there always comes a point when it's time to upgrade.

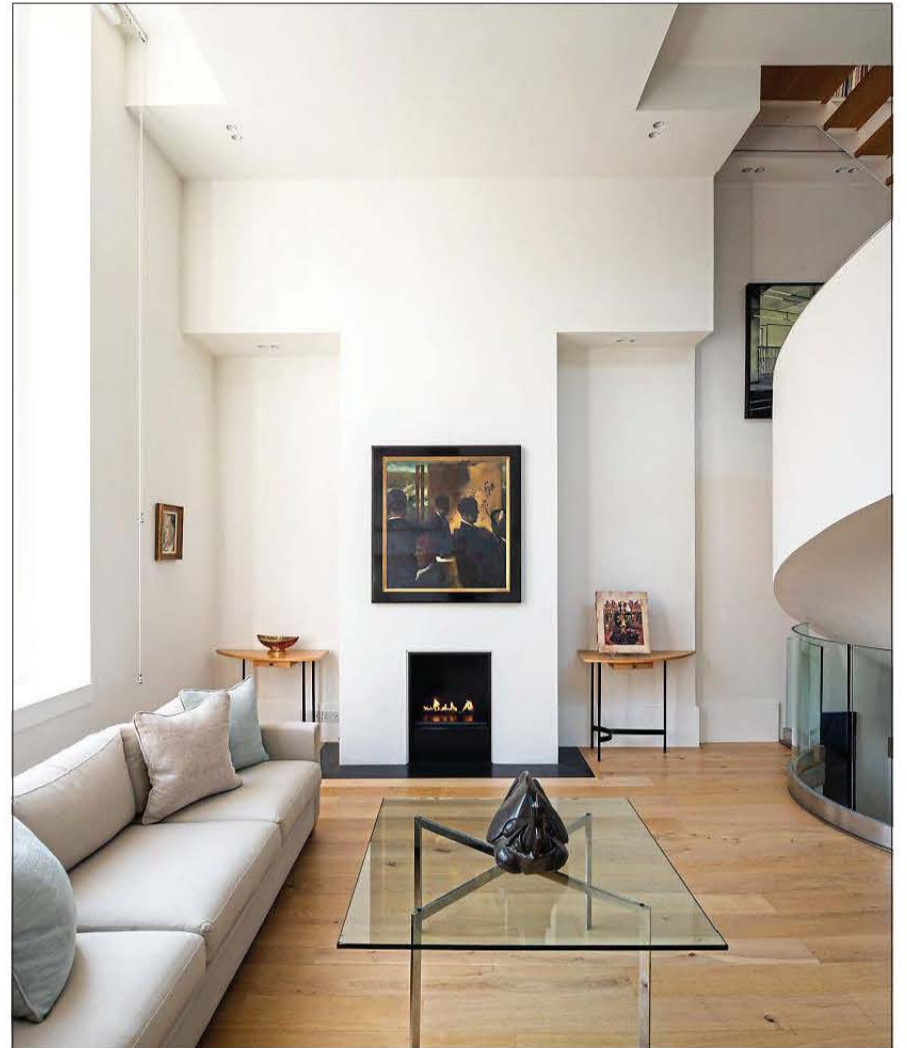
In 2016, the couple asked Jonathan to update the areas where they spent most time. He sent his protégé, Irish-born Mark Smyth, 34, who is passionate about immaculate detail, materials and domestic design, so this was a dream job.

Discussing ideas, he admired the couple's striking marble-topped dining table, which became a touchstone for the rest of the design. He learned the couple spent most time on the first floor, which held a linked drawing room, dining room and kitchen.

The wide, narrow kitchen looked out to the main terrace though a big letterbox-shaped window, but the kitchen felt cramped. In the

Lighbox effect: the long fixed window and partially glazed ceiling over kitchen worktops





Part of a gracious suite of rooms: the sitting room got new oak floors and a stylish gas fire



Timeless: the palette of oak and white was retained, with lots of glass to bring it up to date



Place for everything: Smyth photographed drawers, then designed bespoke replacements



adjoining dining room, reached through a wide opening, a fireplace and shelves used up space, making the 10-seater dining table a tight fit. And the double-height living room looked out at the terrace through an odd arrangement of three French doors required by the original planners. This was also awkward because due to the original layout, this room was higher than the terrace. Finally, on the floor below, the master bedroom and en suite needed upgrading.

BRINGING IN SPACE AND LIGHT

Smyth aimed to add space and light, while keeping the overall white and oak look. Because of the levels and angles there were geometric problems, but subtle changes in one place had knock-on benefits elsewhere.

The kitchen transformation was pivotal. Pushing the wall out three feet allowed an entire run of bespoke kitchen drawers and a new worktop. Smyth filled the wall above the new worktop with a long, fixed window, and glazed the new ceiling, creating a sort of lightbox illuminating the kitchen. An island in dramatic honed limestone makes

GET THE LOOK

- **Architect:** Mark Smyth at Studio Bua (studiobua.com); The Manser Practice (manser.co.uk)
- **Structural engineer:** aspirecl.com
- **Main contractor and joinery; oak flooring; sash window:** johnpatrick.co.uk
- **Self-cleaning structural glass:** glassteceystems.com
- **Waterproof millboard decking on terrace:** millboard.co.uk
- **Limestone for island:** gdstones.com
- **Boiling/sparkling tap:** zipwater.co.uk
- **Pull-out stepladder:** hafele.co.uk
- **Kuadra cooker hood:** elica.com
- **Flueless bespoke fire:** cvo.co.uk
- **Sculpture:** michaelcraigmartin.co.uk
- **Shower room tiles:** mandarinstone.com; **bath** by duravit.co.uk
- **Fittings:** dornbracht.com
- **Blinds:** waverley.co.uk
- **Rooflights:** glazingvision.co.uk
- **Pots on terrace:** ateliervierkant.com

a great statement. Soft grey cupboards lining the walls have lit shadow gaps above and hold everything from toaster to juicer, so nothing clutters surfaces. Fabulous details include a stepladder hidden in the skirting board and a tap that dispenses both boiling and sparkling water.

The sitting room is alongside the kitchen, so Smyth continued his 3ft extended area there and replaced those three French doors with a huge sash window that fills the wall. Yet it's so well balanced that the top pane glides effortlessly down to make a glass balustrade. The biggest sash window you will ever see, it brings in vast amounts of light. The sitting room also got new oak floors and a stylish gas fire. And, for outside the glazed skylight, the couple commissioned a steel artwork from Michael Craig-Martin, making a focal point when lit at night.

Just by removing the fireplace and chimney in the dining room, the table now fits effortlessly — creating in all a harmonious, gracious suite of connecting rooms.

In the master bedroom, an existing bathing area behind a screen wall was completely

redone with a new marble-clad bath, and a shower room similarly upgraded. Self-confessed detail freak Smyth photographed all the kitchen drawers to learn where things went, then happily designed bespoke drawers for everything. He repeated the trick in bedrooms and bathrooms, and even liaised over the pots and planting on the terrace.

"I love getting all the details right," he says. "I love starting off with the big moves, but then everything has to join up perfectly, so it all feels effortless — and the spice drawer should be exactly where you want it. Everything is tailored towards the occupants."

This meticulous work took three phases over two years. That amazing sash window raised some objections, but was won on appeal. Structural steel supports look like quite small changes in terms of volume, but the final effect of light and of effortlessly clean-lined windows is enormous. And the spices are precisely where the owners want them to be.

WHAT IT COST: the architect's estimate for a similar project is £200-£250 per sq ft.