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january 2022



chillout mix

With a *Mad Men*-style lounging pit and peaceful corners at every turn, this house has mastered the art of relaxing



PHOTOGRAPHY Taran Wilkhu
STYLING Echlin
WORDS Juliet Benning



LOWER GROUND FLOOR

Three steps (see left) lead from the kitchen-diner to the sunken lounge area, which is very mid-century modern. The cook space looks discreet as most of the functional parts are concealed, while the bench built into the island is a clever space-saving solution.

Bespoke **cabinetry, sofa and dining table**, all Echlin. **Sofa** in Christian Fischbacher Focus fabric. Walnut **dining chairs** by Dare Studio. **Pendant light**, CTO Lighting. **Jacob's Ladder rug**, Floor_Story. **Artwork**, LRNCE

The serene, modern and beautifully pared-back interiors favoured by Scandinavians have always

appealed to Liam Wilde, so when he bought a dark and warren-like mews house in Knightsbridge he knew that adapting it to his taste would require a great deal of ingenuity. 'I was living locally when I spotted the house on the market. The kerbside appeal was relatively grand for the street, but internally the layouts were poor and it suffered from a lack of natural light. In spite of this, I felt it had potential to be redesigned and extended,' he explains.

Recommended by a work colleague, Echlin was a firm that resonated with Liam's values, so he invited Sam McNally, its director and co-founder, to explore the house at an early viewing. 'It had last been refurbished in the 1990s but to a relatively poor spec,' says Sam. 'We could see where we could increase space in the top storey by opening up the pitched attic and introducing skylights, and we also wanted to add a basement and adopt a broken-plan style for the main living areas, dividing them with joinery through which light could flow.'

While building operations on the first floor into the attic space went smoothly, the construction team found underground obstructions that stymied their progress. 'The house was built on top of a wartime bomb site so there was a mass of concrete in the ground, which took a lot of work to remove,' Liam explains. Yet, the construction anguish paid off with a new lower ground floor providing a third more living area. 'I love the new kitchen/livingspace and although it's in the basement, it feels like it's at ground floor level due to the huge amount of natural light flooding in and an outside view through glazing to a planted living wall,' says Liam.

Taking his cue from the mid-century designers he has always revered, Sam created a *Mad Men*-style sunken conversation pit on

this floor. 'It adds a sense of interest and drama, while marking a differentiation between the two spaces,' he observes. Liam asked for plenty of areas for entertainment as well as work, but as a regular restaurant goer he considered the kitchen less of a priority. 'I wanted it to look quite discreet and Echlin cleverly came up with a design that concealed the functional parts,' he explains.

While a suitable location for Liam's cherished Fritz Hansen

PK22 chair was high on the agenda, his ideas for interior design were more fluid. 'I didn't want to be too prescriptive in terms of aesthetic as I liked the look of Echlin's past projects,' says Liam. 'I travel a lot so my inspirations for interiors typically come from well-designed hotels and restaurants. I'm also a fan of rich and earthy colours and contemporary forms.'

In response, Echlin has utilised every inch of the building with a comprehensive scheme of bespoke furniture. A mossy green velvet banquette in the ground-floor dining area wraps around the wall, backed by an antique mirror evoking the intimate mood of a restaurant booth. On the other side of the shelves, a five-metre modular sofa beckons, its rust-coloured velvet delightfully tactile.

With so much space designed especially for entertaining, Liam is planning the lavish Christmas the family were denied last year. 'We hope to throw a big party and invite lots of friends,' he says. Revealing itself through so many intimate nooks and set pieces, and with such creatively planned living spaces, the house is the ideal festive venue. Inviting guests into this intriguing space should be no problem, but getting them to leave may be.

x

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home profile

THE OWNERS

Liam Wilde, an entertainment industry lawyer, and his wife Natasha, a doctor, plus their teenagers, Stella and Michael.

THE PROPERTY

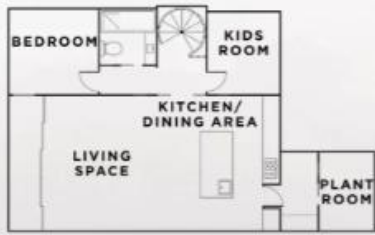
A mews house in London set over three floors. On the lower ground is a kitchen-diner with further sunken seating, a kids room, guest bedroom, shower room, utility room and plant room. Above is a hall, living area, formal dining, study and WC. The first floor has the main bedroom suite, plus two more en-suite bedrooms.

STAIRCASE

The handmade design is like a work of art and the floating treads allow natural light to filter through.

Staircase made by TinTab. Sans Titre No.5 sculpture by Francesco Moretti

the blueprint



BASEMENT



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR LIVING AREA

The five-metre long sofa places an emphasis on relaxed living, while the partition divides but allows the flow of light.

Bespoke **sofa** designed by Echlin; **upholstered in** Heritage in Cayenne, Pollack. **Rug**, Verdi



FORMAL DINING SPACE

Antique mirrored glass and banquette seating evoke a restaurant-style glamour.

Bespoke **banquette** by Echlin; **covered in** Bracken velvet by Paolo Moschino. Bespoke **dining table** by Winter and Kurth. **Artwork** by Gabriele Cappelli, Cadogan Contemporary gallery

STUDY

Blackbean veneer cabinetry provides a warm feel.

Desk and joinery by Echlin. **Leather chair**, Muuto. **Riddle wall lights**, Bert Frank





MAIN BATHROOM

Globe tap handles and lights respond to the curves of the tub. A composite wall-hung double basin is a crisp, contemporary choice.

Picasso is a similar free-standing bath, Lusso. Sanitaryware, The Watermark Collection and Vola

HALLWAY

You enter the house through an impressive oversized bronze door.

Artwork by Gabriele Cappelli, Cadogan Contemporary gallery.

Entrance flooring in Pietra Grey marble, source at Lusso

home truths

BUILDING YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE LOCKED IN OVERNIGHT?

Harrods, to have it to myself and try everything before purchasing.

FAVOURITE HOTEL INTERIOR?

Blakes Hotel in London by Anouska Hempel - it's not my exact taste but it's considered one of the first boutique hotels and is the perfect urban bolthole.

DESIGN OBJECT YOU WISH YOU OWNED?

Aston Martin DB5.

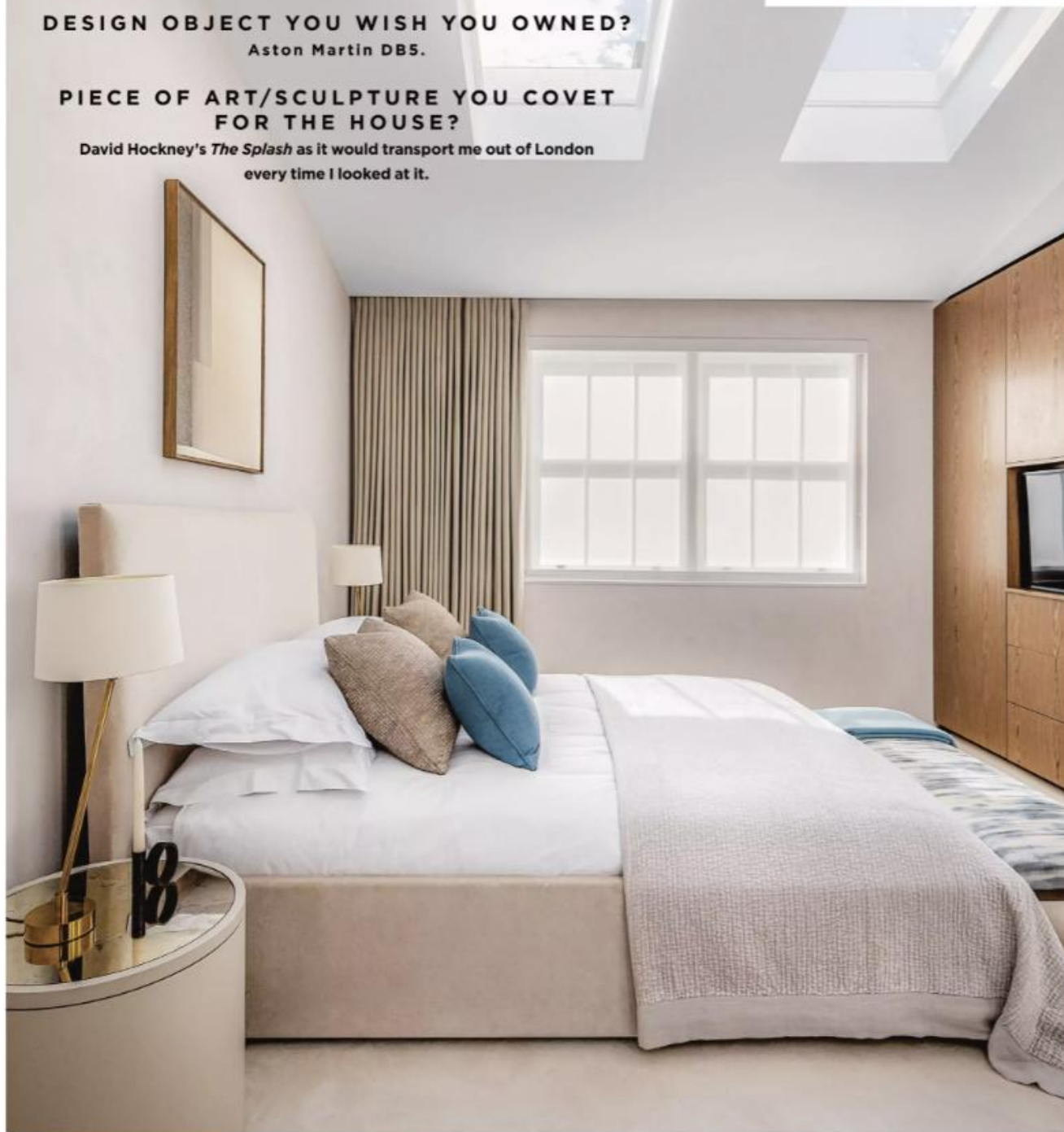
PIECE OF ART/SCULPTURE YOU COVET FOR THE HOUSE?

David Hockney's *The Splash* as it would transport me out of London every time I looked at it.

MAIN BEDROOM

Large skylights allow for a spectacular view, day or night.

Bed in Pierre Frey velvet; lacquer **bedside tables**, all bespoke by Echlin. Brass **table lamps**, Vaughan. Bespoke Echlin-designed **ottoman**; upholstered in Watercolour Winter Pond fabric, Altfield



EXPERT ADVICE

sitting perfectly

LOVE THE BUILT-IN SEATING IN LIAM WILDE'S MEWS? COMMISSIONING YOUR OWN NEEDN'T BE A DAUNTING TASK, SAM McNALLY EXPLAINS

THE EXPERT Sam McNally is co-founder and director of London-based architectural design studio Echlin. For the Knightsbridge mews project, he crafted banquette seating and custom sofas to achieve the restaurant-style aesthetic the client was after, as well as helping to define and divide the space. In large cities we are constantly challenged for space, and custom-made seating is all about making every centimetre count, he says.

TOUCH WOOD For timber built-in seating you should commission a carpenter or joiner, the latter being generally more qualified, working in the factory making more specialist pieces. Having reference images will make life a lot easier. For wooden seating it's important to factor in comfort levels. We considered ergonomics when designing this kitchen seat, giving it a gentle rake while the seat pad is a high-density foam. Any seat with a vertical back will need a pad to stop it feeling like a church pew. Sustainability is always important, so ensure your maker works with an FSC-accredited source.

SOFT OPTION It's commonly assumed that commissioning bespoke upholstered pieces will be prohibitively expensive when, in fact, they might not stretch the budget much further than a piece bought from a high-quality high street or internet-based brand. This is true even with UK-based makers – the company we commission our sofas from is based in the Cotswolds. As with any commission, find the right maker through recommendations and reviews. Companies that work with end users will be able to advise on style and comfort. Most will have a catalogue of standard products that will be adaptable to a particular size.

AVOIDING PITFALLS Something that always comes up on our projects is that the frame can look very different when the upholstery is on. You may have measured for the frame very precisely, but once the feathers and padding are added the shape and dimensions may not meet your expectations. There only needs to be a 20 or 30mm difference in size for the seat to have a different feel. Be strict with your measurements and make sure you understand exactly how the padding will work.

If you've commissioned lots of built-in seating, the maker will usually come out and do a survey, taking all the measurements for you. A piece that arrives and is too big to get into the room is



a mistake we can all relate to. I once had to saw half an arm off a sofa! We've also had to take out sash windows to make a piece fit.

FABRIC FIRST If you're choosing your own fabric, the maker will tell you how much you'll need to buy and whether it is suitable for upholstery. It will then be sent to the flame-proofers – essential to meet UK regulations. Here it will be checked for flaws and treated, then returned to the maker.

Your final job should be to check your finished product at the factory. Make sure you're happy with the stitching and detailing, as most companies will make adaptations with anything you're not comfortable with. If the fabric is pale coloured, it's well worth asking for covers to be removable so they can be washed.

Built-in seating is a fantastic investment in homes where space is at a premium. While you can't take it with you, it should be reflected in the resale price and the property's general appeal.

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“Custom-made seating is all about making every centimetre of space count”