



Enfilade

Coleherne Court, London

Architect : Unagru Architecture Urbanism
Structural Engineer : Fidler Associates
M&E Engineer : Electricus Limited
Contractor : House UP
Joinery : Progetto 172
Photographer : Mariell Lind Hansen

Completion Year : 2023
Area : 135 sqm
Budget : Undisclosed

Off the Old Brompton Road in Earl's Court, Kensington, the apartment block Coleherne Court was built in the early 1900s with elegant red brick and Portland stone features. One would think of its spacious flats with elaborative decorations and ornaments, where Diana used to live in the building. When we were appointed by the client to refurbish an existing three-bedroom flat, our take in designing our client's flat was to create a comfortable space embracing the advantages of natural light ventilation with a light material palette. The main design intervention was to unify the kitchen, living and office spaces into an open 'gallery' without doors or corridors with delicate and minimalist craftsmanship details.

Design Brief and Background

The Coleherne Court Apartment Block, built in the early 1900s, is a graceful composition of red brick and stone, spanning an entire city block. Its most enchanting feature is a meticulously tended garden cared for by the Building's residents. Among them, our clients, long-time inhabitants of the building, embraced the chance to move from a street-facing flat to one that overlooks the garden. The flat was oriented towards a smaller and darker courtyard of the building. The kitchen dining room, and study opened onto the courtyard, while two bedrooms and a small living room faced the garden. The rooms were relatively small compared to the scale of the flat and the building, except the kitchen dining room, which felt, on the contrary, slightly too large in the cold light of the courtyard.

The clients' and our immediate instinct was to look for a solution that would allow us to make the most of the exceptional garden views and southwest light. To find a balance between the classic proportions of the small rooms and our contemporary need for open spaces, flow and togetherness, we opted to connect the three rooms facing the garden in an enfilade of living areas: a study, the living room, and the kitchen dining room all open into one another. Given the strict structural restrictions to the interventions in the building, we could not create full-width openings and opted for a Serlian or Venetian opening, with twin, slender round columns reducing the span of the tripartite opening. A small opening into the study and a new, large opening into the living room allowed them create a circular layout and extend the Southwest light into the wide entrance. The two former living areas were transformed into two bedrooms, one with an ensuite bathroom. The services area also now comprises a utility laundry room.

Transparencies, axes and alignments were particularly important to the effect of the flat. By establishing main axes and alignments, the flow and depth of the flat are enhanced while providing ideal focal points for the clients' photography.

Bespoke furniture forms the final layer of the architectural intervention. Warm woods and stones characterise the living areas. The study is wrapped in bright walnut bookshelves with integrated LED lighting to highlight books and artwork. The kitchen is slightly tucked away in a pocket and only partially reveals itself as a stone peninsula clad in walnut. The bedrooms, entrance, corridors and utility rooms are equipped with floor-to-ceiling wardrobes and storage units, with a simple oak recessed handle detail and spray-painted panels.

We avoided installing a suspended ceiling to keep the maximum possible headroom and the original relationship between windows and ceiling. The lighting strategy relied exclusively on wall and floor lamps to avoid touching the ceilings and introducing spurious spotlights and downlights. Even the more technical kitchen dining area was resolved without touching the ceilings, with suspended lights spanning from wall to wall.

The interior design is based on a modern take on classical ornamentation, with slightly simpler, slimmer profiles than the original, homogeneously painted in one colour to reduce contrasts further. We opted for a palette of warm materials and muted colours. A warm, light herringbone wood floor spans through the entire flat, and different tones of warm whites cover the walls, skirting boards, cornices, architraves and doors, muting the array of traditional ornamentation. The bathrooms are clad respectively in ivory and grey tones, with dark bronze fittings.

Furniture and fittings:

The living areas are furnished with the client's furniture and new pieces. The living room is occupied mostly by a light grey and brown sofa by Flexform. The dining room is composed of a walnut table and walnut-and-green-leather chairs. The kitchen, by Bulthaup, is partially clad in a warm stone and has a bespoke walnut panel that matches the dining table's decoration. The subtle wall lights by Viabizzuno contrast with the strong character of the suspended lights in the dining area, by Ingo Maurer, and the stark black suspended kitchen lights by Davide Groppi.

Design Strategy

Guided by their photography and interior design expertise, the project revolves around prominent visual lines. Subtle shifts in colours, materials, and light create cosy corners while allowing glimpses across the entire space. The central intervention aligns with these aims, merging three distinct rooms into a fluid, open expanse—a non-salon—housing the kitchen, dining space, home office, and living room. This harmonious blend, reminiscent of a classical enfilade, finds balance through precisely aligned new openings that invite an uninterrupted visual journey.

A second enhancement introduces two welcoming openings within the expansive hallway, encouraging a circular flow throughout the flat. This versatile arrangement proves invaluable for various activities, from focused studying to lively gatherings or children's games. The hallway connects the vibrant living area with the tranquil service and sleeping quarters, where thoughtfully designed bedrooms, including a well-appointed master suite, maximise space, light, and modern amenities. Previously unused spaces are ingeniously transformed into a full laundry room and utility area, while the new bedrooms offer private retreats filled with natural light.

Our collaboration with our clients flourished once layout details were established, continuing seamlessly through the construction phase. Over six months, meticulous attention was devoted to every detail, from the intricate lines of cornices to the final touches on the bespoke kitchen. Lighting, colours, curtains, and blinds combine in a harmonious tapestry of style and comfort. The result is an engaging journey through a series of bright spaces, each exuding its unique character while blending seamlessly with the next.

Step into the kitchen, where innovative design merges with functional elegance. Suspended lighting fixtures interact with the gentle radiance that graces the dining area. A walnut table and chairs bask in the natural light pouring through expansive windows, creating an inviting setting. Transitioning to the living room, a sense of simplicity and weightlessness infuses the furniture and lighting design, mirroring the overall material palette.

The study, radiating a mature ambience, features contemporary elements like bespoke walnut joinery with subtly integrated lighting. In the service areas, a refined palette prevails—burnished nickel tapware, nuanced shades of grey, and coordinating natural stone countertops.

The project also stands as a testament to acoustic ingenuity, with suspended floors and resilient strips ensuring impressive sound insulation between units, enhancing the overall living experience.

In essence, the Coleherne Court Apartment Block project pays homage to the captivating interplay of light, the artful arrangement of materials, and the meticulous harmony of thoughtful design.