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in.Brief: The lofty heights of Parliament Hill
All that glisters... surface design shines on
En-suites: big ambitions in small spaces
A week in the life of Anji Connell

Lofty Ambitions

Stephen Dick graduated from the Inchbald School of Design with top marks and distinctions in both the Diploma and post-graduate Diploma in Architectural Interior Design, and was also awarded the annual Principal's Prize for his outstanding talent and creativity.

In 2007 Stephen established Residence, and here tells us how he dealt with logistical problems and paint code mishaps to create a stunning apartment!

There's a distinct Scandinavian influence to the design



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This project was a complete renovation of a loft apartment on Parliament Hill, just a few doors from the Heath in London's leafy Hampstead. It was an unusual conversion, and its layout and finishing was fussy and confused. It needed to be rationalised to make the space work better for the clients; they were looking for a simpler style and décor, and a scheme which would also make the most of the natural light up in this loft space.

With the simplicity came talk of minimalism, but what the clients were looking for was a calm space, with muted yet interesting and welcoming natural finishes.

The ceilings and eaves are incredibly high, although the light from some of the original window openings is limited, so it was important to keep as much of it as possible. Loft spaces without light don't feel like living spaces, but more like half-forgotten storage spaces! Here it was about making the most of the light flooding in from mezzanine glazing alongside the roof terrace.

The first thing you notice on entering the apartment and its bright, simple scheme is that abundance of natural light – after that there's no doubt that it's the beautiful Douglas Fir flooring from Dinesen. A natural finish across the floor was key to the warmth in this otherwise simple space, and by using Douglas Fir we could simplify the nature of the timber flooring due to the huge widths and lengths available. The boards are 300mm wide, and there's not a single break in the boards in any room; every board was ordered for the length of each room, with some boards up to almost thirty feet in length. ▼



▲ This led to a certain amount of effort required to bring them in through one of the small fourth-floor windows at the front of the property, although not as much effort as

actually getting them up the street itself...

Long boards need long trucks, for obvious reasons, and having examined the access

with Dinesen on Google Earth it was obvious that we needed to switch the load from the enormous truck that brings the boards over from Denmark, onto a smaller truck which would actually be able to get up the street with no problems.

But the shipper in this country decided to chance it and save the effort of transshipment.

With a certain inevitability, it meant that the truck made it about halfway up Parliament Hill – a narrow residential street lined by parked cars – and could go no further. All hands on site became all hands used to carry each board the remaining half way up the hill to the site from the stricken truck. And it took even longer to get the truck out of the street than it did to carry the boards!

But the end result is worth the greatest of efforts, and the timber, with its white lye and soap finish, brings light, warmth and simplicity to the whole apartment. And as it's used everywhere except the bathrooms, it leads you through the space without the distraction of changing flooring.

The lye and soap finish which is unique to Douglas Fir is also immensely practical. Clients were concerned about wear and marking on a timber floor over time, but the finish is actually dirt repellent, and the cleaning of it increases this repellency every time. And unlike timber such as oak which might scratch or dent, the Fir absorbs the impact, with cleaning and soaking allowing the timber fibres to expand back to their original shape and such damage to disappear. No wonder the finish is a favourite of public spaces like the Saatchi Gallery.



▲ Following from the floor, the palette of materials that came together continued with a distinct Scandinavian influence to the design.

The L-shape sofa is upholstered in a soft-feel faux suede fabric from Kvadrat. It doesn't just feel soft though – the texture even looks soft before you collapse into it. And the cushions from Anne Kyyro Quinn provide further visual texture, catching the light and adding a dash of natural colour to the room. Their felt fabric is again interesting and warm to touch but it's a contrast to the suede. These are small details but there's deliberateness to their subtlety, and their gentle embellishments bring warmth and comfort to the room.

Attention to detail even extends to the exact tone of white used on the walls. White is not always white, and brilliant white rarely looks good in a domestic environment.

In this project a dozen soft just off whites were whittled down to three tested in huge areas in situ. Even the slightest tints have an influence in large areas, especially when they're the predominant finish, and in a property like this with large amounts of natural light the eye can be very sensitive to the smallest changes. The chosen tone has a touch of the pink that's in the Douglas fir and works beautifully with it. You'd only ever see 'white' as the wall colour, but it looks just right.

The radiators were sourced from salvage merchants so more in keeping with the new aesthetic, refinished in a white to match – although not at the first attempt...

All of our project correspondence is prefixed with our project code for filing and efficiency.



High-gloss white lacquer cabinetry complements the timber floor

This supplier didn't read the email though, and just took the code from the subject line as the paint code. Unfortunately it happened to correspond to a colour from the RAL scale that wasn't quite right – mustard yellow! It was the contractor who saw them

on delivery and knew straight away that something was amiss.

Luckily neither the client nor I suffered the heart-dropping moment of seeing them appear, or even worse installed! ▼



A solid limestone basin is a luxurious inclusion

▲ The bespoke fitted TV unit houses a range of storage. All hidden behind push latches, some have AV, others are cupboards, and some are drawers. To maintain the lines and visual rhythm of the doors, the drawers have a second, hidden drawer inside, where the clients' extensive CD collection is kept. The unit accommodates all of the clients' functional requirements, but design in such a way that's complementary to the look and feel of the finished interior, and continues to fulfil the clients' brief.

For all of the open space in the apartment though, even the corners are used for something, such as the bookcase in the sitting room. A bespoke-made piece fitted into this corner beneath the eaves of the roof, it creates an almost intriguing effect in the corner of the room, spot lit to create a subtle focal point, and also so that you can actually find a book in there! If unusual spaces are going to be used then they have to look right visually and also function properly, otherwise they end up feeling

unresolved or like after-thoughts.

The bathrooms were designed to continue the simplicity of the living spaces, and their use of gentle, natural colour tones, to create a Zen-like calm.

The shower room is the master bedroom's en-suite. Large format tiles are used to bring a look of simplicity to the room, but trimmed to lower the tile line below the ceiling so it doesn't feel like a kiosk. They also set ▼

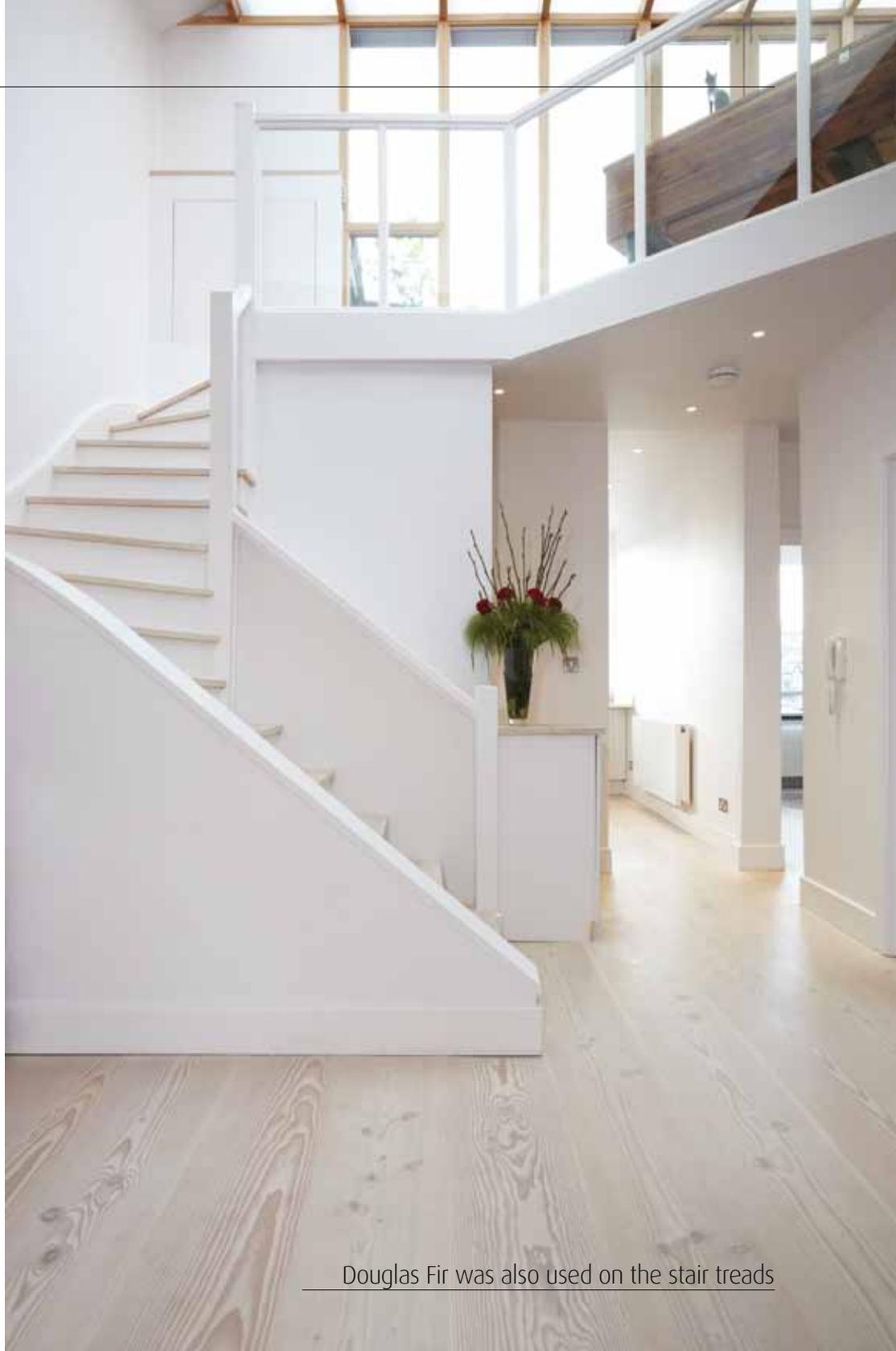
▲ up a waistline which the accessories and valves can be set out on. With the vertical tile lines also used to line up with the shower enclosure, there are no unnecessary cuts to distract the eye.

A simple, bespoke limed-oak vanity unit and washstand with a limestone top maximises the available space in this compact room. It's so important to have face level lighting where possible – downlights can make early-morning faces look droopy – and here the neat vanity lighting is fitted through the flush mirror.

There's also a floor lighting circuit for using in the night: a soft floor washer beneath each bedside table – just enough for way finding and to avoid having to turning any main lights on – and a couple in the bathroom too, so that it can be used without disturbing one's partner.

Real life usage is so important to the success of a project, and to providing something for clients which really does change and improve the way they live – making them more comfortable, and in this case hopefully improving their sleep too, just by thinking through a solution to something like this.

In the second bathroom a solid limestone basin is a luxurious inclusion, and the same stone is also used for other surfaces. To maximise the use of the space, mirrored-fronted cabinetry spans the room over the service wall, with LED lighting above and below. New partitions for this room were set out so that the width of this space is one of the full large-format tiles, so reducing cuts and lines in the floor, and again simplifying the end result.



Douglas Fir was also used on the stair treads



Light floods in from the mezzanine glazing

▲ The Douglas Fir flooring runs through into the kitchen, with high-gloss white lacquer cabinetry and a natural coloured composite worktop which complements the timber below. The Smeg 'Piano' hob is a simple but striking fitting, and the unusual Elica extractor makes sense of the intersecting eaves and windows – another unusual space in the existing apartment, where it had been previously extended for the mezzanine and roof terrace above.

A Franke tri-flow tap delivers filtered water on demand alongside the usual hot and cold. At the end of the worktop a niche for bar stools lets the clients enjoy coffee or breakfast whilst admiring the view over the tree-tops.

The cabinetry in the bedrooms is similarly neat and slick, although there's lots of it in order that the interior space can remain clean and clutter free. The photography here is actually of the lived-in apartment – not a set up! But having nice simple touches, such as leather tab handles in the edges of the doors, means that there's still a warmth to using them by touching natural materials.

In other areas the same palette of materials was used, with Fir on the stair treads to the mezzanine, as well as for other horizontal surfaces such as the tops of the fitted cabinets in the hallway and the mezzanine. Just like for the main flooring, the stair treads were ordered individually, so that the winding treads up to 500mm deep could all be made from single pieces. The risers were painted as the walls – timber here would have been too heavy – and with the vertical surfaces painted white the staircase drops back visually.

Maximum impact from a minimalist design!