

Interiors

IT'S WHAT'S INSIDE THAT COUNTS

PALACES

'Make me a dream house!'

PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS TUBBS



Spending in excess of a million quid to buy and renovate a two-bed house would be pure madness in most people's minds. But minted Aussie venture capitalist Brad Rosser did just that in November 1999, when

he ordered his very own ideal home in London's Kensington – a minimalist palace tailored specifically to his personality and lifestyle. "You have to have firm ideas as to what you like and what you want," he says. "I wanted lots of natural light, loads of mirrors, a decent-sized fridge, a laundry area, a big TV room, and loads of space and storage."

What was wrong with the place before? "It was full of poky little holes," Brad says. "It was like, 'What's this nook for? Nothing.'" Christopher Ash of architecture firm Project Orange (020 7689 3456) gutted the house, then Brad gave him his list of prerequisites and let him loose on the place.

There's little doubt he came up with the goods. Packed full of nifty gadgets with loads of discreet cupboards to keep his clutter stashed out of sight, Brad's pad may be a bit OTT price-wise but it's exactly what he asked for – a vast walk-in wardrobe knocked on to his ensuite bathroom, a blinding chrome-flued stove in the living room, and glass roofs over the stairwell and the bath to let light flood into the home. But where it all really comes together is the bedroom, a clutter-free shrine to the god every man worships – sweet, sweet sleep...



Brad's gaff before its makeover

Paint

To increase space, the designers deliberately went for soft, muted colours throughout the house. These non-acrylic matt paints came from a range by Farrow & Ball (call 01202 876141 for colour charts and mail-order details).

Bed and bedside tables

The headboard – designed by Project Orange and crafted by a joiner to fit the space – is made out of veneered maple. Visit the Timber Trade Federation's website (www.ttf.co.uk) for designers who use maple. The bedside light fittings are "Bloc W" from the Artelace range by Flos (020 7258 0600). The sturdy aluminium-framed bed is by MDF Italia (just over £1,000) and fits in perfectly; try Viaduct (020 7278 8456).



Lighting

All controlled by a bedside dimmer, so there's no need for Brad to clamber out of the duvet at lights out, avoiding bedtime frostbite. Instead of a traditional overhead monster, there's a series of 240V Architectural Tube lights, giving a warm, opaque light. Try Ryness Electrical – prices £15 to £26 (020 7278 8993, www.ryness.co.uk).

Recessed ceiling downlighters

For an even softer, more subtle glow, small directional downlighters were sunk into the ceiling, again controlled by dimmer switches next to the bed.

Fireplace

Sparked into life at the flick of a switch next to the bedside table, this cool, one-off gas fire cost about £3,500, inclusive of flu and wiring. "For the practically-impaired, like me, this fire's amazing," says Brad.

Dimmer switches

Bathroom lighting is controlled from the bedroom – so no chance of post-shower electrocution. Brad chose these stylish metallic switches throughout the house (Wandsworth Electrical, 01483 740384) with a satin silver finish. "It's worth spending money on finishing touches," recommends Ash.

Carpet

In response to Brad's plea for comfy shagpile, the designers went for this "Cornfields" carpet by Lecaflor Carpets (£31 per square metre, 01132 775776). It has the look of a hemp-type flooring but is 100 per cent wool – so much softer underfoot and also more durable. Similar carpets are available in most department stores.



The fireplace

"We wanted the bedroom to be a place of indulgence," admits architect Christopher Ash, who designed this bespoke, minimalist gas fire. "Brad wanted the bedroom to double as a living space, so he could lie in bed and read the papers on a Sunday morning."

With major safety and technical problems to overcome, however, make sure you always work closely with Corgi-registered fireplace experts, such as The Gas Fireplace (020 8563 3223). Look under "fireplaces" in the *Yellow Pages* for other specialist installers.

The sliding door

Fire safety requirements meant that a door had to be fitted between the gas fire and the ensuite bathroom – so to keep with the clutter-free feel, a sliding door was installed.



Curved wall and ceiling

More visually attractive than a run-of-the-mill box-room, the architects decided to curve the tops of the walls during the rebuild. An intricate – and expensive – procedure, it nevertheless gives an otherwise traditionally square room an unusual shape, without losing space. Shop around for a skilled builder who's had such experience – they'll make a "form" out of either timber or metal studs, line it with special plasterboard designed to be curved, and finish by skimming with plaster.

The window blinds

The blinds, bought from John Lewis (020 7629 7711) have been fitted to all the windows in the house. "As long as you stick with the same style throughout, it works," says Brad. By installing blinds, as opposed to curtains, you can help accentuate a room's size. >



Ensuite bathroom and shower

With a frosted and toughened glass ceiling directly above the bath (speak to experts such as Preedy Glass, 020 8965 1323), natural light floods into the small

bathroom. The huge five-inch shower rose (from a range by CP Hart, www.cphart.co.uk), together with the limestone splashback – speak to experts such as Stone Age (020 7385 7954) for more information – and the frosted glass partition (again, try Preedy Glass) complement each other while maintaining the distinctly modern feel of the room.



Bathroom sink

The chunky but very trendy "Scola" sink, made by German manufacturer Duravit (CP Hart, www.cphart.co.uk) was originally designed for use in schools, but looks the part at home too. The taps, from

the Tara Classic range by German company Dornbracht (try CP Hart), are expensive but beautifully made, complementing the vast glass bathroom cupboards. Glass cabinets such as these reflect the natural light, making the room seem bigger. A simple shelf under the cupboard keeps regularly-used bits and bobs, like razors, within easy reach, while Brad's other bathroom junk is stashed above.



The playroom

With a veranda looking out over Kensington, this TV room is Brad's out-of-hours paradise. "If you're starting from scratch, think about where to put things like power points," he advises. Designed for home cinema, sockets were placed in the centre of the room, behind where the DVD player sits.

Telly

This vast Fujitsu plasma wall-hanger (from £6,000, 01344 456700) sits between the room's vast windows. The wiring's been set into the wall and plastered over for a clutter-free view.

Stove

Along with the gas fire in the bedroom and a simpler gas burner in the kitchen/ciner below,

Brad pushed the boat out and invested in this stunning stainless steel stove that burns anthracite – a special, safe type of coal (£764 plus £100 per metre for the flu, Pither Products, 01784 457896). Note how it sits (required by fire regulations) on a slab to protect the floor. The architects deliberately chose a limestone hearth in keeping with the rest of the house.

Sofa

Placed between the front and rear speakers, and directly in front of the plasma screen, this comfy – if pricey – metallic-legged sofa looks the part (£2,408, The Designer's Guild, 08456 021189).

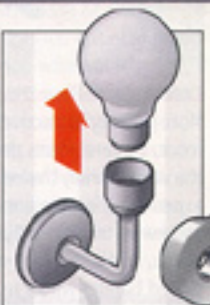
Floor

Brad went for "flamey" grade maple floorboards (Solid Floor, 020 7251 2917). Lower grades like this are visually interesting, as knots and colour variation ensure it doesn't look like lino.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Plastic bags

When, after being worn down by your missus's nagging, you decide to re-paint the front room, beware of splattering the carpet. But while such decorating disasters can be avoided with plastic sheeting, how can you protect objects attached to the walls? Enter, in the nick of time, the carrier bag...



1 To stop paint splashing onto mounted lamps or other such wall-living paraphernalia, don't bother dismantling the fittings. First, unscrew the light bulb to prevent a fire risk.



2 Cover the fitting with a plastic bag and secure it tightly around the neck of the light with string, as near to the wall as possible. Use masking tape to cover exposed areas, then paint!



3 If you're planning to continue using the same paint the next day, don't bother washing out the brushes – roll them up tightly in a plastic bag, securing the ends with string.

GOD, WOMAN, NO!

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The dainty door-knocker

Adding a new coat of paint to the portal might help your home's saleability – but don't let your lady go near the knocker...

What are they? Abysmally-painted imitation wildlife, adding a little life to door-bashers.

What are they for? Making the front porch feel "unthreatening".

Popular with... Middle-aged ladies entrenched in wedlock.

Cost? Under a tenner from hardware stores.

Alternative...

Unscrew it, claim an over-zealous Jehovah's Witness broke it when you failed to answer, and then buy a doorbell. **PSM**



Birds: polished