

A kitchen for life

MWAI's period-sensitive refurbishment transforms Edwardian kitchen into multipurpose lifestyle space



An Architect's House, Shepherd's Bush. All photography by Alexander James.

The West London home of Matthew Woodthorpe, founder of MWAI architects is a mid-Edwardian terrace in Shepherds' Bush, it had generously proportioned rooms and period character to spare, but its layout simply wasn't configured to meet the needs of a 21st-century family of four. Matthew and the MWAI team set out to gently ease the house into the present day without compromising the original details and formal composition that gave the property its charm and grace.

"We wanted to create a family house that we could live in for the next 10 years or more, and which provided a variety of social spaces and environments. We set out to retain the house's original character and generous proportion, adding minimally, using the building's own attributes as a lead, creating a clear but coherent transition between the old house and new kitchen extension."

– Matthew Woodthorpe, founder, MWAI



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The refurbishment encompassed three floors, but the project's focus was the transformation of the kitchen at the rear of the house into a versatile contemporary lifestyle space – a room that could fulfil all the functions of a kitchen, but didn't visually define itself solely as such. This involved extending laterally into the side passage, moving the back wall of the house into the garden, and dropping the floor by 20cm, thus enlarging the room dramatically. Four frameless skylights above the side extension and the Crittal-style garden doors, designed by MWAI, bring in floods of light.

MWAI was determined to retain a sense of flow throughout the house, which meant the transition from the old part of the building to the newly expanded lifestyle area had to be harmonious in look and feel. To achieve this, the doorways were retained and MWAI added bespoke panelling and baton detailing on the walls, inspired by the original versions elsewhere in the house.

To tone down the typical 'kitchen' visual language, MWAI disguised the room's working elements – fridge, freezer and pantry – behind four panelled doors on the rear left wall. Farrow & Ball's Dead Flat paint was used – its 2% sheen lent softness and versatility to the room's aesthetic. The flooring was another departure from the look of the conventional kitchen.



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Illustrative of MWAI's inventive approach to materials, the floor is made from polished concrete but without the usual cementitious topping, instead presenting an organic interplay of sand and aggregate, a visual expression of the act of pouring preserved permanently in the surface.

MWAI projects often involve bespoke detailing and specially commissioned joinery, and the practice drew on its experience in developing project-specific features to create several elements of the Albourne Road design. The oversized scullery table is the result of a collaboration with kitchen design firm Lanserring. A solid brass footrest provides support for under-table storage shelves, which can easily be removed to transition the table into 'feast mode'.

Inspired by the Victorian kitchen blocks found in northern country houses, the marble blocks on the table complements the Calacatta marble work surfaces and creates an additional area for food preparation. Thanks to MWAI working closely with its Italian marble manufacturer, the decorative veining of the stone gives the impression of single, solid blocks, disguising the fact they are actually hollow, and therefore much more portable.



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The architects brought the same attention to detail, period authenticity, material consciousness and considered craftsmanship to the entirety of the property. In the bathroom, for example, Murano polished plaster, made from marble dust and finished with beeswax, is set flush with Calacatta marble cladding, creating a dado line that pays homage to the typical style of Edwardian country houses. Chosen for its distinctive lustre, the Murano plaster was applied by an Italian artisan, and the exact colours were chosen on-site on the day of installation in order to ensure they complemented the rest of the room's features – such as the distressed doors and handles – perfectly.

Wherever possible, original features were retained – such as the window ironmongery, which dates from 1905. In instances where items had to be replaced, pieces were either upcycled – such as the front door, which was in line to be thrown away from another building project – or created anew for the project. These include washstands with powder-coated steel frames designed by MWAI and built bespoke by Lanserring, and window casements remade as double-glazed units according to the exact design of the originals. Outside, the Edwardian terrazzo path leading to the front door had deteriorated too much to be retained, but by incorporating a bespoke floral pattern of Victorian tiles into a screed path, MWAI were able to create an effective homage that also nodded towards the concrete floor of the kitchen.



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Notes to editors

For more information, images or interviews with Matthew Woodthorpe and the MWAI team, please contact Grace Ridley-Smith or Siham Ali via mwai@zetteler.co.uk, or reach them on +44 (0)20 3735 5855.

About MWAI

Founded in London in 2009, MWAI is a RIBA-chartered academic architectural practice specialising in human spaces shaped by an appreciation for, and commitment to, craft processes. Each project is the sum of numerous details, meticulously considered to create unique environments that relate to human needs. Whether engaged in turnkey residential projects or designing for large commercial developments, its 10-strong practice brings a deep respect for client and context to develop long-term relationships based on trust.

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