

## Quick change

### MWAI masterminds the rapid-fire transformation of a Hampstead family home



Study, Chesterford Road. Architecture and design by MWAI, all photography by Alexander James.

Owning a house is an ongoing process of shaping it around your needs. A series of tweaks, adaptations, facelifts and refurbishments unfolds over the years – a long-term customisation project that continues until you sell, and the whole process begins again for someone else.

Sometimes, however, you need the process of turning a house into a home to go a little quicker. For one young family who had acquired a Victorian red-brick semi in North London to be their first family home, time was of the essence. In the process of relocating to the UK, they had used a property finder to identify a home that met all of their needs in terms of size, location and price, but was fundamentally ill-suited to the lifestyle of a growing family in its layout and style.



Kitchen, Chesterford Road. Architecture and design by MWAI.

The configuration was formal and outdated; the reception spaces were over-sized and poorly organised; the marble-clad bathrooms were distinctly adult-orientated; storage was limited, and the dangerously sloped garden was anything but conducive to children's play. The family's third-party property finder recommended five architects to undertake the transformation of the house; MWAI won the commission.

Before they could move in, the new owners needed a complete refurbishment that would open up the kitchen and ground-floor living areas to create a flowing family space, as well as a reconfiguration of the bedrooms on the floors above to introduce more privacy and flexibility. The project called for a new ventilation system, the re-insulation of all external walls and considerable structural work – all within the tightest of timeframes as the clients had a set and immovable move-in date.



Extension and garden area, Chesterford Road. Architecture and design by MWAI.

This meant MWAI had to work fast. Over the following months, MWAI and its collaborators worked diligently on-site, refining and adapting the design as the construction and project progressed. They began with the removal and replacement of all structural walls on the upper floors. Liaising closely with the clients, MWAI developed a material palette to match their tastes – a range of natural wood veneers and simple architectural stones – and used it to create contemporary finishes throughout the house, incorporating off-white polished plaster, decorative wallpapers, custom-made marble sinks, and a media room fitted with acoustic fabric panelling. Open-grain veneer joinery and a rustic-look engineered timber floor added texture to the space, whilst the patterns and details created in simple materials contribute to a distinct sense of personality and place.

The client was keen to introduce a warm decorative finish to her dressing room, in keeping with its dual function as a study and seating area, where the look of plain wardrobes might have looked too austere. MWAI came across Parisian wall covering specialist Ananbô at Milan Design Week, and were able to source a hand-painted botanical pattern that, once fitted to the wardrobe's joinery, defined the room's atmosphere.





En suite, Chesterford Road. Architecture and design by MWAI.

A series of adaptations have made the property more accommodating – and appealing – to the kids. The children’s bedroom is rich in bespoke detail, including a custom-made bed and lighting, and a striking mountain motif adorning the joinery on the integrated wardrobes. The adjacent bathrooms have been redesigned in a brighter, more playful aesthetic, with easy-to-clean Corian worktops speckled with colour. On the second floor, a newly installed kitchenette enables the family’s nanny to look after the owner’s young daughter without recourse to the ground-floor kitchen, and a new – much safer – garden is rich with play spaces and sun-trap seating.

Downstairs, a bespoke kitchen from the craft-driven designer Lanserring, with richly veined marble worktops and a custom-designed chandelier over the island, has become the hub of the home.





Downstairs dining and lounge room, Chesterford Road. Architecture and design by MWAI.

*"The choices our clients make go hand in hand with the development of our bespoke design solutions – meaning every project is tailored to their practical needs and personal taste, and that no two projects are ever the same. In the background, our trademark attention to detail and craft-orientated process tie each project together. In this case, although 16 months might seem like a long time, it was a tight timescale for a project such as Chesterford. Typically, a project is organised in a linear manner – concept to planning to tender to contractor appointment. As this project was large in scope and the client wanted a high-quality finish, the timescale wouldn't allow for this approach. MWAI, therefore, had to be flexible. We worked closely with the client, using our turnkey building service – MWAI BUILD. The end result was a bespoke home – delivered on time and to the highest standard of quality."*

- Matthew Woodthorpe, director at MWAI

This comprehensive ground-to-gable refurbishment took the MWAI team just 16 months from commission to completion, meaning that the owners were able to assume occupancy bang on schedule, moving into a pristine, custom-designed contemporary home that was completely unrecognisable from the property they purchased the year before.

## Notes to editors

### 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.

[mwai.co.uk](http://mwai.co.uk)

[instagram.com/mwaiarchitects](https://www.instagram.com/mwaiarchitects)

## Further images



Stairwell, Chesterford Road. Architecture and design by MWAI.



Master bedroom, Chesterford Road. Architecture and design by MWAI.



Main family room, Chesterford Road. Architecture and design by MWAI.





Children's bedroom, Chesterford Road. Architecture and design by MWAI.



Children's bathroom, Chesterford Road. Architecture and design by MWAI.