



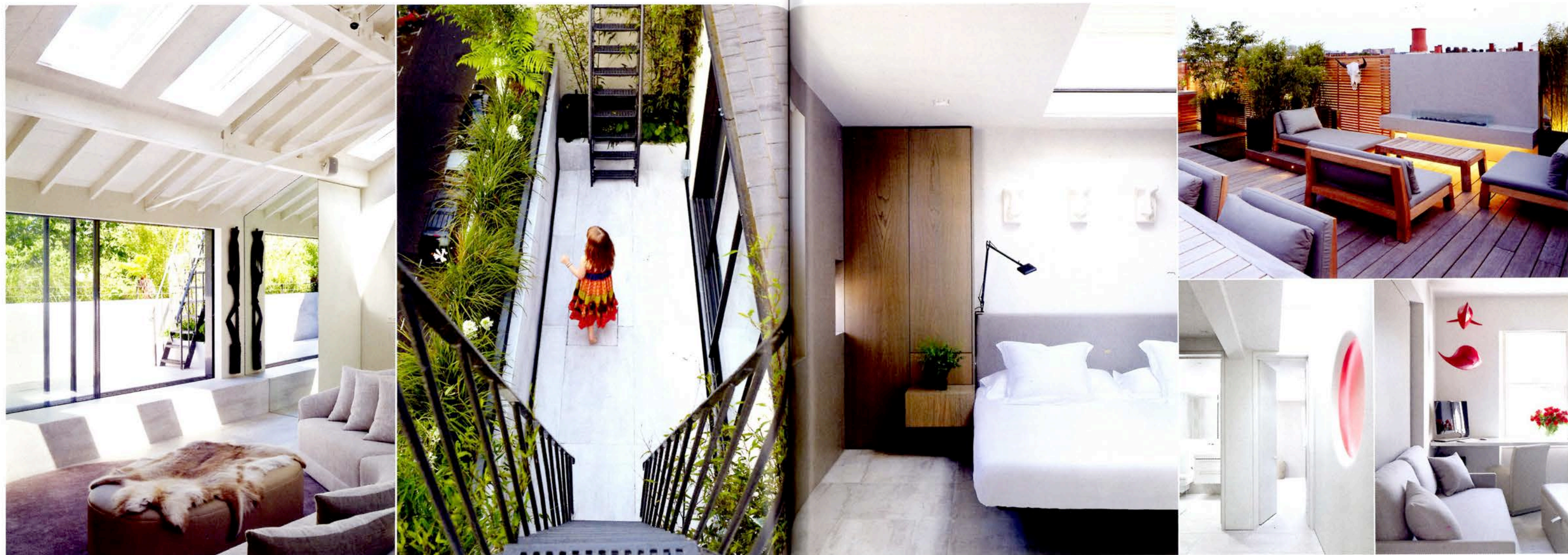
Photosynthetic solution

Light – both natural and artificial – was key to the redesign and decoration of this restful flat at the top of a Victorian town house in west London

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OPPOSITE The kitchen area, with units by Bulthaup, is illuminated by lights from François Muracciole. THIS PAGE In the sitting area, the sofa, ottoman and rug are all by Michael Reeves



When the owners of this west London flat started searching for a new home, they were clear about their priorities. They wanted high ceilings, large rooms and outdoor space. But above all they wanted light. 'If there's one ray available,' says the owner, 'my husband wants to be the one to catch it.'

Light is perhaps not always the first word associated with London living, and the couple's quest for luminosity brought them to the pinnacle of a stately Victorian town house. Here, they finally found what they had been looking for. Once the attic home of servants and mice, the top-floor flat had already been opened out to provide a lofty sitting room, with a large roof terrace and views over a garden square. It had plenty of light, but still, they felt, not quite enough. 'Even before we decided to buy we asked if we could put in a number of skylights,' says the owner. 'We wanted 18, but eventually were allowed 12. Now, you can track the sun from morning until night.'

The next step was to create an interior. Architects Marek Wojciechowski and Ben Cousins, in collaboration with Brendan Thompson from Mint Construction, supplied them with a soothing, clean-lined backdrop, with three bedrooms arranged round a central hallway and a reconfigured roof terrace. Once that was done, interior designer Michael Reeves was called in to introduce some grown-up gloss.

Michael, a former Andrew Martin Interior Designer of the Year, is known for his chic, pared-down style, a winning combination of urban elegance and everyday practicality. Here, his approach was to take a tightly controlled palette and layer it with a sophisticated mix of materials and understated modern furnishing. 'The flat has a semi-industrial feel,' says Michael, 'and we needed to get a balance between the hard-edged and the domestic. It all needed to be quite refined.'

Instead of clinical white, the walls and woodwork were painted in creamy tones of grey, and ash cupboard doors were tinted to harmonise with the smoky porcelain floor tiles laid throughout. Against this neutral backdrop, the owners'

THIS PAGE FROM LEFT The sitting area opens out on to a balcony, where plants screen the view of the street beyond. The owner's daughter, Aimée, plays on the balcony; the steps lead up to the roof terrace (opposite, above right)

collection of modern art – Sixties silk screens in shocking fluorescents and floating fibreglass fish – was carefully arranged to provide intermittent shocks of colour and wit.

Between them the couple have four children, and though not all of them live in the flat all the time, they all need occasional accommodation, so much of the space has to do double duty. A study, for example, can be transformed instantly into a bedroom at the pull of a lever which lowers a double mattress from the wall, while upstairs, a snug adjoining the roof terrace is magicked into further sleeping quarters with a set of sleek daybeds.

Establishing an intimate relationship between indoors and out was always a fundamental part of the brief, and the new roof terrace, now as streamlined as the interior, works very much as an extra room, with a full working kitchen, comfortable seating and a generous dining table. Here, the oriental-inspired planting, designed by Karena Batstone, is intended to offer a strong evergreen structure, updated with seasonal planting throughout the year. Carefully positioned planters contain bamboos and grasses that dance above the skylights, casting lacy shadows in the bedroom below.

Apart from allowing daylight to flood into the apartment, the roof lights give glimpses of the terrace and the clouds above, while from the terrace itself they can, at certain angles, look like deep, dark pools of water. But artificial lighting plays as significant a role as daylight. The bed in the main bedroom, for example, is underlit at night and seems to float on a cloud of light, while in the adjoining hallway a light sculpture built into the wall glides gently through the colour spectrum. 'It can look just like an African sunset,' says the owner. Certainly, in this tranquil space, you'd never guess you were perched high above a city street □

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THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT At night, a mechanical blind covers the skylight in the main bedroom. Karena Batstone designed the oriental planting scheme on the roof terrace. Suspended fibreglass fish enliven the study. Doors and woodwork have been painted soft grey to harmonise with the porcelain-tile floor