

# A little Brixton house with a big personality

At less than 10ft wide, interior designer Ed O'Donnell's home presented a challenge but a makeover injected striking colour and created space, says **Dominic Lutyens**

**T**HE ultimate aim for Ed O'Donnell and Richard Angel, co-founders of Soho-based interior design business Angel O'Donnell, is to ensure that their projects ooze personality. "We try to introduce individuality into our interiors," says O'Donnell, who, with Angel, plumped for high-octane glamour when designing a penthouse in the new Atlas building in Shoreditch. "Clients are increasingly design-savvy, so we designers have to work harder to create appealing spaces. But a big part of that is not being afraid to stamp your personal style on them."

He and Angel, whose background is in surveying, first met while working at Battersea-based interior design firm Alexander James. "This made us confident we'd be good business partners," recalls O'Donnell. "I studied graphic design, then became an interior designer, which I've been doing for 20 years."

Today, O'Donnell and Angel favour a maximalist yet relatively clean-lined look. They love layering contrasting textures, such as velvet and leather, with rich blues, greens and browns for walls and upholstery, counterbalanced by straight-lined geometric furniture and swathes of wall in neutral white.

One of the duo's ploys is to use arty and crafty pieces. "Art has loads of personality — it gives any space a big hit with little effort. We prefer that to busily patterned wallpapers," says O'Donnell. Another of their tricks is to hang mobiles from ceilings, particularly ones inspired by artist Alexander Calder's kinetic sculptures of the Thirties and Forties, with delicate components that twirl gently when hit by currents of air. "They bring a room to life with movement," he says.

When O'Donnell and his husband, JP Banks, an advertising copywriter, bought a home in Brixton, Angel O'Donnell poured all their creativity into the challenge of remodelling a house that, though long, is only 9ft 8in wide.

Its quirkiness is apparent from the street. Formerly a bland shade of cream, the rendered exterior is now a surprising inky blue. The front door, in rich burgundy, has a stag's head knocker and opens directly into a cosy living room with a parquet wood floor and walls painted deep, moody green. The light-



**Characterful home:** JP Banks and Ed O'Donnell on their patio, beyond the kitchen

ing, cast by halo-shaped pendant lamps and a wash of indirect light under the banister of a bespoke steel staircase with wafer-thin yet robust treads, is soft and ambient at night. A Deco drinks trolley, from Sunbury Antiques Market at Kempton Park Racecourse, is loaded with colourful liqueur bottles, backlit to create a mini lighting effect.

It's all very inviting, and it's no surprise to hear that O'Donnell and Banks are a sociable couple. They plan to have lots of friends round for Sunday lunches, with guests seated at their unusual dining table made of concrete and glossy resin. "Our choice of dining table was more important to us than our sofa," says O'Donnell. That said, the living room sofa is a statement piece, a "contemporary take on a chesterfield" covered in claret-coloured velvet. When

the couple bought the house they had to re-roof it, slightly raising the bowing roofline. They then set about squeezing every inch out of their space. A low ceiling on the first floor was removed, which allowed them to create a dramatic double-height space in the main bedroom and a platform, providing a small spare bedroom in another room. This sleeping den is reached via a plywood-clad staircase incorporating storage from the lower level, used as an office. New exposed rafters were added to the ceiling on this floor and are painted a pale, putty-coloured grey, which makes the rooms look taller.

A small extension on the first floor created a walk-in wardrobe adjoining the main bedroom. The extension was built above the kitchen and faces the back garden. "We didn't have problems

getting planning permission as other houses in the street have added rear-facing extensions, although usually for bathrooms," says O'Donnell.

On the ground floor, a wall separating the kitchen and living room was removed. Now a patio with a turquoise wall at the far end of the kitchen is visible from the front door. "The blue wall is in fact a raised flowerbed planted with grasses, created to maximise the area's floor space," says O'Donnell.

Anyone stepping through the front door of the original house would have been confronted by a staircase, the foot of which was awkwardly positioned near a street-facing window. "We replaced it with a new staircase against the wall opposite the front door. This was created in three sections off-site, welded together on site and bolted on to a steel plate inserted into the party wall," says O'Donnell. Not only is the slimline staircase space-saving but its burnished bronze colour makes the living room look more enticing and its zigzagging steps pleasingly echo the parquet floor's chevron pattern.

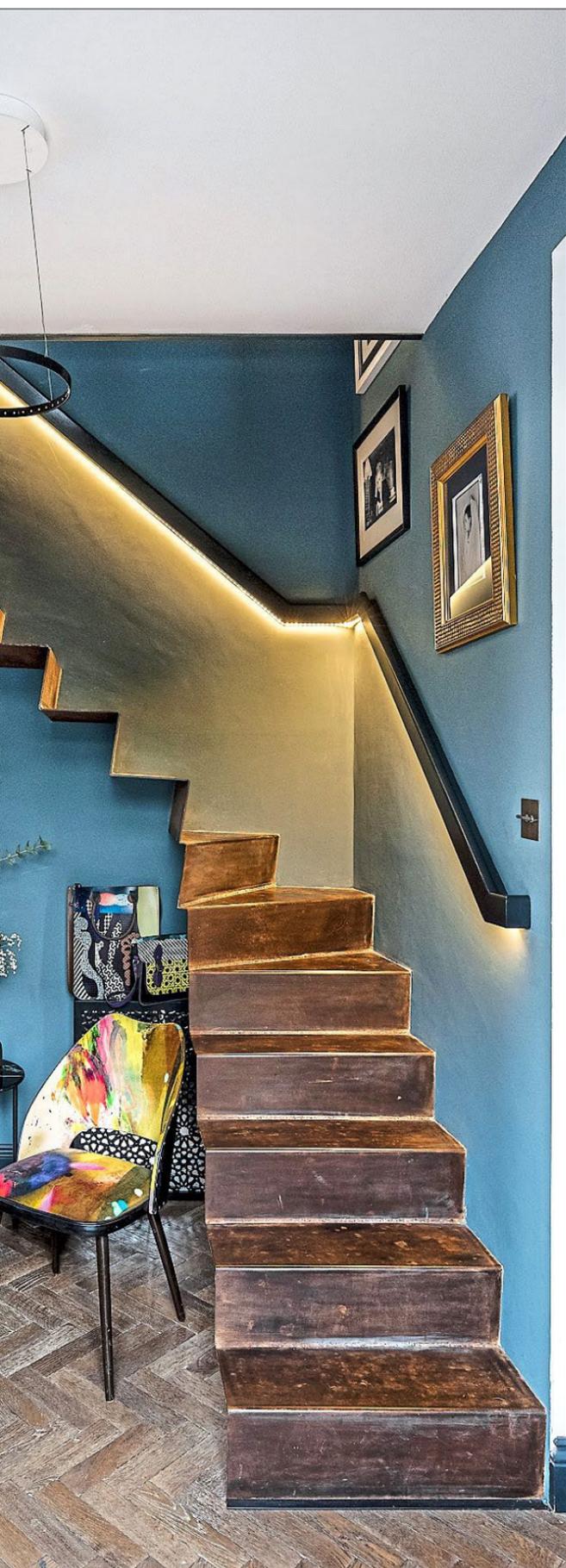
Atmospheric lighting and moody hues might suggest Banks and O'Donnell wanted their home to have a nocturnal vibe. Yet the ground floor was designed to make the most of day and night-time. By day the kitchen, which now has a large glass door leading to the patio, is their favourite hangout. The worktop is white marble, cabinets are vibrant blue and the shelves are wooden planks with rough-textured bark edges.

What unites all the rooms is the characterful art and craft pieces studding every wall. "We like finding work by emerging artists and craftspeople," says O'Donnell. A favourite hunting ground is the Urban Art Fair held every summer in Brixton. Above the fireplace hangs a whimsical print by Icelandic-born artist Kristjana Williams depicting a map of east London overlaid with exotic animals and hot air balloons. Upstairs is a surreal print of a Victorian gent with a horse's head, while fringed textile wall hangings "provide texture".

All this art offers visual variety — O'Donnell's training as a graphic designer hasn't gone to waste.

**Above right:** the new slimline staircase, in a shade of burnished bronze  
**Right:** vibrant blue and cool white marble in the kitchen  
**Far right:** exposed rafters painted pale grey make the rooms look taller





### Get the look

- Architect and designer: Angel O'Donnell (angelodonnell.com)
  - Structural engineer: Alan McVicar (amcengstructures.com).
  - Glass doors: SunSeeker Doors (sunseekersdoors.co.uk)
  - Approved building control inspectors: Ian Blackwell
  - Wooden parquet floor: Broadleaf Timber (broadleaftimber.com)
  - Recycled leather floor tiles: City Floors (cityfloors.co.uk)
  - Kitchen doors and plinths: Superfront (superfront.com/uk)
  - Kitchen marble worktop and splashback: Granite & Marble UK (granitelondon.net)
  - Kitchen cabinets: Ikea (ikea.com)
  - Stairwell pendant: Alfies Antique Market (alfiesantiques.com)
  - Living room pendants: Le Deun Luminaires (ledeun.co.uk)
  - Kitchen pendant light: Random Chandelier by Chian-Yi (mintshop.co.uk).
  - Ceramic clock in the living room: Haoshi Design (haoshi.com).
- WHAT IT COST**
- Original house in 2015: £489,000
  - Cost of extensions and full refurbishment: £90,000
  - Value of house now (estimate): £825,000



**Above:** the view through from the front to the back of the house, taking in the unusual dining table made of concrete and glossy resin  
**Left:** unifying factors are parquet flooring, clever lighting and highly individual artworks in all the rooms

Photographs:  
**Taran Wilkhu**