

The background of the cover is a photograph of a modern interior. On the left, there are long, light blue-green pleated curtains. In the center, a large window looks out onto a lush green forest. In the foreground, a bright orange, curved, upholstered chair with a matching ottoman sits on a wooden floor. The chair has a chrome frame. The floor is made of light-colored wood planks. A small, patterned rug is partially visible under the chair. The overall atmosphere is bright and airy.

# INTERIOR DESIGN YEARBOOK 2022

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# DESIGN TO RENT

**BY RICHARD ANGEL AND ED O'DONNELL,**  
Angel O'Donnell

*Angel O'Donnell is an interior design studio founded by Richard Angel and Ed O'Donnell, who have over four decades of design experience between them. They have been making waves in the property sector since launching in 2018 and the pair already have an impressive portfolio of clients, including Canary Wharf Group, Lincoln Square for Lodha and Henley Investments. Plus, several stunning private client commissions in luxury developments like Barratt London's Landmark Place and The Atlas Building in Shoreditch. The studio is also focusing on the growing Build to Rent sector across the UK and is experienced in premium student accommodation.*

## How did you get into the Design to Rent market?

We've always wanted to design for a buy to rent development. It's a burgeoning sector with tons of potential. And the smart BTR developers are hot on interiors. They make sure that every resident has access to large terraces, bright and airy lounges, workstations kitted out like global blue-chip HQs, and other top-end amenities. Ultimately, they're willing to invest in quality, which is every design studio's dream. So, when we were given the chance to pitch for 10 George St, Canary Wharf, we jumped at it. It was a fantastic experience that culminated in winning lots of awards, including HomeViews Best London BTR Development 2020. This was an especially important nod because HomeViews is the only BTR awards solely voted for by residents.



Above: Furniture designed by Angel O'Donnell

### How do you conceptualise the brief for this type of project?

Every BTR development is different – the architecture, the views, the amenities, the culture and history of the location. These are some of the things that help to shape our aesthetic and the way we plan each space, both indoors and out. But whether a development is a soaring tower of glass and steel or part of an old vinyl factory, you must always strive for uniqueness. You've got to think hard about what's going to set your designs apart from the rest. And what's going to compel renters to live there and be part of

the community you're trying to create.

### What opportunities does DTR give you as a studio?

We get to work with some of Britain's leading BTR developers. These are experts pioneering the fastest-growing sector in the UK rental market. This can lead to very fruitful collaborations. Their industry knowledge – coupled with our design acumen – enables us to anticipate people's changing needs and identify what they value most in a home. These insights are vital. They keep us fresh and relevant and prevent

us from living in a design bubble. BTR communities often publish reviews on design, service, and value for money. If you score top marks with them, it gives you renewed confidence when you set about designing for your next project.

### Without knowing anything about the end user, how do you establish a design narrative that feels universal and personal?

We have a strong idea of who we're designing for. In London, for instance, younger renters represent the majority of BTR tenants. We know that a big proportion of this age group see renting as a way of life, rather than a steppingstone to owning bricks and mortar. Their standards are high. They want stylish and comfortable furniture, meaningful artwork, enlivening hues and patterns, smart layouts and practical design solutions. They're also looking out for brands with eco- and social-friendly credentials. They value provenance and revere products and services with compelling stories to tell. And the demographics are constantly evolving. At 10 George Street, we sourced art from around the world because we knew we were appealing to an international market, which included downsizers who were swapping the big house and mortgage for a well-managed, hassle-free slice of London life. Whereas in Newfoundland, we designed a multi-fabulous work-play space for adults and kids – where residents of all ages can either catch up on work, catch up with friends or, if they're small enough, scale a climbing wall. Mercifully, our designs never need to be generic. We're not creating interiors for a chain of Holiday Inns or souped-up sixth form common

rooms. Each time, we're designing for a very specific audience.

### What common challenges do you come across with DTR projects?

Interior designing 10,000sq ft of communal spaces is akin to creating a cohesive scheme for a mansion owned by a large extended family. There are infinite layout options to explore. Rooms that must be designed modularly for multi-purpose use. And an overall aesthetic that feels fresh and productive by day and warm-hued and relaxing by night. There's also the challenge of future-proofing your interiors. This is crucial when designing for BTR, as developers won't want the financial burden of having to replace furniture every couple of years. So your materials must be capable of weathering structural stress. And your designs must be easy to adapt to help keep them looking new and current. Plus, there are huge commercial considerations. You must think carefully about where to spend your budget in order to create maximum impact in all the right places. After all, prospective tenants will make up their minds about a development in just a few seconds, so it's our job to win them over as soon as they walk through the door.

### How do budgets vary compared with private residential projects?

Budgets vary across the board. It's more a question of how they're allocated. With private clients, the houses are often old and compromised. So while you may have a healthy budget, a lot of this money will get poured into internal reconfigurations, extensions and essential structural work. Many months can go by before the house is ready for decoration.



Above: Lobby cubist wall art at 10 George Street

But with BTR developments, everything is new and solid. You're presented with these vast blank canvases. It's very liberating. You can get to work straightaway – collaborating with local craftspeople, designing bespoke pieces of furniture and joinery, sourcing artwork and curios, it's all the best bits of design without a hint of red tape.

### How does DTR impact your studio?

BTR represents huge scale and variety. It's a fledgling market, so the potential is endless. We've entered at the point when things are starting to take off, when BTR is shedding its newfangledness and is being seen as a highly desirable

alternative to owning or renting off a private landlord. It offers people democratised access to beautiful design, with services, amenities and events that nurture communities. We very much want to continue to be a part of that.

### Will BTR continue to grow in popularity, or do you see home ownership leading more?

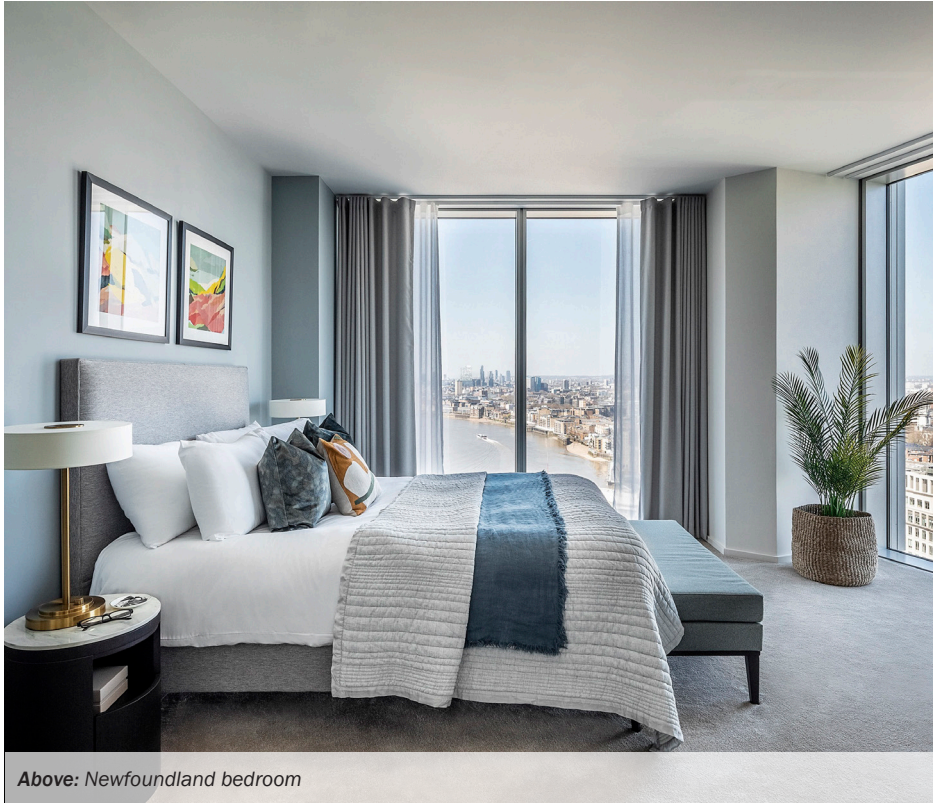
100%. We've turned a corner. 1 in 3 millennials will never own a property. And older homeowners are seeing the benefits of downsizing, cashing in and experiencing a new, freer lifestyle.

### What future DTR projects do you have in the pipeline?

We're poised to start working with



Above: Newfoundland Work Play



Above: Newfoundland bedroom

a couple of private UHNW investors who are branching into Build to Rent – a 400-unit development in west London and another two projects in north London. Can't say more than that at this stage – but we're very excited.

#### 10 George Street

We took on the enormous task of making 10,000sq ft of communal breakout areas both functional and fabulous. Knowing that these spaces could be used by thousands of residents in any given week, we decided to design a lot of the furniture ourselves. That way, we could make regular trips to the manufacturers, test the comfort and durability of our designs, and

closely monitor the quality of each piece – from conception to completion. Artwork was an essential part of our aesthetic. We needed to appeal to an international crowd, so we sourced an eclectic mix of pieces from around the world. Notable artists include Mo Cornelisse, who was responsible for the cubist ceramics covering the wall in the main lobby; Peter Monaghan, who created the chromatic circle made up of radiating lines; and Lauren Baker who produced our fizzing neon.

#### Newfoundland

We were tasked with designing a multi-fabulous work-play space for adults and kids. Here, residents of all ages can either catch up on

work, catch up with friends or, if they're small enough, scale a climbing wall. Booth chairs, work desks, comfy benches, slides, crash mats – it's all available in one safe, naturally bright space with expansive views across Canary Wharf. We also dressed a number of BTR apartments, too. We went for a cool, calm palette punctuated with pops of richly pigmented colour. Simple silhouettes in each room create a subtly sophisticated look for people of all ages. We wanted nothing to distract from the incredible views.

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