

# THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

This modernist gem (with pool) was once three pokey flats, says **Oliver Stallwood**

**H**IDING behind a traditional west London Victorian façade, this could be London's most successful modernist house. For anyone who thinks contemporary minimalist design can't create a cosy family home, this townhouse aims to prove you wrong.

A two-year conversion from a run-down small property, that had been divided into three flats, has transformed the space. Nearly all the internals of the house were removed and a basement dug to create a spectacular five-floor gallery-esque space, complete with a subterranean swimming pool.

While restrained and purposefully spartan, clever lighting helps create a home that is welcoming and relaxing.

Lighting experts Nulty worked with the renovation, which was carried out by British company Theis + Khan, to bring attention to key features and soften the edges, creating a domestic setting.

Illumination effects have been concealed wherever possible and statement pieces used for ambience. For example, three Raimond lamps by Moooi hang elegantly above the dining room table, giving a soft glow reminiscent of a starry night. Show-

stopping features such as the curved staircase, itself a work of art, have been picked out with opal low-level LED lights emphasising the movement and fluidity. Diffused LED lighting has also been integrated into the joinery.

'Lighting is at least as important as the furnishings because it affects how you feel about a space,' says the house's owner Lee Newman.

'You could have the right furnishings and furniture but if you have the lighting wrong it is not going to work. Lighting affects your emotions about a space and you do have to get a balance with minimalism.

'It can easily slip into brutal and be a bit too cold; lighting helps to soften that a lot.'

The basement of the house extends beneath the front garden and part way under the back garden. Here you find the 20m pool, surrounded by grey tiling to mimic a mountain cave pool.

'It's just a really cool thing to have' laughs Lee, who clearly has a great eye for design, but doesn't take herself too seriously. Included in this downstairs area is a gym and a cinema room with dark grey velvet finishes.

A large clerestory window brings natural light into the room, while aspen panels add a further natural feel to the space. While the lighting is designed to

come second to the architecture it is the perfect collaboration. The subtle integrated illuminations help to define the building.

'It's about providing good, ambient lighting that is then punctuated with very good accent lighting,' explains Paul Nulty, founder of Nulty.

'There's a multi-layered approach, but ultimately, it's also about flexibility, so there is an opportunity for the lights to be bright when necessary, but quite moody also when someone wants a bit of contrast, drama – and maybe a bit of Barry White on the stereo.'

Another key design feature of this property is the way the floors interconnect. 'Many tall family houses feel very layered, with little connection



**Soft and low:** Ambient lighting in the kitchen

PHOTOS: JAMES FRENCH



**Reel draw:** The cinema (top) is great for cosy nights in while the bathroom (above) has a relaxed feel typical of the house



between the floors,' says Soraya Khan from Theis and Khan. 'We set out to ensure that none of the three living-room floors felt cut off from the others and so we developed a split section with half-level staircases to create views up and down.'

Lee says: 'One of the things I find with a lot of houses in London is that people end up living on whatever floor the kitchen is on. We had a drawing room in our previous house and it was never used and that seemed like a waste of space.'

'We wanted a way to get movement throughout the house so people were willing to go upstairs and away from the kitchen and Theis + Khan have managed to achieve this.'

From the pool at basement level to

the kitchen on the lower ground, the dining room a half level up from that and the sitting room at upper ground level, everything is visible.

Akarana Builders have created half levels so you don't feel like you are disappearing into another part of the house. The bedrooms are more conventionally layered with a family room at the top. The master on the third floor is cocooned by thick plants for privacy. 'I'm delighted with the result,' says Lee. 'It's a nice place to live, with wonderful lighting and high ceilings. It brings a twist to what could have been a standard refurbishment. It's calm and serene – everything you want from a home.'

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