

Bijou & beautiful

Owning a small property doesn't have to mean clutter and cramped living, as **Oliver Stallwood** discovers

SHRINKING living spaces are a reality for much of Britain. The UK is said to have the smallest properties in Europe and the average new British home is barely half the size they were in the 1920s. But all is not lost. This clever micro flat in Notting Hill proves that, with the right approach, small can not only be beautiful but also liveable. Beginning life as a decidedly bijou 215 sq ft (20 sqm) studio flat – less than half the size of an average new UK one-bedroom – it has been transformed into a well-proportioned one bed, and extended by over 60 per cent to 350 sq ft (32 sqm) by using the terrace area to gain more space. 'We have carefully considered not only the aesthetics and storage, but also how to live healthily and how design practices can benefit the wellbeing of the resident,' says Rory

'It's a good exercise in micro-living - even with a small space you can live well!'

Macpherson, founder of architectural interior designers Play Associates, the company that has refurbished and interior designed the property. 'It was an opportunity to transform a very small space and a good exercise in micro living – even with a small space, you can live well by using the right materials. So many people live in small spaces – in city that is the nature of the beast, unfortunately.' The brief was to promote good living within a small environment, with a fluid space that is laid out so you don't feel cramped. As Rory points out, we are set to become even



PHOTOS: ROB SANDERSON

Natural: The apartment has wooden furniture, tuneable lights and a beautiful herringbone reclaimed solid-oak floor

more cramped in London and other cities as the housing crisis continues. US student accommodation specialist Greystar is even rumoured to be bringing student-style accommodation to the capital, which has shared living areas and is designed for non-studying adults.

The original flat was a tiny and very dilapidated studio space. 'I took a bit of a gamble with it and the risk of getting planning consent from RBKC to extend over the flat roof,' says Rory.

'It took a bit of back and forth and negotiation with the council but luckily we managed to get in through. Getting the extra 130-odd sq ft made all the difference. We were also able to replicate the existing sash windows in the newly extended space, which, although it was a smaller foot print, visually feels like we doubled the living area,' says Rory.

'That bank of four sash windows with the bedroom door concealed in the wardrobe really gives a sense of space and continuity when you walk in. The existing roof also had a slight pitch that I felt added real character, so rather than trying to level it out we accentuated it by adding roof panelling and leaving exposed beams.'

The next thing Play Associates looked at was the colour scheme. A natural approach would have been to use a neutral palette, but Rory wanted to try something more forward thinking, and has offset the white walls with powerful greens, dusty pink and gold.

'It isn't overpowering but it does

feel quite bold,' he explains. 'The objective, because it is quite small, was to give it character and to make it feel uplifting. I think sometimes the feeling is to do everything white or grey or beige, because it is small, but in many ways it can be a bit gloomy. But our approach is to be bold with colours in a measured amount – it feels quite cheerful. The right colours can bring it to life.'

The flat is green in more ways than one. The materials are as sustainable as possible, from the beautiful herringbone reclaimed solid-oak flooring to all-natural paint with only naturally occurring raw materials. Recycled fabrics and plastics abound, too.

Abundant planting is also part of the scheme, with air filtration integrated into the bespoke joinery to clean the interior air. 'This creates a healthier

and more beneficial space,' adds Rory.

The joinery itself has been carefully shaped to allow as much storage as possible, while maintaining an open feeling to the light-filled apartment. So-called human-centric lighting is designed with deliberate attention towards the colour temperature of the light, as well as the lumens, or brightness. The thinking is to give the inhabitants total control of their lighting, to create the correct personalised effect.

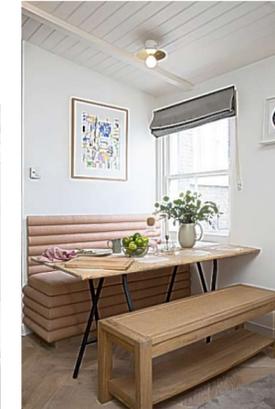
'The lighting is an important one. We are at an interesting time with interior lighting,' explains Rory. 'Lighting is subjective and we have put in tuneable lights where you can control the power and the temperature. An interesting parallel with lighting is food – some people have allergies to nuts and lighting has a similar effect on people. They can



Bold: Golds, greens and dusky pink created a striking colour palette



Light-filled: The attractive living area



Innovative: Storage solutions abound



Modern: The sleek bathroom

get headaches and, at the extreme, seizures with flickering lights. Giving control is something I think we will see a lot more.'

Rory hopes that this flat will give homeowners in London, regardless of how many square feet they have, a better understanding of how to use space effectively.

'We are driven by necessity and everyone is obsessed with square feet, so space has become a premium, but it is how you use that space that is the important factor. The point with this is to show that you can have a small apartment and not feel compromised.'

■ play-associates.com

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