

THE DESIGNER'S VIEW FLAT REMODEL

City Style

A rundown Victorian 230m² flat in London has received a sympathetic update, which marries period style with contemporary flair, thanks to the team at London Atelier



IMAGES: LONDON ATELIER



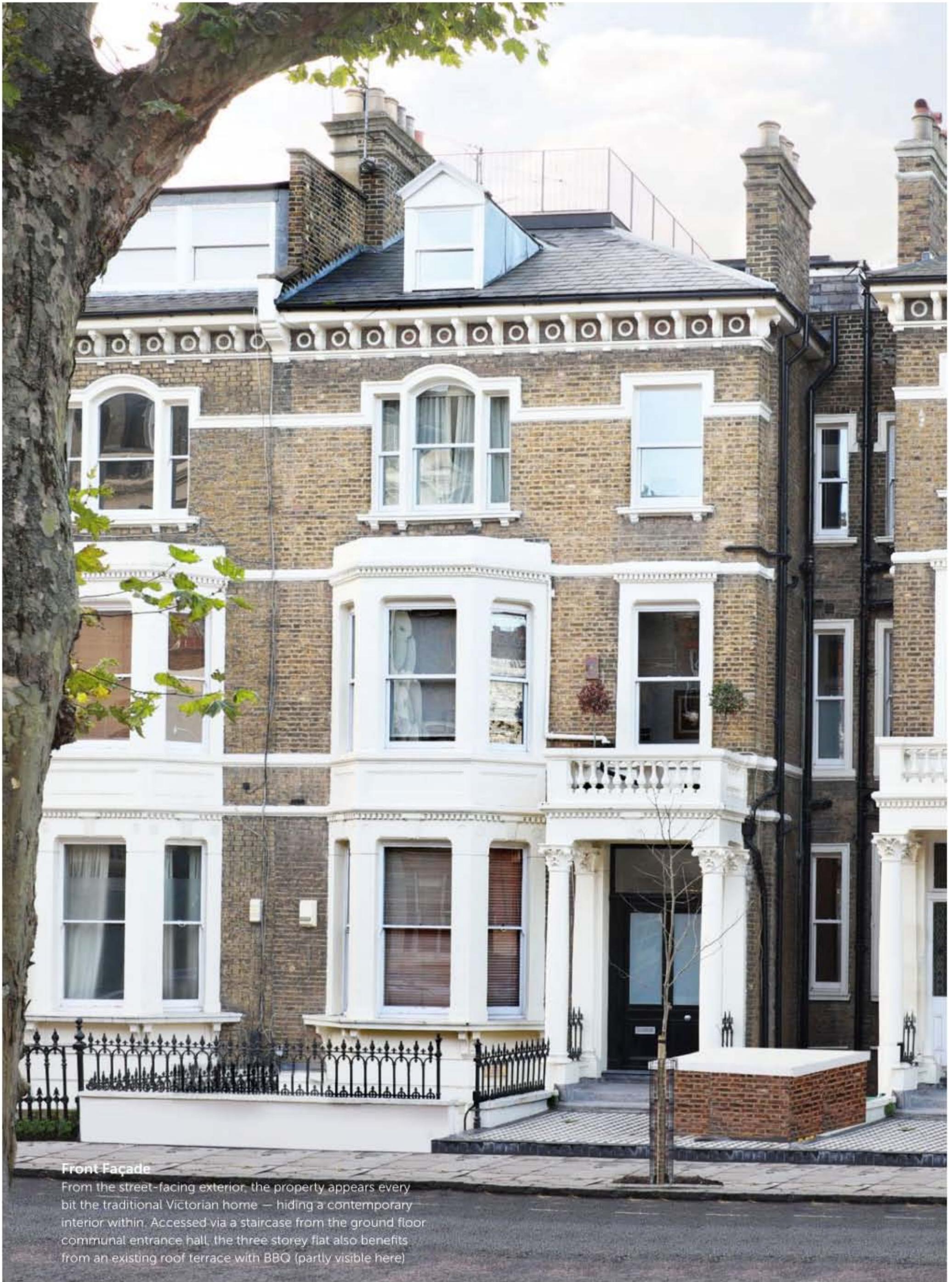
RALF EIKELBERG
Ralf Eikelberg is Director
of architectural practice
London Atelier
(londonatelier.com)

HB&R: Did the client approach you with a specific brief for this home?

Ralf Eikelberg: The client approached us after we were recommended. We handle a lot of museum design projects as well as residential architecture and always try to capture the historical spirit of the property, which the clients were keen to see happen with their rundown Victorian flat in Maida Vale.

The client had a set of requirements, which included three generous bedrooms and retaining the period features. The property was in a very poor condition with a series of partition walls dividing up spaces and preventing light from reaching different rooms, meaning that we would need to open the spaces up. There was also dry rot and a lot of structural problems. Everything was wonky, the windows were single glazed and some walls of the flat had seven layers of plasterboard placed on top of one another, which was quite dangerous. Everything needed straightening up.

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Front Façade

From the street-facing exterior, the property appears every bit the traditional Victorian home — hiding a contemporary interior within. Accessed via a staircase from the ground floor communal entrance hall, the three storey flat also benefits from an existing roof terrace with BBQ (partly visible here)

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Above: A New Staircase

In order to provide a greater connection between the second and third floors, the existing staircase was changed to a contemporary replacement with louvres and strip lights providing architectural interest

How did you approach the design process?

The flat is close to 230m² which is unusual for London and feels almost like a house with its three separate levels. The third floor however was not very well connected and so the existing staircase between the second and third floor was taken out and a new staircase – with louvres and strip lights – was introduced (shown left).

Everything internally was removed and we started from scratch. However, in order to maintain the historical envelope we played with the scheme by keeping the period features intact but customising the rest of the space; the fireplaces, skirting boards and the free-standing bath were all kept in order to enhance the Victorian look.

On the first level, the dividing partition walls were removed and there is now a large open plan living/kitchen space where plenty of light can flow through. The second level houses the master suite and a guest bedroom, and on the third level there is a third bedroom and a TV room, which could always be turned into another bedroom in the future if needed.

Every item of furniture in the home has been customised to meet the client's needs, too. For instance, the client wanted a boot room for storage and so we looked at the layout and decided to arrange the supporting rooms – including boot room, storage space, etc. – around the staircase which now acts as a spine for the property.

Were there any issues with the project?

The flat on the ground floor below was occupied and, along with planning permission, this was one of the challenges we faced. The property sits within the Maida Vale Conservation Area and so we had to respect the local authority's requirements when we applied →



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for planning permission. Before we could even apply for planning though we had to gain approval from the neighbourhood association.

There were then issues with the freeholders and the Party Wall agreements needed sorting out. Luckily the client was very proactive with this. Once all of this was in place we started immediately and the project in total took 11 months. We took a risk, however, by putting work out to tender straight after applying for planning permission, before it had even been granted. We did as much as possible to get everything in place before we received permission to speed up the process. It was definitely the quickest way of doing things, but it was risky. Fortunately everything was fine — even the alterations we made to the existing roof terrace.

With the floor below there were conditions with the freeholders to achieve similar or better soundproofing values and we had to meet Building Regulations requirements, too. The client also wanted wood flooring and so we had to design this accordingly and had Building Control along with acoustic professionals on board.

What is your favourite element of the project?

The folding ladder leading to the established roof terrace is a really cool piece. Due to planning conditions it was impossible to extend the staircase to this level, and previously the roof terrace could only be accessed by a roof hatch and ladder which wasn't very stable. We came up with a folding aluminium contraption complete with handrail which pulls down and sits on pressurised pistons — much like a car boot door. It lifts back up when not in use so that it also doesn't disturb the layout of the third level accommodation. The new rooflight above opens electronically too so there is easy access to the terrace which benefits from a BBQ and views over the rooftops — five rooflights were also introduced in order to boost natural light.

How does the home meet the client's requirements?

We kept the spirit of the Victorian envelope and reopened the spaces to inject a new contemporary life without disturbing the historical structure. The home has been fully remodelled and the newly customised spaces have created a pleasant balance and sense of calm throughout. Even though the rooms are contemporary, everything has a traditional element — the clients are very happy. **H**



Below: Staircase Solutions

With planning conditions ruling out the possibility of extending the staircase up to the roof terrace, London Atelier devised a clever solution in the form of a folding aluminium ladder sitting on pressurised pistons which can be pulled down when required



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