

A dramatic contrast of old and new in this superb townhouse drawing room. The coffee table is a versatile piece, made from resin, marble and metal, intended to enhance a range of different schemes. *Table Objet*, from £16,500; *Stool Objet*, from £2,850; cashmere throw from £950; all *Maison Arabella*



Townhouse ELEGANCE

Create contemporary looks that complement period interiors for stylish urban living

From ornate aristocratic residences to more modest dwellings belonging to merchants and professionals, the townhouse defines many of our towns and cities. These imposing terraces of multi-storey properties, with their facades that feature tall windows and neo-classical ornamentation, offer a unique and often highly desirable way of living that, done well, blends the best of historic building design with modern functionality and aesthetics.

The vast majority of townhouses were built in the Georgian and Regency eras, and interior designers relish working with their well-thought-out proportions, which focus on symmetry, order and balance, and features such as marble fireplaces, sash windows and architectural mouldings. "The main thing I love about townhouses is their proportions," says Irene Gunter of Gunter & Co Interiors. "They have a beautiful symmetry, incredibly generous ceiling height and gorgeous windows. The architecture is just so elegant, and that, to me, is luxury."

USING THE SPACE

Whilst some townhouses were conceived on an undeniably grand scale, many were built by speculative builders for whom narrow frontages led to higher profits. The typical tall, thin layout with numerous small rooms may not always suit modern family life, and many townhouses have had rear extensions added and rooms 'knocked through'. Gunter says: "Sometimes, when an extension is added, you lose the windows on the rear facade that allow light into the stairs and landings. Glazed internal doors can help, or you can add a skylight or – better – a lantern light that suits the architecture of the house." She also feels that creating completely open-plan rooms is not necessarily the best solution. "In losing the original proportions the soul of the house can be lost." When trying to open up two small rooms she likes to include a tall, wide set of raised and fielded double doors – pocket doors where ▶

TOP RIGHT In this hallway by Gunter & Co Interiors, a vibrant mix of contemporary furnishings makes for an exciting contrast with the traditional cornice.

RIGHT Sheer, slimline blinds provide privacy in this cosy study, with traditional panelling and radiators, a lovely parquet floor, and a retro-style wall light adding an interesting touch.

Juliette chair in Coniston Blue, £1,146, Parker Knoll





there is not enough room for a hinged pair – and she strongly recommends using the same floor finish throughout an entire floor, or even the whole house, to make rooms feel connected.

Alex Beauguard, design director at Lanserring, urges anyone considering altering their townhouse to look at the project through the eyes of the original builders. “These houses are exemplars of a certain architectural period,” he says. “A great place to start is to unpick the thinking of the day and try to understand what they were trying to do, to understand its value, and make any work resonate with the original architecture. And if you can keep a delineation between old and new, they will both retain their purity.”

ORIGINAL FEATURES

The combination of a central fireplace, timber floorboards, sash windows and detailed mouldings that featured in the typical Georgian townhouse is beyond compare. “If you have anything original you should retain it,” says Emily Todhunter of Todhunter Earle. “Fireplaces, especially, are so important, creating a focal point for classical elegance, and are so cosy and welcoming. I would sacrifice a piece of furniture for the sake of having a fireplace.” ►

ABOVE The cabinetry in this kitchen works sympathetically with the period style of this property whilst providing ample storage and interest. Kitchen cabinetry for above kitchen, from £60,000, Naked Kitchens
RIGHT A scenic wallpaper creates a focal point in a luxurious bathroom. Stand Wood wallpaper, designed in collaboration with renowned mural artist Melissa White, £119 a metre, Zoffany



A balanced mix of old and new gives interest to this minimal bedroom. Olivia headboard, from £650; Flint bed base, from £595; Madeleine chair in Chloe Old Rose, £390, all Neptune



Symmetrical placement
of furniture emphasises
the gracious design of
a typical townhouse.
*Portman sofa, £3,260,
plus 15 metres of fabric,
David Seyfried*





Original sash windows are also to be treasured; if they are sticky, loose or draughty, it is possible to have them renovated. Where features are missing, or have been replaced with substandard alternatives, it is well worth researching and carefully reinstating them (the Georgian Group has good advice on this). Gunter recommends adding wall panelling as appropriate to the period of the house, and perhaps replacing an unremarkable cast-iron fireplace with a better-looking marble one. "The main thing is that it adds to the identity and personality of the room," she says. Todhunter, meanwhile, suggests that the detailing of mouldings, if being reinstated, may be subtly changed for a slightly more contemporary style, provided the original proportions are kept.

MATERIALS, FINISHES & USE OF COLOUR

It is possible to choose a palette of materials that has barely changed in 200 years – oak, marble, brass, bronze and porcelain, for example – and yet still appears relevant, luxurious and highly modern. "Period properties used a lot of English oak in their construction, so I always feel that is a very appropriate material," says Beaugeard. He prefers a honed finish for stone and marble as more truthful to the historic nature of the property, but Gunter ►

ABOVE The focus of this elegant drawing room by Todhunter Earle Interiors is the view through the window to the balcony and gardens.

LEFT In this restful Fulham bedroom by K&H Design, a triptych by Flora Roberts above the bed and a metalwork oak-leaf chandelier by Cox London link the scheme.



favours a polished finish, which she feels adds a sense of grandeur and helps to reflect light around the room. Fabric-lined rooms will, of course, always feel both luxurious and welcoming, whilst on narrow staircases, Gunter strongly advises using either a wallpaper, a wipeable emulsion or a durable material such as polished plaster, pointing out that ultra-matt emulsion, though beautiful, will mark within weeks.

Whilst bold and deep colours may have been the norm in a historic townhouse, a more modern aesthetic appreciates paler, neutral shades. "If you have an absolutely beautiful, classically proportioned room, I don't see the need for bold colours," says Gunter, whilst Todhunter adds: "A simple colour palette – though not entirely beige – is lovely. Perhaps it can be related to what can be seen outside the window. My feeling is that darker spaces are best painted darker, and lighter spaces lighter; and that small rooms often benefit from a bit of wallpaper."

FURNISHINGS & ART

When rooms are beautifully proportioned and contain attractive features, simplicity is key. "Less is more," says Todhunter. "For that urbane, contemporary feel, the best thing to do is mix some ►

ABOVE LEFT The striking geometric shapes in laser-polished steel with contrasting blackened infill panels echo the property's front door, whilst the oak handrail to matches the original parquet flooring.

Price for a bespoke balustrade, from £3,000 a metre, Bisca

ABOVE RIGHT The architecture and historical era of this townhouse in Holland Park, London, greatly influenced Lanserring's design of the kitchen, which embraces natural timber finishes with brass accents.

Kitchen from £60,000, Lanserring

RIGHT A pretty green brings the outside in, with accessories complementing the period architecture of this home.

Lover sofa in Linen Cotton Pistachio, £1,100, Willow & Hall



old with the new. Our typical look would be very sleek sofas, with some antiques and perhaps something ancient to add more character. It is about balance – doing enough, but not too much. Find pieces that sit calmly with one another and that make the room feel good. It is also important to mix some softer textures with hard surfaces.”

Choosing furniture that is of the correct scale for high-ceilinged rooms can be tricky, and Gunter points out that it is important not to overwhelm the architecture. She goes back to basics, clears the rooms and lays masking tape on the floor to show the size and placement of each piece. “These rooms really lend themselves to placing furniture symmetrically,” she says. “But it doesn’t have to be too stiff and upright – upholstery can be really comfortable and inviting.” She likes to add large pieces (or groupings of several smaller works) of contemporary art and, for a formal look, recommends a pair of consoles with either lamps or modern sculptures in the alcoves either side of the chimneybreast.

IN THE KITCHEN

The modern ideal of a spacious, family-centred kitchen rarely accords with the traditional Georgian townhouse, where kitchens were sited in the basement, from which staff delivered food to the dining room above. Moving the kitchen to a larger space should definitely be a consideration. “I would generally try to put the kitchen in the biggest room possible,” says Todhunter. “The dream scenario is to have a kitchen with a sitting area and play area, with doors opening onto the garden. If that means opening up or digging down, I don’t have a problem with that, as long as one keeps the essence of the building.” Beugeard adds: “Making social spaces is really important, so it is a question of considering how the family interacts, where people do different things and what the sightlines and thoroughfares are.”

Technology helps in creating a functional, enjoyable kitchen – whether it be a quiet dishwasher or an extractor that disappears into the worktop when not in use. Beugeard recommends a charging drawer with USB ports at the back for phones and tablets, and a boiling-water tap, both of which help declutter the worktop area. He does, however, like to include some open shelving, either for a colourful selection of cookbooks or perhaps a more considered display of art or objects, and adds: “I always try to include handmade handles. It really makes a difference to feel something solid and well-made.”

The other advantage of a townhouse kitchen is that smaller, nearby rooms can be employed as ancillary spaces, whether for laundry, storage or washing up. “Townhouses often have these little pantries or other small rooms,” Beugeard says. “That way you can have your main kitchen as the primary social room and somewhere to put the dishes at the end of a dinner party.” ■

TOP RIGHT In this London dining room by Joanna Wood, a false ceiling features invisible lighting and a recess for the curtains.

MIDDLE RIGHT Brass and marble finishes create a luxurious feel in this bathroom whilst traditional pieces have been treated in a modern, minimal way.

London basin stand for 700mm washbasin, from £1,076; London 700mm washbasin, £531, both CP Hart

BOTTOM RIGHT Dashes of orange bring vivacity to this bedroom, where understated panelling provides an interesting grid-like structure. Flooring, Delamere natural oiled oak, from £64.98 a square metre, Kersaint Cobb



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