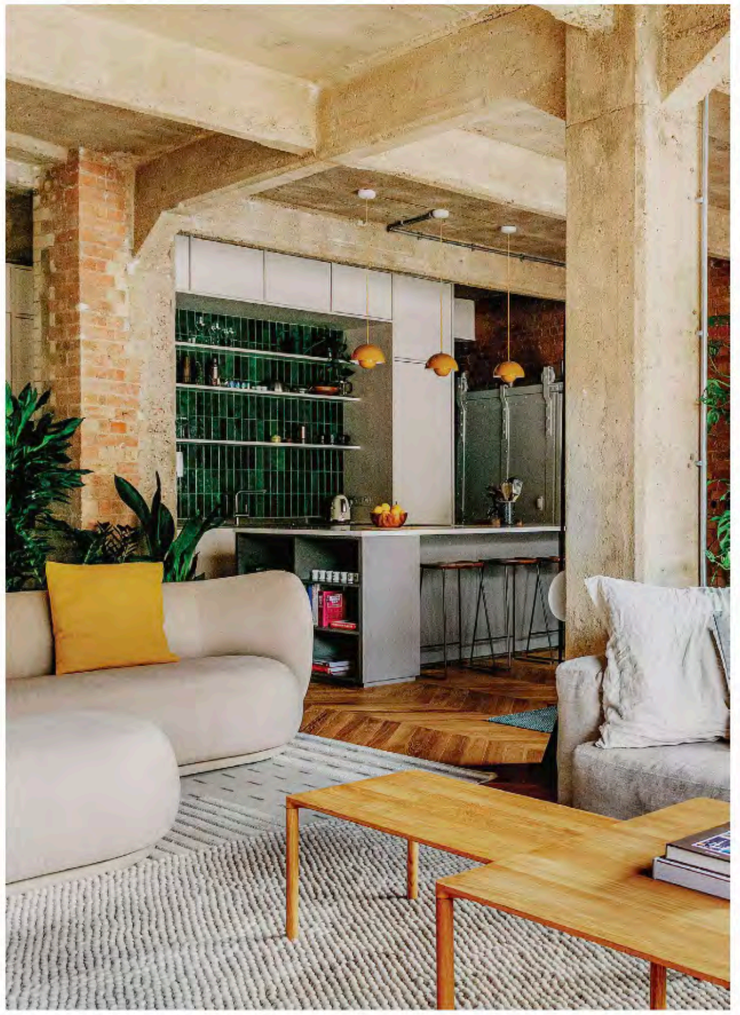
clerkenwell calling

A warehouse flat in one of east London's hottest spots has been sensitively designed around its existing fabric

PHOTOGRAPHY Mariell Lind Hansen
STYLING Emil Eve Architects
WORDS Juliet Benning



DINING AREA

Unadulterated ceilings make the most of structural height. Low and horizontal furnishings hint at a Japanese influence.

Table, Case. **Chairs** and **sofa**, Hay. **Bench** (just seen), Bolia. **Plants**, Patch Plants

LIVING SPACE

Chunky knit pale rugs provide a sense of warmth without detracting from the architecture.

Coffee **tables**, Hugo Passos for Fredericia. **Rugs**, Hay

THE OWNERS

Jen Long, who works in tech, and Mike Zhang, who works in finance. The couple previously rented separate flats – Mike in Russell Square and Jen in Caledonian Road – before renting a flat in a building next door together. This is the first home they have bought together.

THE PROPERTY

A flat on the second floor of a five-storey warehouse building in Clerkenwell. The front door opens into a library-hallway space. There is a main bedroom with dressing room and en-suite bathroom, a second bedroom, used as a gym and home office, a pantry and main bathroom. The rest of the space is open-plan and contains the kitchen, dining and lounge areas.

LIVING SPACE

Rich upholstered pieces were included to act as a foil to the flat's more raw materials.

TV cabinet made by Harbour Joinery Workshop. Oak parquet **flooring**, Havwoods. Curved **sofa** and **ottoman**, Ferm Living

KITCHEN

Concealed behind the main cooking area is a neat pantry. The emerald colour of the glazed tiles was popular in commercial Victorian architecture of the area.

Surfaces, Harbour Joinery Workshop. Flowerpot Yellow pendant **lights**, &Tradition. Bar **stools**, Zara Home. **Tiles**, Parkside

When Jen Long and Mike Zhang's Clerkenwell flat first came on the market it didn't want for admirers. A rare example of an almost entirely untouched warehouse flat, its lack of walls, plaster or modernisation gave it a raw appeal. 'The seller had accepted another offer but the buyer's chain broke down, meaning our offer was later accepted. We were given a strict timeline so we had a mad dash to get everything lined up in time for the sale,' Mike recalls. The couple had been searching all over London for many months before striking gold. 'Clerkenwell is extremely convenient for us. We both work in central London but our friends are mostly east so this location bridges the two,' Mike explains.

While owners of the surrounding flats in the old factory building had succumbed to slick modernisation, Jen and Mike's flat retained its bare bricks and roughly hewn concrete pillars echoing the vigorous industry of the site a hundred years prior. 'The fact that the bare fabric of the building was intact appealed to us,' Mike says. 'With every other flat we looked at we would have to start taking things out, whereas with this one we would be effectively working from the ground up,' Jen adds. An unassuming commercial exterior sealed the deal. 'You enter through a small lobby and lift so you don't expect the flat to be particularly exciting but then you walk in and it opens up into all this impressive space. That contrast really hooked us,' Mike describes.

Living at Jen's Caledonian Road property, the couple were eager to get the flat configured to their needs rapidly. Not only did they wish to avoid paying more rent but looking for an architect in March 2020, they realised the global pandemic would also stymie their plans. It meant they appointed their architects, Emma and Ross Perkin of Emil Eve, without even meeting them in the flesh. 'We spoke to them on the phone and we had a really good feeling about them,' Jen says.

The challenge the pair presented to Emma and Ross was to break up some of the space into functional, zoned living areas while retaining as much of the old factory fabric as possible. 'We created a series of contemporary interventions that were distinct from the existing building. Each one contains a new domestic room: library, dressing room, bathroom, en suite and pantry. They are lined with bespoke timber joinery and ceramic tiling to create a unique atmosphere and identity,' Ross explains.

Clad in neat oak cabinetry, the newly constructed rooms provide a warm wooden heart amid the brickwork perimeter. Large sliding doors either side of the central library mean the entire length of the property can be admired. The bedrooms were swapped with the old kitchen location onto the quieter side of the building. Contained very separately beyond the dressing room, the main bedroom has a serene character. 'We've covered the walls in this lovely soft plaster. It's a sanctuary in contrast with the industrial vibes in the rest of the flat,' Mike notes. While some of the furniture was made especially for the flat, Jen sourced other pieces from local furniture stores SCP and Twentytwentyone. 'I think it was only once we'd started putting in all the plants that it really started to feel like home,' Jen says.

The culmination of all their hard work has been the socialising the pair missed in lockdown as Mike reveals, 'We've been entertaining friends in groups of six but the big housewarming party is still to come.'

Architecture by Emil Eve Architects, emileve.co.uk

DINING AREA
Plump leaves of a fiddle leaf fig tree animate this corner while the smooth modernist furnishings contrast with the rough brick and concrete.

Pendant **light**, George Nelson for Herman Miller. **Rug**, Hay

LIBRARY
'The terrazzo tiling is a composite material like a refined version of concrete. It picks up in the warmth of the wood,' says Ross.

Terrazzo **tiles**, Solus Ceramics. **Cabinetry** designed by Emil Eve Architects in collaboration with Harbour Joinery Workshop

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home truths

FAVOURITE FURNITURE DESIGNER?
Charles and Ray Eames.

FABRICS THAT BEST SUIT THE WAREHOUSE LIFESTYLE?
Linen helps soften the more raw and hard materials of the structure.

PIECE OF ART YOU COVET?
The dream would be a piece by Basquiat.

FAVOURITE BUILDING?
Fallingwater by Frank Lloyd Wright is beautiful.

BEST PART OF THE DESIGN PROCESS?
Sitting down with Ross and Emma and picking materials to use.

TOP THING ABOUT LIVING IN A WAREHOUSE SPACE?
The openness and the flexibility.

MAIN BEDROOM
Slatted joinery wraps around the space. Under the window it conceals a radiator that doubles as a long seat.

Custom made bed and **joinery**, Harbour Joinery Workshop. **Bedding**, John Lewis & Partners. Table **lamp**, Made. **Wall** finish, Clayworks. **Armchair**, West Elm. **Drawers**, Made

the blueprint

EN SUITE
Dappled tiles provide textural interest. A seam of lighting under the mirrored cabinets adds to the sense of depth.

Pico **tiles**, Mutina. Concrete **basins**, Kast. Black **taps**, Vola

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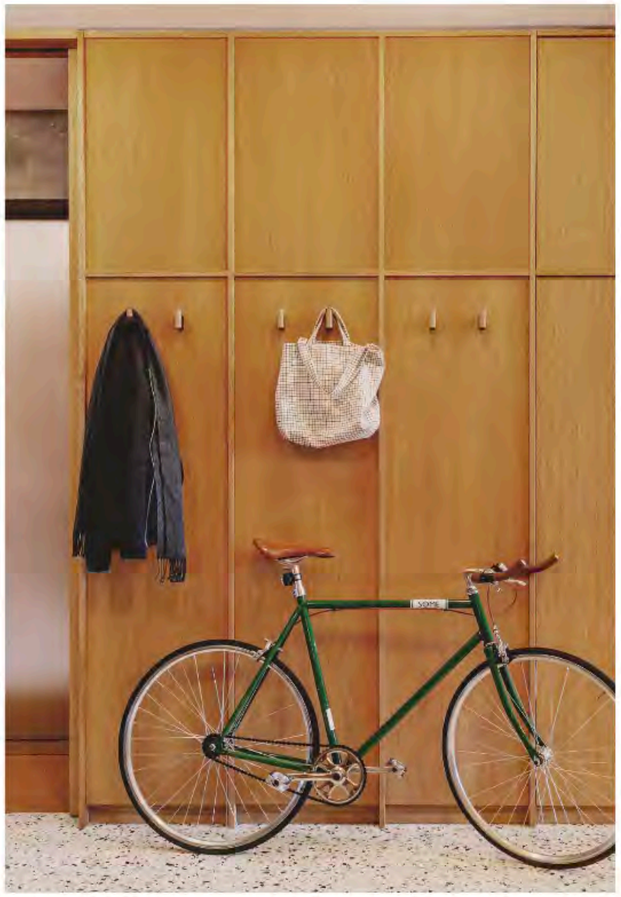
EXPERT ADVICE

cabinetry confidential

JEN AND MIKE'S HOME IS FULL OF CLEVER CUPBOARD SPACE. ARCHITECT EMMA PERKIN, WHO WAS BEHIND IT, TELLS US HER DESIGN PROCESS



I worked with my partner Ross and we faced two challenges; one was the mathematical puzzle of how to create a new floor plan that made sense and retained the openness of the 170 square metres. The other was how to use materials and joinery to bring character to Jen and Mike's flat and provide the storage they needed. A key space is the library. You enter directly into this room and then move from here into the other areas. It's lined entirely in European oak joinery, incorporating bookshelves and hidden storage that establishes a calm and welcoming atmosphere to the space. An integrated approach to design was essential here and we needed to plan for technicalities of the services from the outset.

FINDING A JOINER There are lots of great joiners out there. Instagram is a good place to start looking. Also look at architecture and interiors journals to see who the joiners in the projects you like are. Key things to consider are if they have a workshop or will be making everything on site and if they will produce their own drawings to finalise the design.

Ross and I met our joiner Hazel Thomson at Edinburgh University where we were all studying architecture. After university, Hazel worked as an architect for some years before undertaking a joinery apprenticeship and then setting up her own firm, Harbour Joinery Workshop, with a friend. Working with a joiner who has an architecture background is great – Hazel understood what we wanted to do and why.

PLANNING STAGE We considered services and service routes from a very early stage so we kept in mind where these routes, whether it be for lighting, gas or boiler flue, would be going. Our integrated approach allowed us to plan for the sliding doors. In the past, these have had a reputation for being unreliable and rattly. The system we use, Portman Pocket Doors, is a really great kit. It's quite straightforward to use, making it popular with builders. We laid acoustic matting below the terrazzo floor tiles, and to hide the services running across the top of the space we created a lowered ceiling, which also helped with separation to the flat above.

It's essential to consider the lighting and electrics from an early stage to make sure all switches and sockets are integrated into the design. In the library, we thought about where items such as speakers would be placed. We also integrated five-amp sockets into the shelves, which meant that lamps could be turned on and off directly from the main light switches in the room. This is great as it's much simpler than turning on lamps individually and it also allows Jen and Mike to create different moods.

MATERIAL GAIN We really like working with oak as it's a very traditional timber for joinery, it's durable and has a beautiful warmth and grain. The library uses a combination of solid oak for the vertical elements and handles with veneered sheets with solid edging for the shelving and doors. The veneer reduces waste during production and minimises the use of natural resources while enabling the creation of large timber surfaces. Using solid oak for the areas of significant exposure ensures a long life for the joinery as a whole.

When sourcing wood you should consider the species and the way the timber has been sawn. When it comes to veneers there are further choices with regards to how the thin sheets of veneer are cut and arranged. You should always ensure that timber comes from sustainable sources.

> "We really like working with oak as it's durable and has a beautiful warmth and grain"

FEATURE JULIET BENNING **PHOTOGRAPH** MARIELL LIND HANSEN