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London-based Australian architect ANDY MARTIN talks about shifting his focus from hospitality towards public and private housing projects



There are very few Australian architects running their own practice in London, but Andy Martin is the best of his generation. Born in Sydney in 1963, he studied architecture at the University of Technology, Sydney before moving to London for post-graduate training at the Architectural Association School of Architecture. Will Alsop was his tutor and they got on well, with Martin making a Super 8 film about his tutor. Martin admired Alsop's style and enjoyed the banter so went to work with him in his Battersea office, before returning to Sydney in 1989 to set up a small practice. Here he completed a couple of private house commissions, one at Whale Beach, before moving to Paris in 1992 to work with Marc Newson on architectural projects. The two collaborated on Coast restaurant in Mayfair and Mash & Air in Manchester, working for restaurateur Oliver Peyton.

Martin found this a superb stepping-stone for his career. He has a close affinity with Peyton, who was expanding his restaurant group, and went on to design his flagship Mash Bar & Restaurant on Great Portland Street, home of London's rag trade. Peyton's most glamorous eatery, Isola, in Knightsbridge was also designed by Martin, who beat Zaha Hadid and Christian Liaigre for the commission. Isola sported a sophisticated yet playful style – masses of chrome and red walls and custom-designed furniture and lighting throughout a huge basement and ground floor space. Although it closed after a few years in the recession of the 1990s, it was a step forward for London's bar and restaurant culture.

It was at this point that Martin decided to re-orient himself towards public and private housing, setting up a new practice, Andy Martin Associates on Notting Hill's All Saint's Road. A beachside development in Hong Kong and a restaurant in Greece were two overseas schemes he took on during this period. He still designs restaurant projects internationally and is working on three in Bahrain. But in the UK he is primarily known for his focus on London housing. "There's a beauty about defining spaces," says Martin. Here

he takes a bold approach to the use of natural light, contrasts of light and dark space and playfulness with materials.

Martin has made mews houses a speciality, with commissions for a variety of pop musicians, Peyton, writer William Shawcross and hotelier and designer, Olga Polizzi. There are many mews houses in Notting Hill and Central London, mainly dating from the mid-19th Century, traditionally on a cobbled street in two facing rows. Originally serving as stabling or staff quarters for the grand town houses, in the last 40 years or so they have become rather more expensive and highly sought after.

St Lukes Mews is one such residential scheme. It originally had a pitched roof but this was removed and set back. Martin introduced screens, custom-designed storage, and a mix of materials – timber, resin, concrete and glass. He also played a nice game with reflections. "Black is the same as a mirror here, and doubles the space." The staircases have been treated as spaces in their own right. There is also a ground floor conservatory with timber walls that make it feel quite detached from the building it is attached to. Here planning officers would not let him do a reflective glazed door, so Martin decided to take the façade of the mews back to what it was before, at least for this project. "Everyone puts French doors and Juliet balconies on these days," he says.

Like many architects, Martin loves creating a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, cohesive projects with integrated interior design, furnishings, equipment and artworks. His work has moved on since the days of Mash and Isola, which were clearly influenced by the extrovert approach of Peyton, who loves colour. Now, it is light that leads the scheme, rather than colour. "We build within the city as if it is our own," Martin says, a characteristically genuine statement about his commitment to people and place.

Lucy Bullivant is Indesign's London correspondent.



WORDS LUCY BULLIVANT



FAR LEFT A black storage wall integrated into the stairs beside the living room in St Lukes Mews
LEFT Chan restaurant in London, 2010, shows Martin's continued interest in restaurant design
ABOVE The exterior of St Lukes Mews
RIGHT Andy Martin



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