

# THE HILL

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# A-list architect

Alexander Larman steps inside Andy Martin's magnificent mews house to find out all about his world-wide projects, transforming London's hippest restaurants, and designing homes for the likes of Olga Polizzi and Noel Gallagher

**T**he first thing that you notice when you arrive at architect Andy Martin's Notting Hill house, situated in a quiet mews off Westbourne Park Road, is its Tardis-like dimensions. From the outside, it might look like a typical two up, two down mews residence, but on the inside it consists of a remarkable amount of space, designed to maximise the potential of every room. It helps that Martin's aesthetic eye is extremely strong, meaning that the building offers something interesting and quirky everywhere you go, whether it's the upstairs master bedroom complete with galley en-suite bathroom or the basement den-cum-living area. Martin has lived there for the past three years, having bought it from the client he originally designed it for. As he says, slightly ruefully: "Most of the things that he changed were things that I'd put in for a reason, but he ignored them." It feels like the home of an architect; sleek, sexy and innovative. In this, the private residence, it reflects his public work.

Martin, a boyish-looking man in his late 40s, has been working in architecture for several decades, after studying at Sydney's University of Technology. He trained under Will Alsop at the AA school in London, and cites Alsop's flamboyant, forward-looking style of architecture as a major influence. He's probably best known for his collaborations with the industrial designer Marc Newson and the restaurateur Oliver Peyton, which have included designs for such seminal 90s restaurants as Coast and the 'alternative' pizza place Mash. As Martin puts it: "We were doing something entirely different back then to the Conran group, which were designed without being forward-thinking." His work has included everything from private residential design to working with furniture, and the interplay between light and dark offers both a compelling environment for people to spend time in,

and the expression of a quizzical and forward-thinking artistic mind. He cites an eclectic range of things as influences, including the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, but his work is inimitably stylish and unique.

When we meet, he's coming off two big projects, having worked on homes for the interior designer Olga Polizzi and her husband William Shawcross, and also one for Noel Gallagher and his wife Sara. Both, unsurprisingly, have had their fair share of challenges, but the ever-focused Martin prefers to see them more in terms of opportunities. "Olga asked me to design her house around a year ago, which is also a mews residence, but a rather larger one. The challenges there were to take a four bedroom house and redo it in a completely different style, and then have her come in and put in the finishing touches.

"With Noel and Sara, I'm obviously restricted from saying too much about it, but it was a total refurbishment of a Georgian building in Maida Vale, top to bottom, and opened up a lot of the space."

## Compromise is key

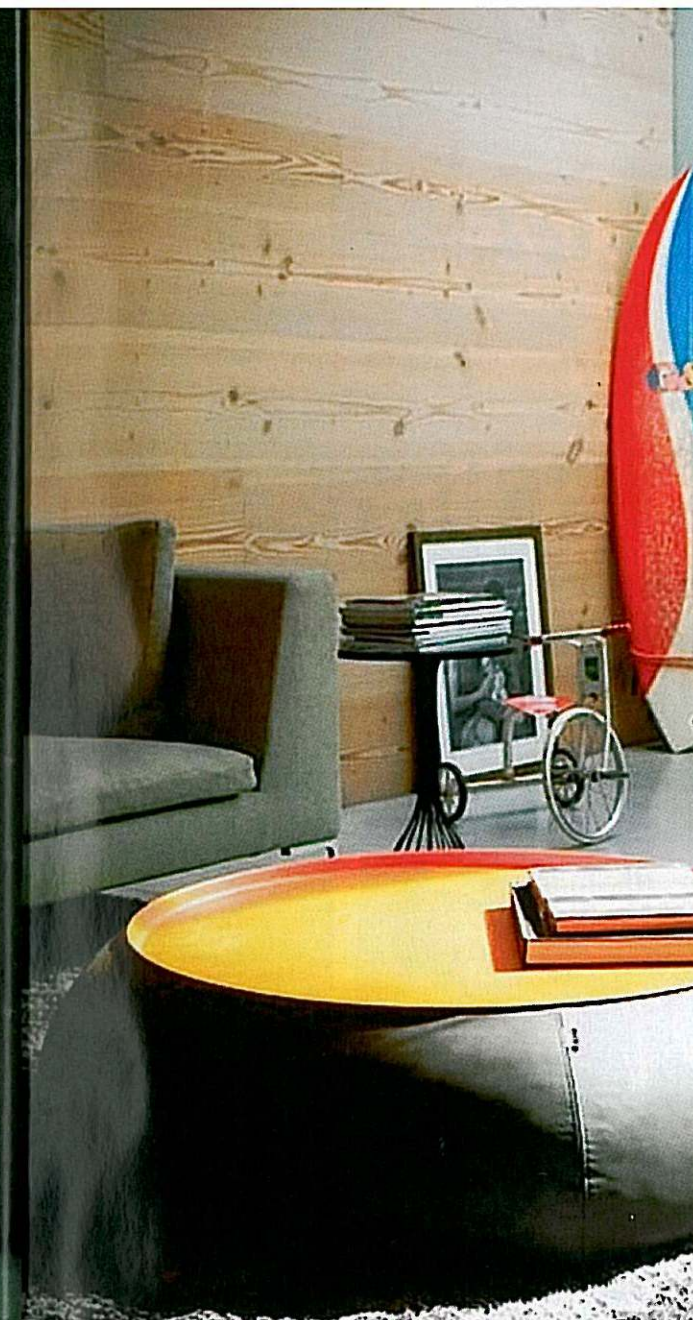
As seems now traditional for moneyed rock stars, Gallagher, the writer of such songs as *Put Yer Money Where Yer Mouth Is* and *The Importance Of Being Idle*, lives in Grade II listed splendour, something that Martin candidly says can often be troublesome in terms of the innovations that he wants to bring in. "There's a lot of red tape, but as long as you work closely with planners, and you stay chummy, you'll be okay. But compromise is always involved, to some extent." He's discreet about precisely what his work on the Gallagher's abode has consisted of, but does let slip that one room is entirely mirrored, and adorned throughout with tiny lights, making for the most extravagant of boudoirs.

His residential projects, which combine lucrative



Andy Martin on the stairs of his mews house holding a gatto lamp designed by Achille Castiglioni and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni for Flos





architectural work with a family's desire for well-appointed privacy (one gets the impression that we won't see many Martin-designed homes in OK! or Hello in the near future), represent a marriage of his skill and his clients' wishes. When asked whether it's he or they who makes the running, he smiles wryly, and says: "It's a bit of both. Some people have very strong ideas as to what they want, but others, as with Olga Polizzi, are really open to suggestions and ideas. But then again, we weren't doing anything radical there, just concentrating on making the rooms more useable, and updating the existing 80s refurbishment. People do occasionally dislike what we've done, but it's all about a process of discussion."

When he's discussing how his restaurant designs mirror his residential work, he pauses, chuckles, and says: "I was about to say they're very similar, but in fact they're not at all. Occasionally, as with Oliver Peyton's house, we tried to do something that's bigger and more 'fun', as we would in a restaurant, but it's so seldom that we have the space to play with. With a commercial space, we have a big library of ideas to choose from, and obviously, if we're working on a restaurant, we work very closely with the chef to get their input and ideas."

In fact, one of the only real areas of crossover tends to be, of all places, in the toilet. "Bathrooms

in restaurants can often be quite unpleasant and uncomfortable things, and so we try and introduce a bit of intimacy there, as we might in a private home."

### *Resplendent restaurants*

He's been associated with many of London's hippest restaurants, including Barrafina, Quo Vadis and L'Etranger. One much-acclaimed Westbourne Grove establishment that Martin designed was Hereford Road, which opened in 2007.

It's an elegant, friendly space, the sort of place that feels like the very model of the high-end neighbourhood joint.

The sort of unforced charm that it radiates didn't come about by accident, hence the appointment of a top-end architect such as Martin. "It was a real fight, because we had two clients who wanted something that felt simultaneously like it was on the street, but also had a serious dining room at the back. They got

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that, but the contrast between the buzzy upstairs and the more formal dining room is so radical that it can be quite sparse. Funnily enough, it's in summer that I really love it as a space, because we put in a big circular window, and the sun streams in and really makes it feel intimate and light."

Overseas work has included projects in Greece ("very challenging...we had to bring in an English builder in the end"), Beirut and Hong Kong. Oddly enough, he claims to find the process easier in many respects.

"If you're from England, they give you a lot more trust, and more of a free rein. Most of the people are looking for a lot of your input, and also for your developing a relationship with a local architect or project manager, which makes it easier when you're only going there once a month or so." It's not always plain sailing – he cites a disastrous misplacing of an enormous floor slab in Morocco that took eight weeks to remove, thanks to the absence of jackhammers – but there's a sense of collaboration and open-mindedness that he often finds lacking at home.

After living in Paris and other places for many years, Martin has been based in and around Notting Hill since 2003, first in Leamington Road ("after the prostitutes had all moved out, when the houses were all selling for £3 million") and now off Westbourne

Park Road.

He first lived in the area while studying at university, and then briefly again in the 1990s, and finds the ways in which everything's changed both fascinating and faintly disturbing. "I love it here, it's a great part of town, but bits of it have turned too chi-chi for me. Lots of good places have just shut down over the years."

He cites The Cow and The Electric as two of his favourite places to go, the former for a drink ("I remember when it was a crusty old man's pub") and the latter for Sunday brunch with his family. Perhaps surprisingly, he doesn't frequent The Ledbury all that often, despite it being run by his fellow countryman Brett Graham, and says, with a hint of self-deprecation: "It's all a bit too young for me." He's enthusiastic though about Bill Granger's new place on Westbourne Grove, which he describes as "packed with Aussies, and sure to be a massive success."

In 2012, he's going to be as busy as ever, with a new Richard James store, a trip to Milan and more restaurants and houses to be designed.

However, it's most telling that, when I ask him about his plans, he smiles and says, perhaps more revealingly than he intends: "Oh, a year off!" Still, with many new worlds left to conquer, there's little doubt that a year in which Andy Martin has nothing to do seems like a very long time away. }

Left to right: Arco lamp by Achille Castiglioni for Flos; The living room with Andy's old surfboard, B&B Italia Pouf and AMA wire coffee table; Children's room with AMA woodlamp; Cinema room in the basement with B&B Italia sofa and green Panton chair

