Timeless appeal

A refined colour palette and restored original features align in this Georgian home

Words / Charlotte Abrahams
Images / Malcolm Manzies

"Timelessness is an important quality," says London-based interior designer Kerri Lipsitz. "I tend to steer clear of anything too 'of the moment', because I believe my clients should invest in something that will last a lifetime." Her latest project, a three storey Georgian home in one of the capital's leafy northern 'villages', is an elegant, tranquil example of this philosophy in practice.

Despite last being modernised 20 years ago, Lipsitz felt an instant affinity with the building. "I am very interested in architectural features, such as cornices, architraves and panelling," she explains. "They mean you have history and beautiful detail built into the architectural canvas. Not all the original features [here] had been maintained well, but it had good bones."

Her first response was to restore the canvas, turning those good bones into great ones. In some cases, this meant repairing what was there; elsewhere, it required a bit of architectural licence. The panelling in the living room was a Lipsitz intervention to accentuate the ceiling height, while the central staircase was remodelled with bespoke newel posts and hidden support beams to give it "a more considered, lighter feel that had real presence."

Attention then turned to the decor. Lipsitz prefers paint over paper and, in this house, she painted everything – walls, ceiling, doors and all – the same shade of warm white. "There's a lot of natural light, so we worked to ensure we chose a colour that was appropriate day and night," she states. "When doing something so simple, it has to be very considered."

Such decorative restraint not only delivered the fresh, calm interior the client had requested, but it also provided the perfect neutral backdrop for one of Lipsitz's signature techniques – the creation of what she calls 'confident contrasts'.

"It's about the balance of opposing elements, using one to off-set another," she explains. "It's how I create what I believe to be an aesthetic of discrete luxury. In the living room, for instance, we used the low-backed sofa to act as a contrast to the height of the ceiling. In the kitchen, we mixed styles of furniture – placing mid-century Kaare Klint dining chairs with an antique French refectory table and bespoke joinery."

There are textural contrasts everywhere, too. Hard surfaces such as limestone, granite and marble rub up against soft wood; shiny leather is set against slubby linen. "Texture is the focal point for me," says Lipsitz, "so the feel of the materials I use, and the relationship they form because of the way I have placed them through the scheme, become very important."

The visual impact of materials is also crucial. Lipsitz has used them in this house to build another layer of confident contrast, and also to create pattern. A single armchair and a scattering of cushions aside, there is no printed pattern here at all: but the rooms are so full of interest that it takes a while for this to sink in. In the study, there is pattern in the grain of the 1960s Danish rosewood and teak desk and the veining of the limestone floor tiles; in the master bedroom, it's in the coarse weave linen light shade and bedhead; and, in the living room, the pattern comes from the ever-changing surface of the zinc-wrapped bar unit.

"I always encourage clients to use natural materials that get better with time," she says. "In this project, I was particularly keen that the hard finishes should build up a lovely patina as they age. Zinc is one of those beautiful living materials that is always changing as it oxidises."

Persuading her clients to choose materials with aesthetic and functional longevity is one way Lipsitz ensures her interiors stand the test of time. Another is to design spaces which suit their lives. These clients wanted to live in an uncluttered way, and that meant giving them plenty of storage – particularly in the kitchen.

"We wanted the kitchen to be functional," she explains, "but also feel like a wonderful place to entertain. The solution was a bespoke cupboard – it means there's a place for everything."

Lipsitz says she loved working on this project. It shows. This is a beautifully understated space that speaks to and of those who call it home.

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A 2018 untitled painting by Spanish artist Pati Batzán makes a bold statement

Facing page
Left to right: the same warm white shade was used for floors, walls and curtains; original features are key to the 'architectural canvas' of this period home

Right
An oil on canvas piece by Spaniard Guillem Nadal brings a touch of the modern to the original wood panelling

"I tend to steer clear of anything too 'of the moment', because I believe my clients should invest in something that will last a lifetime"

Above
Next to a bespoke armchair by Julian Chichester sits a one-of-a-kind Tonga stool, hand-carved by the Batonga people of Zimbabwe

Right
The bright kitchen offers prime entertaining space and functionality, with bespoke features and storage units helping enhance both aspects