
ME AND MY HOME: Holy rock'n'roller

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Radio DJ and comedy talk-show host Nick Abbot has converted the top two floors of a former Victorian church in Hampstead into a wow-factor flat.

"I'd been living in and around Hampstead village for about 10 years when I started to look for a complete shell to convert. In the City something like this would have cost pounds 2m-plus - way too expensive for me. Then I saw an ad in the local paper, the Ham and High, for a huge empty shell here in Dartmouth Park, just between Hampstead and Highgate. When I walked in, it was literally just a gigantic concrete floor with a staircase between the two levels - no wiring, plumbing or anything. At 3,000 square feet, it was twice as big as anything I'd seen. I had to have it.

"The building was originally a Victorian church and had been converted in the Seventies into 18 flats. This was the last space left on the third and fourth floors. I bought in 2000 and then rented a basement flat in the same building during the conversion.

"The design was a joint project with a good friend, a really gifted designer and architect called John Williams. You hear horror stories about builders, but ours, Paul O'Reilly, was great. The whole project took about a year and I think my being on-site all the time really helped. We made all those small decisions that can take time to correct as we went along - it all went really smoothly, but there is a lot of glasswork that took time.

"Despite it once having been a church, there weren't any difficult planning issues. The design concept was really a double act between John and myself. Although if I ever do the same thing again, I think I might not bother with the architect and just work directly with a builder.

"From the beginning, I wanted a real sense of space. The apartment is big enough for five or six bedrooms, but I don't have kids so that's not what I wanted. Instead of dividing the area, we opened it up, so it's only got two bedrooms. In fact, it's so big, we could almost afford to waste space. Upstairs is the more intimate living

area, with the master bedroom at one end and a sofa and my wide-screen cinema area at the other. In the middle is this big 8ft-square glass-sided central void between the two floors. Around it, the cream carpets give the impression of walking on clouds.

"I particularly like the balustrade round the void. It's just plain glass with no rail - anything else would have interrupted the eye. The sunlight shining through it changes all year round, so in March it created the most perfect rainbow right down onto the white kitchen table below. It was an amazing sight.

"As a radio presenter, sound is really important to me, so I have this phenomenal six-speaker home-cinema system, real toys-for-boys stuff, which I listen to really loud. I think it's the sound even more than the picture that makes movies come alive.

"The original rose window on the end wall has a circular opening in the middle - it was one of the few things I didn't change. Through it, there is this great view right across London. There's also a small south-facing area on top of my neighbour's roof where I can sit outside.

"I have a 26ft beamed bedroom with ensuite bathroom and a laundry chute that goes right into the utility room below. It's a great idea, I'll do it again.

"From the beginning, this was never going to be a family home - there's the glass staircase for a start. When you open the front door, you walk into an 18ft hall, which could easily have made another bedroom. But I like being able to see right through the hall and sitting room to the rose window nearly 50 feet away. When anyone comes in, their first reaction is always "wow".

"You're faced with this luminous glass staircase lit from above and below. The light through the glass throws off these amazing prisms and reflections. It glows like a jewel and looks like an art installation.

"We've put in an oiled walnut floor throughout the lower level. I looked at dozens of boring blonde oak floors, but this walnut just has the most wonderful patterns in the grain.

"The downstairs bathroom is 18ft long, with teak decking leading up to a sunken bath. We put in a Philippe Starck bidet and WC, as well as a designer glass basin. Underneath, there's a slate floor with under-floor heating. But the best thing about the bathroom is the massive mirror-sided revolving door. When it's open, light streams through into the hall, and when the mirror faces the stairs, you see two glass staircases, with shards of light all over the place.

"The main living area downstairs is 40ft by 30ft. The kitchen is down one side, with a big 6ft by 12ft Corian-topped island running down it. When you sit at one end, you get a perfect view of Docklands through the rose window. We've used push catches on all the cupboards to avoid a sea of handles and we've even hidden some of the light dimmers in cupboards. I try to keep things discreet without being antiseptic. Lighting is really important. There are lots of down-lighters grouped on dimmers. I don't trust those computerised systems.

"Dartmouth Park is a really interesting place. I can walk to Hampstead Village or the Heath in 10 minutes and take the tube from Tufnell Park and be in the West End in 20 minutes.

"There are great gastro pubs round here - my local is the St John's. My favourite restaurants are the Samphire and a Thai called Charuwan, which gets rave reviews. There's a Sainsbury's just down the road, as well as a great flower shop and an interior design shop, Map. In fact, this area has pretty much all you need and it's much better value than Hampstead Village."

Nick Abbot's duplex penthouse in St Christopher's Court, London N19 is available through Foxtons (020-7704 5000) for pounds 999,500. It was designed by John Williams; www.soinspired.com.
