

IN TOP GEAR

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Architect and designer Mike Fisher, of Studio Indigo, has created an intuitive layout across the many floors of what was once artists' studios in west London, leading up to a spectacular rooftop space

STAIRCASE (*opposite*) A travertine-clad staircase knits the house together. The sculpture is by the South African artist Dylan Lewis. FORMAL DINING ROOM (*this page*) This room features a chandelier designed by Alison Berger Glassworks and chairs from Holly Hunt. The nineteenth-century French chimneypiece is from Jamb





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High above one of Kensington's most lush garden squares, two huge sets of gullwing windows – more usually found on cars and on vans – glide gently upwards, while the roof retracts to reveal the sky. At the flick of a switch, they turn a cool, contemporary room into a wide outdoor roof terrace, with only the treetops and the heavens above for company. It is a James Bond-inspired touch that tops off a spectacular house, rebuilt from the (under) ground up after a decade of dereliction. Welcome to the London home of Mike Fisher, the founder of Studio Indigo and one of the most successful architect-decorators around.

Built as artists' studios in 1892, the building has had a chequered history and had stood empty for so long partly, according to Mike, 'because no one could figure out what to do with it'. That he has made sense of it when previous attempts had failed is testament to Studio Indigo's long experience of working on complex projects. 'The place had fantastic light from enormous windows,' says Mike. 'Originally, the floors were level, but we split them and introduced an extra floor at the back to make the bedrooms feel more intimate, while preserving the high ceilings in the rooms at the front.'

The first thing Mike did was raise the floors. Disarmingly, he says that the main reason was 'because I'm short and couldn't see out of the windows', but adding steps up from the front door also gives one a distinct sense of arrival. Immediately ahead, the staircase takes centre stage. Sheathed in travertine, with bronze banisters and striking Thirties wall lights, it is Mike's homage to the Italian architect Carlo Scarpa. It knits the interiors together and is flooded with sunlight from south-facing windows at the rear of the house. 'It makes the place feel more homely – even though it's a large house, you can call up and down to each other and never feel lost.' Next to it is an unusual high-tech touch: the dog lift. It is actually a regular (if very smart) passenger lift, but with an extra function. As Mike's dogs approach it at entrance

STUDY (*this page both photographs*) Two paintings by Diarmuid Kelley hang on the wall above a sofa designed by Studio Indigo. The rug is from Jan Kath. **DRAWING ROOM** (*opposite top*) Mike commissioned Sally Storey of Lighting Design International to light this room like an art gallery. On the far wall is a painting by Tony Bevan, with sculpted heads by Oriol Harwood on either side. **GARDEN ROOM** (*opposite bottom*) This light-filled space on the top floor has a retractable roof





level, the doors open automatically to let them in before the lift whisks them up to the top floor.

The plan feels intuitive and logical, with a dining room and study on the ground floor, a drawing room and the main bedroom on the first floor, and the top floor entirely devoted to a vast, multi-purpose living and entertaining space. All the main rooms are at the front, overlooking the square. At the back, Studio Indigo's Federica Barbon, Sophie Warner and James Fenwick have exploited the different levels to create four spare rooms, bathrooms, a service kitchen and a second study area. Below ground is a large gym (top lit from the courtyard above), a 15-metre swimming pool, a games room and a hammam, with a wine cellar and services another floor down.

Mike explains how the design evolved, 'On the ground floor, you need rooms where your privacy doesn't feel compromised by being at street level, so it made sense to put the study and the formal dining room there, with the drawing room and main bedroom on the first floor. The top floor has the best views across the square, so that's really where you want to live.' And you could: the top floor is almost a separate house, with a vast sitting room, a kitchen, an informal dining room and a garden room planted by garden designer Marcus Barnett, as well as a glassed-in orchid house at the back.

That only the finest materials have been used here and throughout the house is not, perhaps, unexpected, but there are some especially striking touches and finishes. The floor-to-ceiling cupboards in the top-floor kitchen, for example, are clad in gnarled wood and look as if they are cast in bronze. In fact, says Mike, 'They're weathered planks from Barn in the City, which takes salvaged wood from traditional Canadian barns. We have given them a bronzed finish.' He has used the same planks to great effect next to the swimming pool, though there they have been rubbed with platinum to give them a silvery sheen.

The main rooms at the front of the house have four-metre-high doors to match their tall ceilings. Furniture from Francis Sultana and Holly Hunt, as well as bespoke pieces from Studio Indigo, sits comfortably alongside Mike and his partner's modern art collection, which includes paintings by Tony Bevan and Craigie Aitchison.

How does all this richness come together without becoming indigestible? 'The key is always to get the architecture right, because if it isn't, the house will never feel comfortable to live in.' Coming from an architect-designer with such a wealth of experience under his belt, it is advice that is worth remembering □

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 Studio Indigo: studioindigo.co.uk

KITCHEN (*above left*) Sequoia brown marble with a leathered finish was used for the worktops. **EXTERIOR** (*left*) Decorative brickwork around the front door. **MAIN BATHROOM** (*opposite top left and bottom right*) This room is on a raised level at the back of the house. The bath and sinks are clad in onyx silver marble. **SPARE ROOM** (*top right*) The wardrobe was designed by Studio Indigo and made by Simon Orrell Designs. **MAIN BEDROOM** (*bottom left*) Mike's dog Farah lies on a Solstys rug

