

# out with the old

Resisting the temptation to restore a Victorian townhouse with slavish attention to period detail, designer Noel Douglas has created a contemporary jewel in a 19th century setting.



When designer Noel Douglas visualised the kitchen in the early Victorian house he was renovating, he saw simple and clean lines but nothing too minimalist. Above all, he wanted it to be beautiful. So it came as the ultimate accolade, when a friend, who he freely admits is 'no cook', commented that it was so stunning she would be happy to just look at it and clean it.

Coming from a 21st century woman, this is quite an admission of overriding passion, but being 'no cook', what she missed is that this is also a well-engineered kitchen that is clearly a pleasure to work in.

## BARE BONES

Like beautiful people, the bone structure of a kitchen is more than half the battle and with this house Noel had found a model in the making. His was the talent, though he recognised that with the removal of four walls, the lower ground floor in this townhouse could be liberated into one large, almost panoramic room. The room now extends some 42 feet from the front to the back of the house giving it the light, airy look Noel was after.

The vast room which looks out onto a 100ft garden is now used as a kitchen and a living room and is described by Noel as "really amazing." "I wanted a simple, clean but not too minimalist look and that is exactly what I got."

## MOOD SWINGS

What he also wanted though, was a kitchen that was practical and ergonomically sound, and a proper living area that had a feeling of intimacy about it. It's not always easy to get this combination, especially if you want the kitchen to look very solid and functional, and the living area to be more relaxed. Frankly, the design can easily come unstuck at this point.

Noel has avoided the pitfalls in exemplary fashion. Retaining one of the existing chimney breasts to provide for a warming, working fire, he has also installed a Lutron lighting system which provides nearly 20 different combinations of lighting, so most moods imaginable can be achieved.

With the whole house it was Noel's intention to retain original features where they were worth retaining, and to bring in the best of modern design to complement them. To this end he has kept and restored the wooden shutters at the dining area end of the room as an attractive feature in their own right.

Feature by **Sarah Childs-Carlile**

Photography by **Jake Fitzjones**

Styling by **Di Burt**

**LEFT** Noel Douglas contemplates the panoramically airy room he has created in the lower ground floor of this early Victorian townhouse.



## THE HARDWARE

Having dispensed with most of the walls, Noel was left with an exciting space to fill. Obviously, he had to choose just the right furniture and for the kitchen pieces he went straight to FK&F. He chose the stylish Nuvola collection by Dada which he had seen and been impressed with both in the showroom and magazines. With the help of designer Jane Stewart from FK&F, they put the right pieces in exactly the right places.

Originally designed by Italian architect Luca Meda, these modular units have small but perfectly formed steel handles and there is the option of some pieces featuring tubular steel legs.

Noel specified the furniture in a deep, glossy white lacquer to contrast with the thick granite worktops and splashbacks. He freely admits that the long worktops were, in his imagination, going to be a lighter colour. When they arrived and had entered through the windows, (which had to be removed because of the size of the granite pieces), Noel realised they were much darker, but now feels this has provided a great contrast with the furniture.

One of the reasons Noel was so attracted to the Dada kitchen was because it looked like real furniture, rather than a classic fitted kitchen. The pièce de résistance is the free-standing central island which houses the gas hob, capacious storage space and thanks to a generous overhang of the granite worktop, also serves as a comfortable breakfast bar for snacking.



**ABOVE** Surrounded by breakfast bar, the hob provides a great central feature to the island unit.

## CURVE-FREE ZONE

A rectangular Gaggenau extractor and a Bisque towel radiator both complement the straight, solid lines of the furniture. Curves have definitely been shown the door in this almost Cubist kitchen, but because of the airiness of the room and the avoidance of anything that could appear clumsy, the whole impression is of a sleek, rather beautiful solidity.

Along one wall there is a bank of units surrounding the sink area, some with the understated handles, and some which just open at the touch of a finger. Also in this bank is the generous oven quota comprising two full-size stainless steel ovens from Smeg, one a normal oven and one with a microwave. A discreet, fully integrated dishwasher from Miele is also hidden away.

The sink itself is a stainless steel number, especially imported from Italy, and in installing it FK&F designer Jane Stewart used a clever trick. Instead of the conventional landscape style installation, she designed the sink to be portrait, giving extra aesthetic interest and, at the same time, more worktop space.

All in all, the lower ground floor of this Vauxhall house has been given a treatment the early Victorians themselves would have approved. Innovators who believed in using the best of contemporary design without totally dispatching the old classics, the early Victorians also believed in beautiful, solid design and excellent engineering. It's certainly an object lesson in how period houses can be filled with contemporary design and ideas without either disciplines suffering.

Much of that credit must go to Noel himself, who simply says, "It was a treat, the kitchen has really turned out amazingly."



**Useful Information**

**Kitchen design**  
Noel Douglas Design. Tel: 07958 631990.

**Kitchen by**  
FK&F (formerly Fulham Kitchens).  
19 Carnwath Road, London SW6.  
Tel: 020 7736 6458.

**Radiator**  
Bisque. Tel: 020 7328 2225.

**Ovens**  
Smeg. Tel: 08708 437373.

**Extractor**  
Gaggenau. Tel: 01780 722144.

**Dishwasher**  
Miele. Tel: 01235 554455.



One side of the island unit is storage, while the other is a sitting area – all presided over by a slim and stylish extractor.

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