



Luke Hayes

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A historic wreck in Oxford has been treated to the most elegant of reinventions

Italian design meets English architecture in this beautiful Edwardian villa furnished by Molteni & C

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On a tranquil street in a residential quarter of Oxford stands a line of Edwardian houses with generous gardens. One 1906 property in particular was in a sorry state; condemned by the council as uninhabitable, its future seemed uncertain until it was bought by a

family with three children who saw its potential. They in turn were smart enough to bring architect Nicholas Zervoglos and Carola Sapper on board to help them restore it.



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Carola, the daughter of renowned industrial designer Richard Sapper, oversaw the villa's interior transformation. 'Despite its precarious state, I thought that the building was very welcoming,' she recalls, adding, 'it had good proportions, the rooms were generous with a lot of natural light and the layout had a good flow.'





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Her clients' brief focused on functionality; they sought to unlock the home's potential by converting and extending the spaces at both ground and roof level, to better fit them for modern family life. It was also very important to them that the house would be environmentally friendly and they wanted to preserve the building's historic character.





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Carola's first task is always understanding who will be using a space and what she can add to improve the lives of the people who will live there. In this case the family has three young rambunctious boys, and the parents have hectic professional lives, so she aimed to create rooms for the boys and their many activities, other areas where the parents could spend some 'adult time', and spaces where all could converge as a family.

'There are rooms that feel a bit more severe and moody, others that feel open, bright and playful, and some that are serene and relaxing,' she explains.





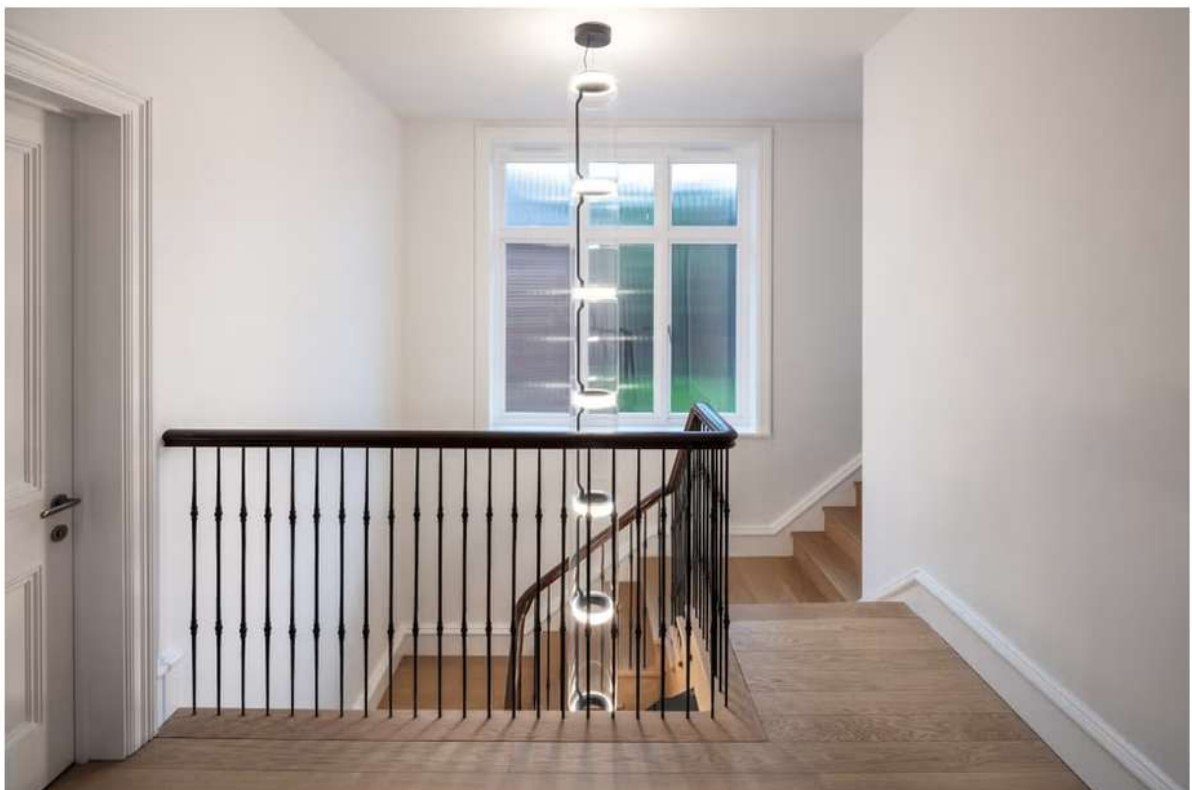
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She likes the large family room the best, perhaps because it presented a design conundrum – having to accommodate kitchen, formal dining, casual dining and lounge in one space – and she came up with such a pleasing solution. ‘It opens out to the garden and has a lot of light,’ she explains. ‘I think there is a good balance in the layout whereby the areas are differentiated but are not separated, which is important for a common space.’



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A thoughtful selection of furniture pieces by Molteni & C fills the space, bringing a contemporary Italian sensibility to this most English of homes. It's a compelling combination, refined yet relaxed. 'Here Italian modern design gets to shine, excellent quality and workmanship, beautifully elegant shapes, timeless and fun as ever,' says Carola, who grew up surrounded by Milan's design culture.



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Many of the pieces seen throughout the rooms were designed by her father. There's the elegant folding 'Nena' armchair, the 'Plico' drinks trolley for Alessi and the 'Tizio' lamp for Artemide in the new family space. The 'Halley' desk light for Stilnovo can be found in the office and the 'Static' table clock for Lorenz and more 'Tizio' lamps sit on the bedside tables.



The most prominent Molteni & C element is the kitchen; it was chosen for its refined elegance and the fact it doesn't dominate the space, which it shares with the lounge and dining areas. 'I don't like the idea of living in a kitchen,' Carola notes. With its warm walnut finish, it blends into the common space, yet remains practical and functional.



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Because of the condition of the building, the original staircase had to be replaced; local artisans worked to create a new design with a traditional curved handrail with thin spindles. Its classical shape is offset by a strikingly modern light column and a stylish black and white chequered floor.





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Carola hopes and believes the family are happy in what she created for them. She made sure they were included in the decision-making process along the way, so they would have had some sense of what to expect on the project's completion, although, she notes, 'once you experience it in its full scale, it is always a bit of a surprise'. Ultimately, she wanted the home to welcome and embrace the family. 'I wished to create an environment in which they would all feel so happy and at ease that they would never wish to leave.' molteni.it

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