







From left: the custom-made dining table supports one of Bruce Denny's sculptures; the staircase was realigned to enhance the stunning view

# WATERLOO SUNSET

At the top of the former MI6 building in South London is an apartment with views so spectacular that its owners redesigned everything else around it

REPORT VINNY LEE PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL RAESIDE

Having one of the best panoramic views in London doesn't come without its problems. The stunning cityscape seen from Bruce Denny and Tim Cohen's 21st and 22nd-floor apartment in Southwest London comes courtesy of floor-to-ceiling windows, with views of the ceaseless waters of the Thames in the foreground, and the comings and goings at Waterloo station immediately below. But these same windows mean that there is little space for hanging pictures, so when decorating their home, Cohen, a chartered accountant, and Denny, an IT expert, started looking for sculpture that would stand independently in front of the glass. After months of fruitless searching, Bruce decided he would learn to sculpt himself, and signed up for classes at a local art school.

The apartment that brought about this career change is one of two two-storey new-build annexes added to the top of the old MI6 building in Lambeth. The one that Cohen and Denny bought in June 2003 was the 2,700 sq ft show flat. They gutted it and, with the help of Philippa Thorp of Thorp Design, reconfigured the layout to give even better access to the mesmerising views.

"We lived here for six months, during which time we planned the renovations in minute detail. The following January we went travelling, and while we were away the majority of the building works were done. Every wall, floor and ceiling was taken out, the stairs were realigned to make a more geometric shape and we reduced the number of rooms from three bedrooms and four bathrooms to two bedrooms and three bathrooms," explains Cohen. >>





<< "Our aim was that no internal wall should abut directly on to the exterior glass walls and that the views should be unhindered."

Cohen and Denny also bought a section of the communal corridor on the upper floor and incorporated it into their apartment to create a triangular entrance hall and cloakroom. The kitchen, which had been fitted with a rectangular run of units, was transformed with a circular, wraparound island finished with a finely grained rosewood façade and granite worktops.

The palette for the decoration of the flat was kept deliberately muted, so that the changing panoramic view would not be challenged. "The internal walls are mostly panelled with rosewood and conceal cupboards and storage. The main bathroom wall is wax-finished plaster and in the study area at the bottom of the staircase the desk and surrounds are in faux lizardskin," says Cohen.

Much of the furniture is bespoke. The crescent sofa that tapers around the sitting room to the top of the staircase is one such piece. The almond-shaped, glass-topped dining table is another, specially designed to be light and unobtrusive but able to seat up to 14 comfortably. Around it are seven custom-made "twin" seats. "We entertain a lot," explains Cohen, "and we didn't want the clutter of 14 individual chairs. The double seats create a feeling of intimacy and because of their curved backs they fit neatly around the table, leaving plenty of space for people to walk around."

Downstairs, the alterations were also dramatic. "The apartment is basically a long narrow strip, so we decided to create more interesting spaces by slicing diagonally across the corners to create a triangular bedroom," says Denny. The main bedroom has a pivoting





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panel door which folds back flat against the wall beside the bathroom, so that when Cohen or Denny are sitting at their desk there is a sideways view out through the glass wall to the east of London.

The bedrooms not only have views, but also an impressive array of toys. Calling upon his background in IT, Denny ensured that the technology in the apartment is cutting-edge: all the audiovisual and air conditioning are operated via remote control, and a central computer stores films that can be watched in tandem or in sequence in different rooms – there are six screens in the apartment.

The main bathroom has an oval bath positioned directly in front of the door so that the bather can enjoy the view from here, too. To the side of the bath is a horseshoe-shaped walk-in shower that wraps around a console supporting a shallow oval basin. Storage is ample but discreet, disguised behind panels in the wall, as is the “invisible” lavatory.

Clockwise from far left: the circular kitchen island; the guest bedroom, with painting by Pedra; the sitting and dining area; the triangular main bedroom; walk-in shower in the main bathroom

Outside the bathroom door by the desks of the study area is a wall-mounted sculpture by Seattle-based artist Peet Sasaki. “We investigated his work on the internet and liked what we saw, so we sent Peet some photographs of this space and he came back to us with his ideas. We commissioned one, a few months later it arrived in the post, and it was perfect,” says Denny. Denny and Cohen’s collection of works by other artists includes an impressive horse head sculpture by Nic Fiddian, and paintings by the Spanish artist Victor Pedra.

The other pieces of sculpture are part of Denny’s rapidly growing portfolio of work created in his studio nearby, beneath a railway arch. “I enrolled at Morley College and started doing classes for half a day a week. I enjoyed the work so much that I signed on for a whole day a week, and then in the third term increased it further,” he explains. “After a year I began working on my own and when I felt I had something worthy of casting I went to a foundry and asked them to show me the process. They cast a number of pieces in bronze, which is so different from seeing them in clay. The metal has a patina that makes the figures seem more alive.”

Somehow at odds with the apartment’s focus on the view is Bruce’s self-portrait on a plinth at the top of the stairs, a cross-legged, crouching figure seemingly oblivious to the constantly changing skies behind him. But maybe he’s seen it all before. ■

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