

Bridford Mews, Marleybone, London

Challenge:

Find room for 3 small mews houses in London, and blend them naturally with the surrounding architecture and fit comfortably within the area. Maximising light in an intimate setting whilst complementing the elegant neo-classical Parisian façade of local architecture were essential.

Solution:

This ingenious project found room for three small mews houses in an intimate location tucked away behind Portland Place in London. The design maximised the space and light available to create elegant dwellings that blended flawlessly with the surrounding architecture. Finding room for a row of three-bedroom houses in a tight mews behind a main London artery took skill and vision. There was much to consider, including how to maximise light and complement the elegant neo-classical Parisian façade of No. 70-74 Portland Place – a substantially larger building that lay immediately behind the site. Although the plot was originally home to nondescript garages, local planners asked for the mews houses to blend with the surrounding architecture and fit comfortably within the broader aesthetic context of the area. Tom Croft Architecture responded with a clever design narrative: the dwellings appear like the fictional rear of the Frank Verity designed building that dwarfs the plot. The focal point of the design is a single short end east-facing elevation with arched two-storey facades. The pre-cast arch sections were the largest that could be delivered through the arched entrance of the mews. These features encourage daylight to flood inside, belying the fact that the main elevation is surrounded by tall structures including RIBA's Grey Wornum-designed headquarters. Other precast sections form the sides and central transom, while the neo-classical facades are topped with a raised-beam cornice. The homes consist of three floors – with the living and kitchen area at the top, the garage in the middle, and further accommodation in the excavated basement below. Instead of conventional garage doors, three dark framed glazed sections open up at ground level to enable residents to drive in. Rearward-sloping monopitch zinc roofs, pale brick, aluminium-framed windows and shallow projecting bays complete the design. Multi-Cream bricks from Ibstock were selected because they were the closest possible relative to the surrounding Victorian and Edwardian architecture. This helps to fulfil Thomas Croft's illusion that the new dwellings serve as the rear of the historic grand mansion behind them. White glazed bricks were chosen at the side to match those of a neighbouring property and to reflect light more effectively. The completed buildings succeed not just because they maximise space and light in a constricted space, but also because they realise an intriguing concept: that a backstreet mews – once a space for coach-houses and servant's accommodation – can be transformed into elegant spaces that mirror the grand Edwardian facades they are related to. Brickwork Contractor: Subcontracted by Whistlers Client / Developer: Howard de Walden Estate, 27 Baker St, Marylebone, London W1U 8EQ. Tel: 020 7580 3163

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Brick:

Ibstock Brick, Ibstock Multi-Cream, White Glazed