

Heart of gold

Creating a chic two-bedroom pied-à-terre in the heart of London took a full year to complete, but the final result was well worth the wait

Words: Ifeoluwa Adediji Photography: Richard Gadsby





This stunning two-bedroom 150sq m townhouse located in the centre of London wasn't exactly run-down and dilapidated when Roy and Florence Barker first bought it, yet it still took a team of specialist builders almost a year to turn it into the property of their dreams. Designer Thomson Carpenter was enlisted to help transform the one-bedroom property into the ultimate London bolthole.

"Before I started work on the project, it was actually fine and wasn't in a bad state of repair; rather the décor was just very boring," says Thomson. Four years earlier, he had worked on Roy and Florence's main home in Sussex – his first big project as a solo designer. "That was another year-long renovation and the budget was around £1m," explains Thomson. With the country house the couple wanted to establish a home that looked very traditional. This time around, however, they were more open to contemporary additions. Here, Thomson tells us more about how the project progressed...

What was your general brief?

The Barkers were originally looking for a house in the South of France and they couldn't find anything they liked there, so they decided to have a little bolthole in the heart of the capital. Florence is French and when they described their vision to me they called it a chic Parisian-style pied-à-terre. Their favourite hotel is the Le Bristol in Paris, which has very traditional décor with lots of panelling and parquet flooring. The couple were also happy to

incorporate some contemporary elements such as the dining table and chairs in the kitchen. They wanted a space where they could have drinks with friends before going out for dinner, plus another bedroom too.

How long did works take to complete?

This project took approximately a year. There was initially only one bedroom, reception room and bathroom and now the property has an additional bedroom and shower room. The original kitchen had a slim galley layout on the ground floor, so to house the new kitchen we added a basement and excavation works for that alone took just under six months. The drawing room is now on the ground floor, while the first floor is where the sleeping quarters are located. These spaces were completely gutted: we removed all the walls as well as the floors.

How did you source the materials that you used in the kitchen?

The worktops and splashback are reclaimed French marble from Bourgogne Stone. There is also wonderful tumbled marble on the island, which isn't shiny but it has great depth to it and doesn't feel too precious, as it's a bit rough around the edges. Pairing that with satin-finished black and white cabinetry designed by Plain English works really well. It was very much a case of juxtaposing the styles. The majority of the products that I specify, unless they are antiques, are custom made, so my suppliers do have a fairly long lead time – for instance one lamp can take two months to arrive! ►

Opening pages (p114-115): The striking kitchen combines a mixture of natural stone worktops and flooring and a contemporary flight of stairs.

Opposite page: Hand-painted task lighting offers a welcome departure from traditional pendant fixtures.

Below: This new basement provides the owners with an ideal space for entertaining and intimate meals.





Tell us about some of the unique features in the kitchen...

The idea was to bring in a more modern feel. Roy and Florence have quite traditional tastes, but they didn't want this property to be stuffy, just a little bit sleeker. I gave them the idea of adding the floating staircase. The flight is a striking focal point that is made from a mixture of steel and walnut and is a real contrast to the classic cabinetry of the kitchen units. The lights above the island were made in Austria and they are hand-painted in antique brass. I knew we needed task lighting here, but at the same time I wanted to introduce something a bit more funky, not something that everyone else was doing.

What was your inspiration for the bedrooms?

As they are small spaces, I didn't want them to be too cluttered. The aim was to create a feeling of comfort and to have a boutique hotel-like finish, and both bedrooms have access to their own shower room. I initially asked the Barkers if they wanted cupboards in the master bedroom, but they were content with a small one in the bathroom as they would only need to hang a couple of items. The second bedroom has a beautiful daybed that can be pulled out and used as a double, which is ideal for when their grandchildren come round, but it is mainly used as a dressing room.

What was your brief from the Barkers for the master bathroom?

I knew that Roy and Florence wanted top-of-the-range fittings, and this ensuite shower room is a bit like a luxury hotel wetroom. Everything in the zone is from Drummonds and the walls are covered in natural stone. I initially thought that using Arabescato marble would be a little over the top, but it is a small room so it works. I don't like shower doors or trays so we have installed a glass panel and ensured that the marble flooring slopes down so that the water can drain away effectively.

Did you make any suggestions that the owners had not considered?

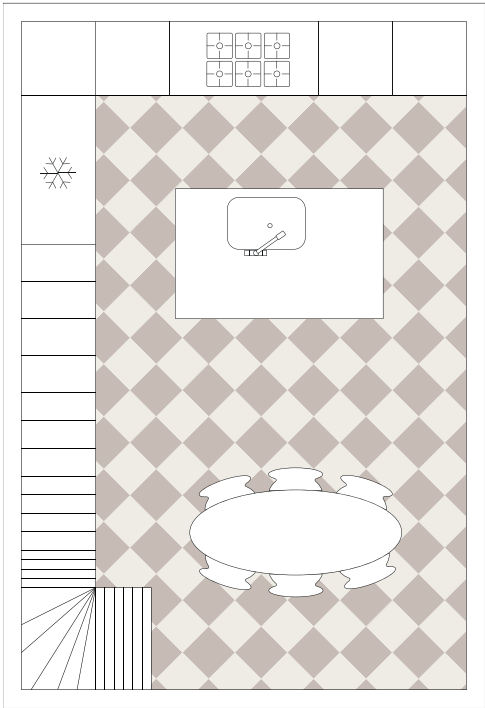
Although the house is set over three floors, the rooms are quite small. I suggested using space-saving pocket doors in the bedrooms for access to the shower rooms. We were also not allowed any windows in the basement because the local council wouldn't allow it. I was concerned it would be dark and gloomy in the new kitchen so I suggested an entire wall of smoked mirror glass, which bounces light around the zone. The couple were a bit worried that it would look like an aerobics studio, but because it's very subtle, and not too reflective, it works well.

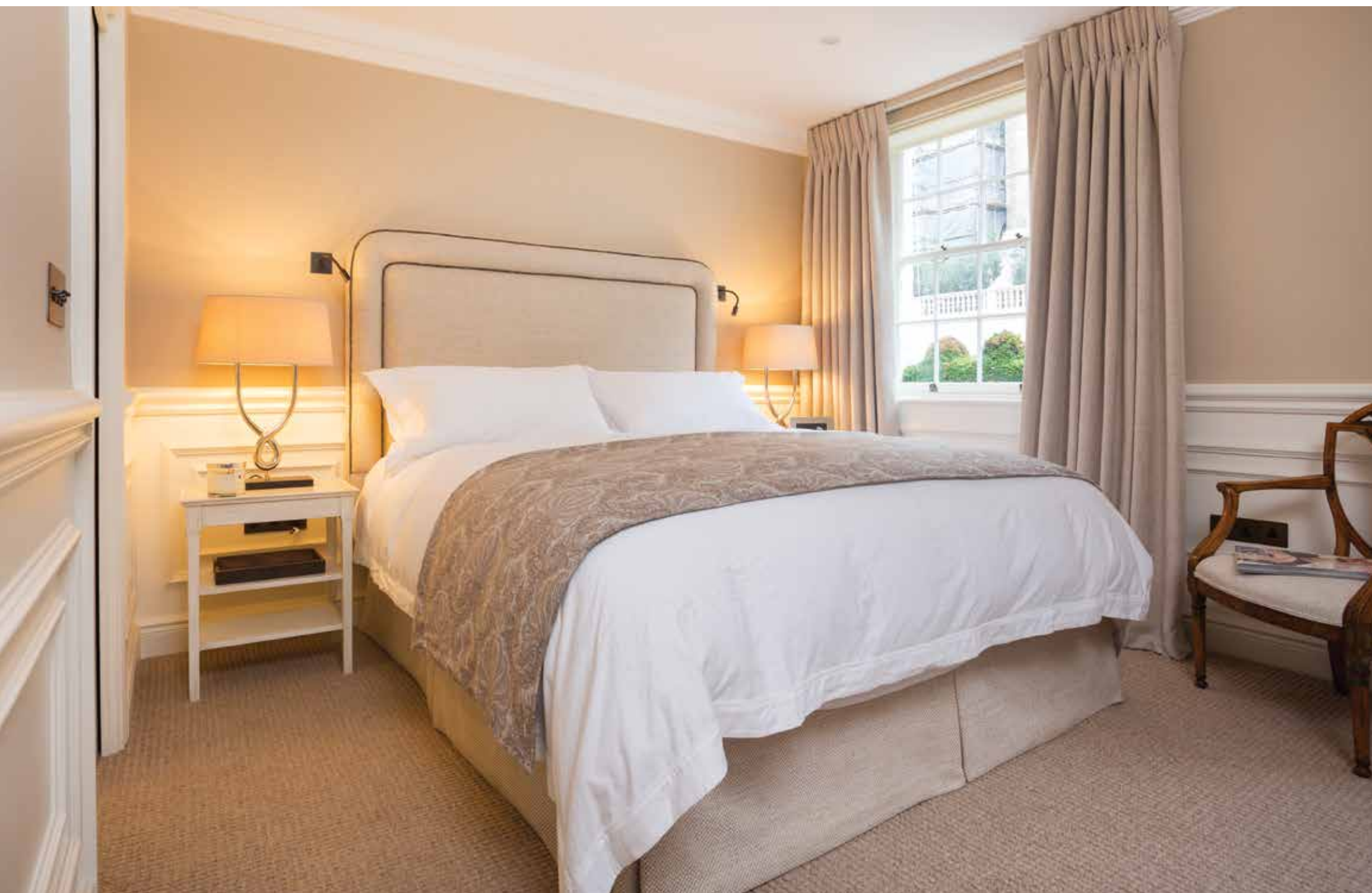
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Above: Spotlights have been incorporated into the steel and walnut staircase; they make the stairs safer and add mood lighting.

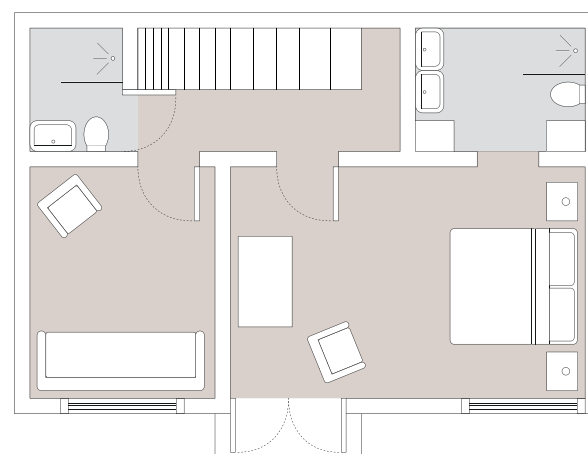
Opposite page, top right: Sleek bronze taps were chosen to create a contrast with the stone worktop.

Bottom right: The professional good looks of the stainless-steel Wolf range cooker strike the perfect balance within the black and white kitchen.





"The aim was to create a feeling of comfort and to have a boutique hotel-like finish, and both bedrooms have access to their own shower room."



Above: A luxurious atmosphere has been established in the master bedroom by using neutral colours, which are calm and relaxing.

Right: The master bedroom space has been left clear of any clutter and is tastefully decorated using antique pieces of furniture such as the chest of drawers and armchair.

Q&A

Designer Thomson Carpenter says...

What advice would you give to people when hiring contractors?

I would say don't rush it, do your research and appoint expert craftsmen and joiners and let them take their time. These builders probably were not the cheapest, nor the quickest, but they do a fantastic job so it's worth waiting for quality.

Is there anything that you would do differently?

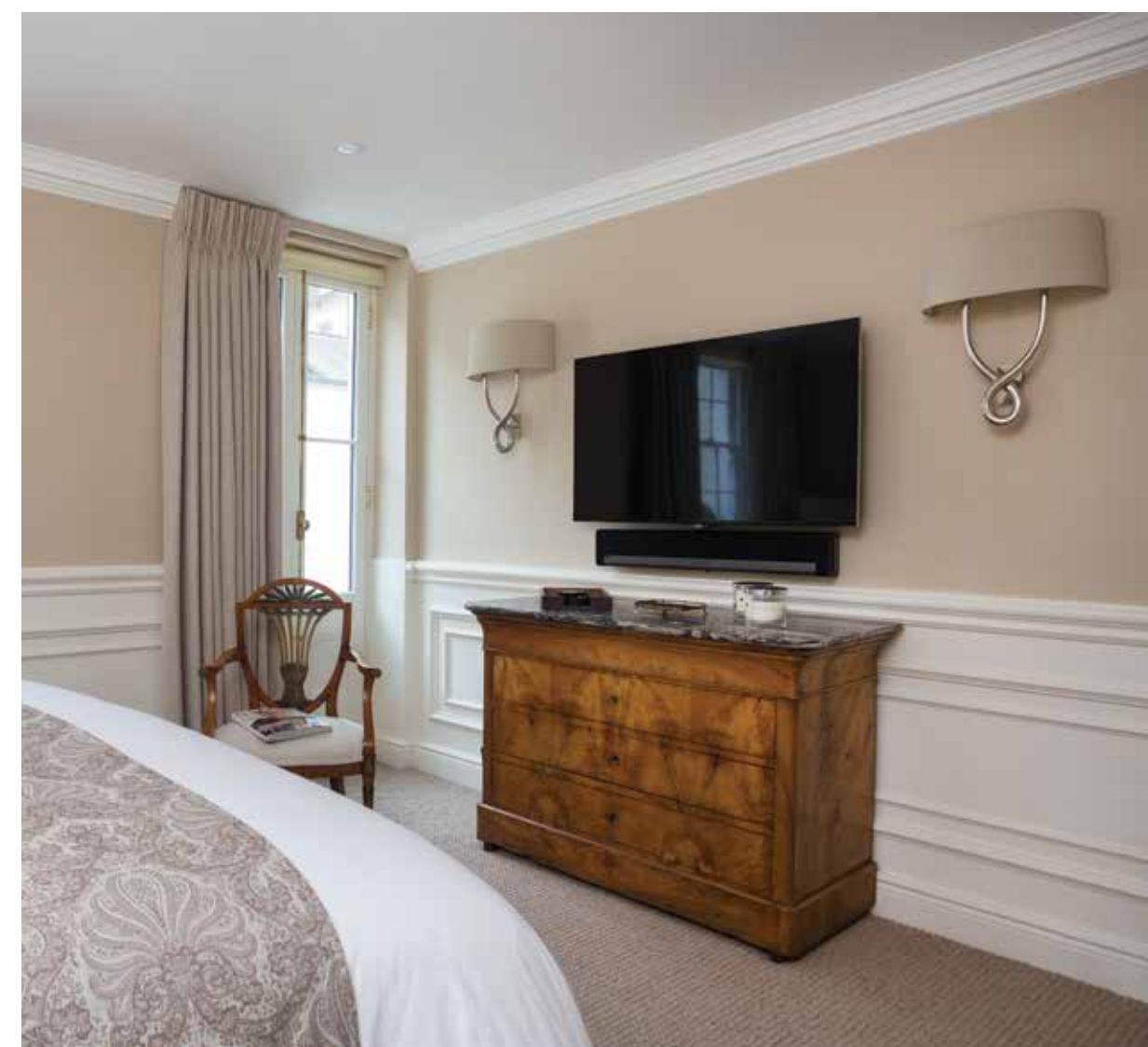
I would consider making the kitchen a bit smaller, because Roy and Florence tend to dine out when they are in London and have not used it much. This would then make room for a small WC as they currently have to go all the way upstairs to access one.

What were the biggest challenges with the project?

One of the main difficulties was the house's fantastic location. It is in Belgravia and is part of the Grosvenor Estate – its rules and regulations are perhaps the tightest in London. We had another tricky moment when the kitchen island worktop, which is one large piece of fossil stone, and the sink (also carved out of stone) were delivered. We had to get them down to the basement and there was talk of needing a crane because they weighed a tonne, but the main contractors, who had a real can-do attitude, just carried them down the stairs!

What element took up the majority of the budget?

The basement was the most time-consuming and most expensive part of the project. It cost approximately £350,000 to dig out!





Right: The guestroom/dressing area oozes character and Parisian appeal because of the use of rich gold tones within the space.

Below left: Stunning basins from Drummonds sit perfectly with the marble walls and floors of the master ensuite.

Below right: Detailed panelling, as shown in the guest ensuite, can be found throughout the property and was inspired by designer Thomson's visit to the owners' favourite hotel, Le Bristol in Paris.

Opposite page: Thomson chose to use marble for the wallcoverings and floor in order to create an opulent finish in the ensuite shower room.



GET THE
LOOK



Left: Shower rose from Drummonds, £450. (020 7376 4499 or www.drummonds-uk.com)

Below: Encore table lamp from Dår Lighting, £83. (01295 672200 or www.darlighting.co.uk)



Left: Dalyan dining chair from Brabbu, around £585. (www.brabbu.com)



Georgica Pond marble tiles from Fired Earth, £89.75 per sq m. (0845 366 0400 or www.firedearth.com)



Left: Padstow mirror from The Chandelier Company, £199. (01892 541355 or www.chandeliersandmirrors.co.uk)

Below: Martinique daybed in cherry wood from Simon Horn, from £5995. (020 7731 3555 or www.simonhorn.com)



SourceBook

DESIGN

Interior designer Thomson Carpenter (07918 099656 or www.thomsoncarpenter.co.uk)

KITCHEN

Cabinetry Plain English (01449 774028 or www.plainenglishdesign.co.uk)

Worktops and flooring Bourgogne Stone (01932 846357 or www.bourgognestone.com)

Appliances Range cooker, extractor hood, fridge-freezer and wine storage unit, Sub-Zero and Wolf (0845 250 0010 or www.subzero-wolf.com)

Taps Mixer tap, Vola (01525 720111 or www.vola.com); Boiling-water tap, Quooker (0808 102 0677 or www.quooker.co.uk)

Dining table Florence Knoll at The Conran Shop (0844 848 4000 or www.conranshop.co.uk)

Chairs Soane (020 7730 6400 or www.soane.co.uk)

Lighting Overhead lights, Kaia (020 7243 6299 or www.kaia.at); Back wall lights, Soane, as before; Dining area wall lights, Vaughan (020 7349 4600 or www.vaughandesigns.com)

MASTER BEDROOM

Bed For similar try Vispring (01752 366311 or www.vispring.co.uk)

Curtain fabric Dedar (020 7351 9939 or www.dedar.com)

Bedding The White Company (020 3758 9222 or www.thewhitecompany.com)

Throw De Le Cuona (020 7584 7677 or www.delecuona.co.uk)

Lamps and wall lights Porta Romana (020 7352 0440 or www.portaromana.co.uk)

Antique chest Brownrigg Interiors (01666 500850 or www.brownrigg-interiors.co.uk)

GUEST BEDROOM

Daybed Simon Horn (020 7731 3555 or www.simonhorn.com)

Curtains Colefax and Fowler (020 7244 7427 or www.colefax.com)

Wall lights Porta Romana, as before

Mirror The Hambledon (01962 890055 or www.thehambledon.com)

MASTER ENSUITE

Marble Arabescato. For similar try Fired Earth (0845 366 0400 or www.firedearth.com)

Sanitaryware and brassware Drummonds (020 7376 4499 or www.drummonds-uk.com)

Wall lights Soane, as before

Shower screen For similar try Aqata (01455 896500 or www.aqata.co.uk)

GUEST ENSUITE

Marble Carrara. For similar try MS International (www.msistone.com)

Wall sconce Soane, as before

Sanitaryware and brassware Drummonds, as before

Shower screen For similar try Aqata, as before

COST

The whole project cost approximately £1,000,000. A similar kitchen from Plain English would cost £70,000

