

Carmen collected

Andrew Lopez-Calvete gets an inside view of a suburban estate house near Guildford which belies a remarkably slick interior

THE interiors we feature in Surrey Life are invariably those of properties in the upper echelons of the market. In the last year we have been privileged to have access to houses in some of Surrey's most desirable locations, many with price tags well over the million pound mark, but this month we have something no less impressive, but much more attainable.

From the outside, Carmen and Sam Molina's modern detached property located a few miles outside Guildford doesn't suggest a great many surprises. However, its suburban estate façade belies a mouth-watering example of slick modern design, a veritable showroom for their architectural and interior design businesses. Arriving in the UK from their native Peru in 1974, both were already qualified architects and came to this country to expand their technical expertise. After a period working within various practices, they made the bold move to start their own company in 1986. Since then, they have grown an impressive client base of commercial and domestic clients and are currently putting the finishing touches to the headquarters of the Coptic Church in Streveage.

In 1994 the company took a change in direction. Carmen explains: "I did the Professional Practice in Interior Design Course at Chelsea College of Art and Design and I have been dealing with the interior side of our projects since then. I am especially keen on the upgrading of residential properties. You can change a simple house into an elegant home simply by merging several rooms together, or adding a focus to a room such as a classical fireplace."

It's hardly surprising with Carmen's background in architecture that her first focus is going to be structure, but her eye for detail in other areas is extraordinary. She continues: "A great deal can also be achieved with light, colour and the creation of good proportions within the structure of the property. Renovating kitchens and bathrooms is a particular favourite of mine. There's some beautiful new sanitaryware on the market and with a splash of innovation, one can make these two areas havens of relaxation. I love to refurbish both period and contemporary properties, but above all I pursue balance, harmony and elegance."

The Molinas purchased their house in 1998 and began their characteristically meticulous planning at the turn of the millennium. From the start they knew they wanted to extend the property to facilitate ambitious plans for an open plan living area. "The fact that this is a timber framed house provided a real challenge regarding it being extended as an open plan concept, due to the fact that we did not contemplate showing any downstand beams or columns. However, careful consultations with our structural engineer provided us with the solutions to implement the design", Carmen explains.

In only eight months and with the help of Mitchell's Complete Building Services, the project's unusual challenges were gradually overcome. The design concept hinged upon the construction of large open areas and the ability to bridge spaces with a minimum amount of walls. "Fortunately the builder rose to the occasion and we were able to educate the various tradesmen with the final solutions we wanted to achieve for



Above: The extended living area has a modern 'loft style'.

Rights: Carmen Molina



Far Right: The custom made unit at the end of the dining room introduces another color to the palette; dark chocolate wood.





Carmen in the Kitchen

the bathrooms, kitchen, etc," says Carmen.

The overall effect of the open plan design and careful use of sight lines into other rooms makes this property feel much bigger than it really is. Bold masculine furniture, is almost displayed rather than simply arranged against the white and dark wood gallery space created in the main living area, whilst architectural details like the raised hearth and dividing wall, which is open at both ends, showcase their technical flair. The Molinas have also extended their plan for the interior beyond the building's boundary and into the garden, with huge expanses of glass, making it an integral part of the living space. For privacy, delicate sheer fabrics drape like

gossamer and have the effect of creating a soft diffused light throughout the ground floor.

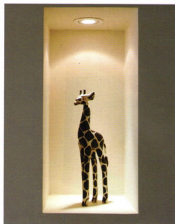
Visitors are instantly struck by the dining area, which looks more like Frank Lloyd Wright's conference room than a place to eat. The fantastic black glazed table acts like an inky mirror rather than sucking the light out of the room. Classy leather B&B solo chairs and a custom-built wenge unit complete the look. However, the adjacent kitchen is in complete contrast to the living and dining rooms; contemporary, but with plenty of classic styling cues and a more neutral colour palette, with creams and citrus hints being complimented by the

unusual light granite work tops. Up-to-date features appear in the form of slick stainless steel appliances and elegant but practical utensils. Unusually for one of our interior features, there is not the usual list of suppliers and manufacturers as almost every element has been meticulously selected by the Molinas from sources around the world.

Throughout our time with Carmen and Sam they were as keen to point out future features as those already in situ. It is obvious their desire to keep the design in line with the latest trend or innovation, and achieve perfection, means their home is going to be a work in progress for some time. One area soon to be the focus of their attention is the



The kitchen doesn't rely on a more expected triangular formation, but still works exceptionally well.



A single lit niche in the dividing wall between living and dining areas helps break up the expanse of white.



The modern gas fire forms the focal point of the living room

garden, explains Carmen "Whilst the garden is well established with some attractive plants and mature trees, we still feel that there is some room for improvement. We are currently looking for professional advice in this area and therefore hope that complete integration can be achieved through wise selection of ornamental plants, contemporary lighting and modern garden furniture." ■

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