

Klippan House Far from the madding (London) crowd



Belsize Architects

Work
Klippan House
Client
Paul Cowan
Location
50 Well Walk, London, UK
Project Year
2010
Architecture and Design
Belsize Architects
Architect
Belsize Architects
Project Team
Shahriar Nasser, Steve Burrows,
Andrea Carbogno, Gaia Bianchi
Engineering
David Bennett
Landscape
Belsize Architects
Size and total area
900 m²
Additional Functions
Main Contractor: Kutz Ltd
Quantity surveyor: Cox Drew Neale
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Nick Kane
Pietro Belli



Not everyone may be familiar with the London district of Hampstead, commonly known as Hampstead Village. It is a secluded area north of Camden Town, known for its beautiful *Heath*, a vast hilly portion of countryside with ponds, meadows, forests and incredible views across the whole London. Because of its charming character, Hampstead has been historic home to a large number of intellectuals, philosophers and artists, as witnessed by the proliferation of *blue plaques* (the typical terracotta inscriptions placed on buildings where famous individuals lived) commemorating them. John Keats, Robert Louis Stevenson, John Constable, Piet Mondrian, Henry Moore, Sigmund Freud, Sir Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich and Sir Nikolaus Pevsner are just a few of the illustrious names you would find when walking around in that neighbourhood. With the booming housing market of recent years, Hampstead has become one of the most expensive London areas and, according to

official data, the village of Hampstead has now more millionaires within its boundaries than any other area of the United Kingdom.

It is at the edges of the *Heath*, along a small and silent tree lined road, that in 1881 architect Ewan Christian (1814–1895) decided to build *Thwaitehead*, the house for his family, known today by the name of Klippan House. Christian was President and Gold Medallist of the Royal Institute of British Architects and was the leading church designer of the period. Appointed in 1851 as Architect to the *Ecclesiastical Commissioners*, a permanent body set up by the government in 1836 to administer the estates and revenues of the Church of England, he carried out about 1,300 restorations and additions to churches throughout England and Wales and built some 90 complete new churches, as well as building, restoring and adding to many vicarages, deaneries, canonries and bishops palaces. Probably because of his travels in Italy, which continued into

his later years, he differed from his church-building contemporaries in not having any exclusive allegiance to gothic. Despite this incredible body of work, he is best known as the architect of *The National Portrait Gallery* next to Trafalgar Square in central London, completed after his death. During his professional activity, he also realised a few residential projects, which predominantly display the influence of the Arts & Crafts style, and, in particular, Klippan House appears to be influenced by the Domestic Revival style of architecture made popular at that time through the work of Richard Norman Shaw (1831–1912) and William Eden Nesfield (1835–1888). The outspoken architectural historian Reginald Turnor, still writing in the wave of anti-Victorianism of the earlier twentieth century, condemned Christian's «horrible self-inflicted home at Hampstead», but in 1982 English Heritage declared the building of national interest by making it Grade II Listed.

The house is picturesquely designed in red brick and is set at an angle to the corner of the road with large stone mullioned windows and a tile-hung projecting bay. The reddish-brown tiled roofs of different levels have hipped dormers and massive and beautiful ribbed chimney stacks (in dark grey-brown brick to match the roofs). The most peculiar features are a tower with its own pyramidal roof, placed asymmetrically at a corner of the building, and a pleasant first-floor open trelliswork balcony, which had views of the heath before a large building was erected nearby and impaired such views. Christian's ecclesiastical legacy is visible in a concrete band of text which runs around the building at first-floor level and includes one of his favourite quotes «God's Providence is Mine Inheritance».

In 2010 Belsize Architects, who have gained a reputation in the design of high end residential properties as well as in dealing with historical buildings, were asked to refurbish this Grade II Listed building and to return the house, which had been divided into three flats, to a single-family home. In addition, their brief requested to add a new subterranean swimming pool to the side of the house and a display building for vintage cars over the pool.

As Belsize Architects director Shahriar Nasser explained, the main focus of the design was to remove additions which were not part of the original design and to rediscover the original architectural forms, restoring them, as well as to design new internal areas using a contemporary language which could dialogue with the past. Obviously one of the main initial challenges was to obtain the necessary consents and to be able to have the informal approval also by the neighbourhood, as the local community has a strong interest in the prominently placed house.

The neglected basement had not been occupied for a long time and suffered from damp and even flooding. On the ground floor, many of the original features had been hidden behind false walls and ceilings. By progressively demolishing such additions, some of the original features were discovered, including a coffered timber ceiling (albeit structurally unsound) and the original external written frieze with Christian's motto, which ran around the house. By tracing the remains, Belsize Architects were able to carefully reconstruct >



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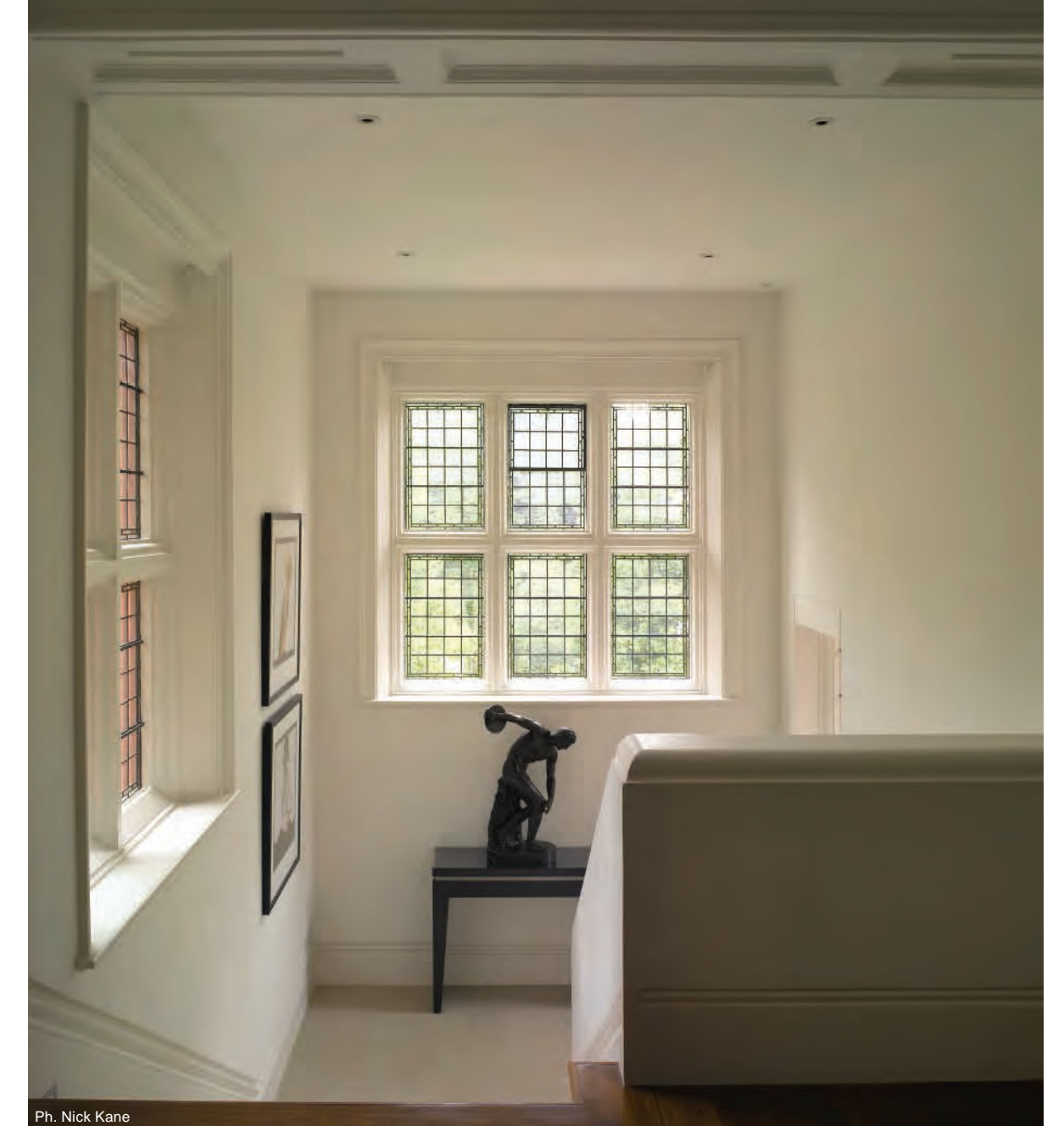
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the text and recreate it in terracotta. Similarly, there were also stained glass windows to be restored, which included some more text to be deciphered and reproduced. A lot of the original ironwork was restored together with the distinctive tall red brick chimneys and the highly pitched roofs. It could be argued that much of the success of the whole project depended on the dedicated team of competent artisans from whom both artistic and specialist skills were required. Internally, many later partitions were removed and the rooms made larger, closer to the original layout. Where the original elements had totally disappeared, new materials were introduced. This is visible in the new fireplace and in the missing steps made out of *basaltina*, a dark volcanic stone, used in place of the original Portland stone. Similarly, the timber staircase in the tower was not original and was replaced by a contemporary stair made out of stone and glass. Most of the basement and some of the ground floor were covered with both *basaltina* slabs and timber floors. The new kitchen has been relocated in a portion of a very large room where the historic ceiling had been rediscovered. The main bathroom appears to be a comfortable room with a large bath with highly designed elements such as an etched glass panel back-lit by the windows behind. A former outbuilding and external passageway were converted into an extra room and library by glazing over the space between the buildings. This allowed additional light to penetrate in the former service areas and created a much broader sense of space, enabling new perspectives on the historic parts of the house. Finally, the garden was re-landscaped with new hard landscaping and with the addition of a contemporary summerhouse to one side, with adjacent pools fed by a sculptural channel of running water. The basement swimming pool and the new building designed to display a vintage car collection have yet to be built, but were granted planning permission. Klippan House has now gained a new life and reputation.

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