PROPERTY

How Princess Beatrice's husband built the perfect Belgravia family home

Edoardo Mapelli Mozzi is an interior designer who combines comfort and high-end design — but sadly he and his wife can't afford his latest £42 million project

The perfect Belgravia family home — just leave the crayons in the nursery
MICHAEL SINCLAIR

Katrina Burroughs | Thursday April 04 2024, 12.01am, The Times

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'Would I like to live here? Yes, please!" Edoardo "Edo" Mapelli Mozzi is whisking me around the six-floor, 10,000 sq ft townhouse he has designed in Mulberry

Square, Chelsea Barracks, enthusing about the remarkable display of crafts, from the outsized oval travertine kitchen table by Arthur Vallin to the Coral & Hive rug in the living room, woven in karakul wool and mohair on the largest loom in Africa. As the CEO of Banda, a multidisciplinary, design-led property practice, he was called in by the developer QatariDiar to create a luxury family home. And as a dad of two under ten — a two-year -old daughter with his wife, Princess Beatrice, and a seven-year-old son he shares with his former fiancée, Dara Huang — Mapelli Mozzi seems to have designed the residence with a specific family in mind: his own. He says, “There’s nostalgia for me here. I grew up around the corner. I went to school at Eaton House [a nursery school], so I feel like I’ve walked past Chelsea Barracks all my life. My stepfather was in the army and when I thought of it I always pictured this place.” After completing the year-long project this March, he says he will see the site often when he walks his youngest to school from their grace-and-favour apartment in St James’s Palace and then proceeds to his design studio on the King’s Road. It would be the perfect pad for the family, he admits — if they had £42 million to spare.

The townhouse exterior

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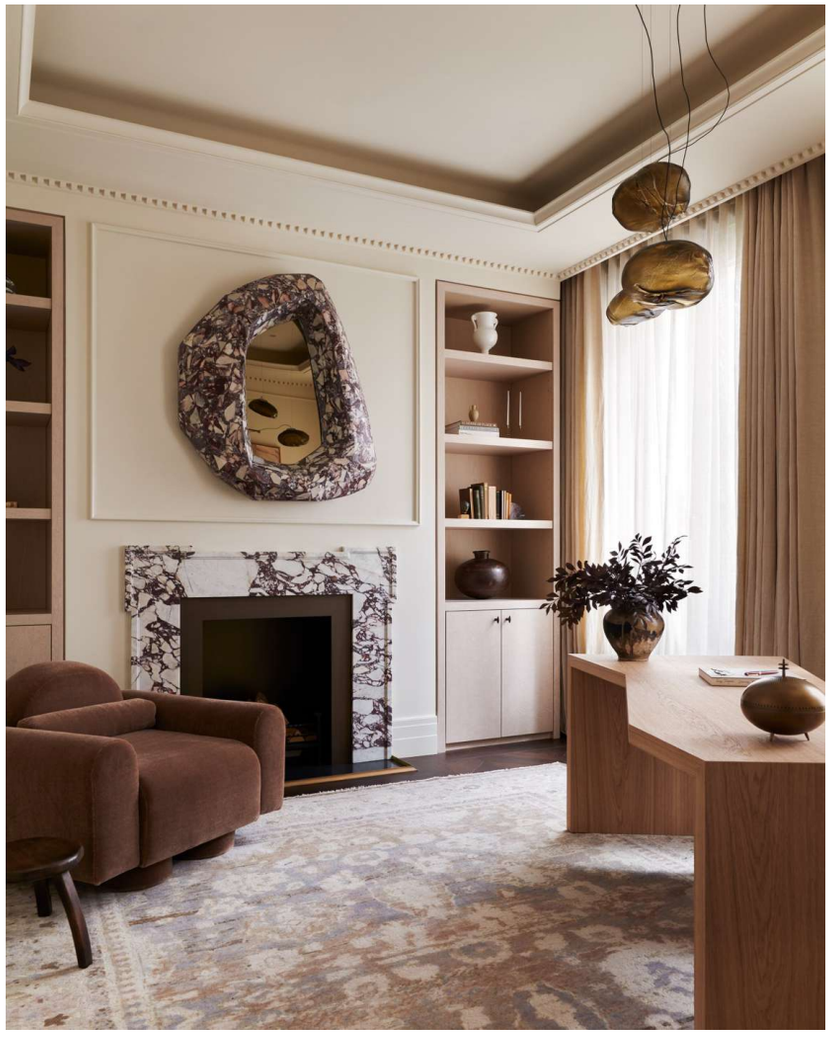
There are many reasons why this five-bedroom townhouse with a roof terrace, cinema, sauna, swimming pool and three-car garage feels like such an appealing home, but let’s start with the location. It’s in Belgravia, not Mayfair. This may seem like splitting super-prime hairs, but it could not be a more significant difference. Belgravia is close to the excellent Chelsea schools, the liveliness of the King’s Road and the glorious interiors bazaar that is the Pimlico Road. The designer explains that this means properties here are more likely to be primary residences rather than a London pied-à-terre, so Belgravia homes tend to be designed for deeply comfortable full-time living rather than lock-up and leave. “Belgravia is a proper home. You can’t buy a box of cereal in Mayfair. I say to my friends, if you’re going to live somewhere full time in London, it’s Chelsea, Belgravia, Notting Hill or Holland Park.”



The ground-floor study with Helios marble mirror by Pierre Augustin Rose and marble chimneypiece

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Key to the property’s comfort and charm is the collection of art, crafts and custom furniture curated for the interiors. This is a speciality of Banda, which Mapelli Mozzi set up — he calculates — 17 years ago. “Seventeen years!” he says. “I’m really old!” (He is, in fact, a baby-faced 40.) “So we’ve had 17 years of building this little black book of the best ateliers, the best producers, the best joinery shops and people we can trust to deliver this level of craftsmanship.” The upshot is that buyers of its properties will invariably take the entire contents. “The majority of the time we do houses or apartments, people buy everything, because they are buying into what we do. Yesterday we had a family move into a house we’ve just finished in Notting Hill and they bought it 100 per cent furnished. They are just bringing their clothes!” He enjoyed creating “the collection of a lifetime” for prospective owners of Mulberry Square. Indicating the Pearl travertine table (monologuelondon.com) in the main kitchen, he says, “You can buy this and it will stay with the family for ever. I love that.”

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There’s a commitment to longevity and sustainability, but also an unexpected playfulness to the decor. “There are a lot of things throughout that are meant to make you smile,” Mapelli Mozzi says. Such as? On the first floor, Jess Wheeler’s whimsical Hispi cabbage plaster lights on the dining room wall (jesswheeler.com) or the dining room chairs resembling plump little figures with round bouclé faces (studiotwentyseven.com) and, in a guest bedroom, the artist Tess Newall’s charming Herbarium wallpaper, a pattern of English country flowers composed to look like découpage (tessnewall.com).

The kitchen features an oval travertine table by Arthur Vallin

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Some pieces are frankly astonishing, such as the Helios mirror in the ground-floor study, a marble-framed looking-glass made by the Parisian studio Pierre Augustin Rose (pierreaugustinrose.com), which hangs above a classic chimneypiece in the same stone. The lumpy, bumpy, rock-like shape has been hand carved from Breche Violette marble. Is it ugly or beautiful, you ask yourself — is it OK to touch it, and how on earth does that 300kg chunk of stone stay on the wall? Is the study a gravity-free zone? No, apparently there's a "reinforced hanging system".

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The interiors are characterised by a mix of contemporary and traditional elements

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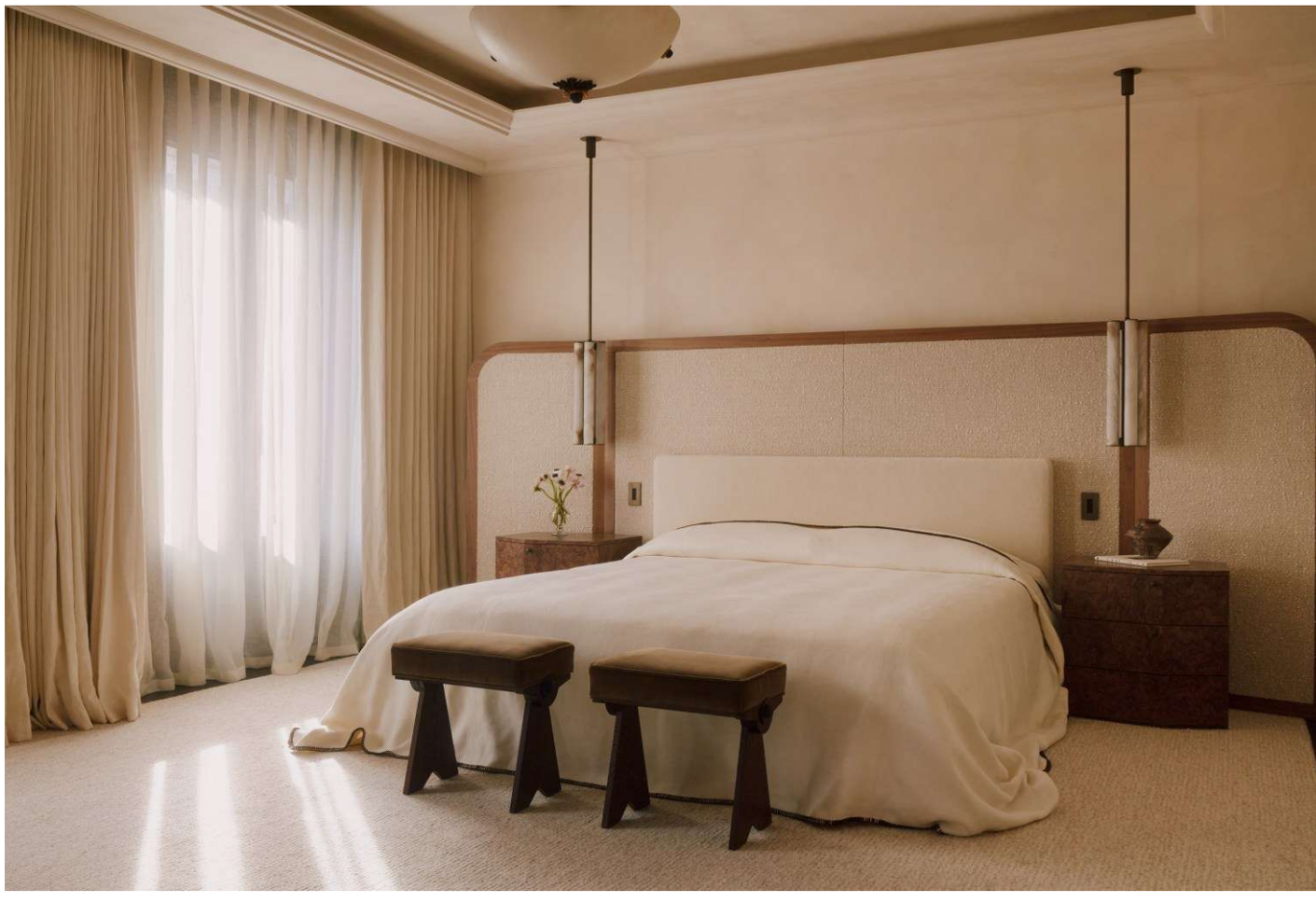
Mapelli Mozzi talks about wabi sabi, the “perfectly imperfect” look of the handmade pieces, and the dynamic energy that the juxtaposition of contemporary and traditional lends. Touching is encouraged, apparently. Well, maybe not too much before the house finds a buyer, but in general, tactility is one of his goals. He is clear that interiors should make their inhabitants feel profoundly at ease, and the palette — Bauwerk limewash on the walls; timber and leather; stone and metal furniture and lighting — has been chosen for its robust beauty and calming vibe. “They are all natural materials that should age well,” he says. “In some [super-prime showhomes] you feel uncomfortable. It’s too silver, too white, too shiny. Someone has come in and done that karate-chopping thing on the pillows. You don’t want to sit on the sofa. You don’t want to put your drink down in case it spills. But here, if [a timber table] gets stained, it’s just telling its story of time.” I wouldn’t want to be the one to add coffee splatters to the biography of the Galet dining table by Emma Donnersberg, with its handmade oak top and picturesquely pitted lava-stone legs (edonnersberg.com). It’s a highlight of the house. But his point is a good one: nobody wants to feel on edge in their own home, and in this project Banda has managed to combine opulence with a relaxed, informal atmosphere.



The master suite bedroom is designed in a calming colour palette

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Places of particular comfort include the principal suite, which takes up the entire second floor: a generous bedroom plus a brace of dressing rooms and a bathroom with a freestanding tub big enough to “fit a family of four”. The next floor up is equally cosy, with three bedrooms and bathrooms earmarked for the children of the family, plus a guest suite. In the prettiest bedroom of the trio, Newall’s floral wallpaper harmonises with a pale green silk and wool carpet. “It is supposed to be like a garden — flowers and grass," the designer says. His favourite room is the basement cinema, featuring two whopping bed-sized sofas. "Isn't it fun, this room? What you want to do is all pile on the sofa together. It's so much more fun than having individual chairs."

The property includes a sauna and swimming pool

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As soon as he saw the building, Mapelli Mozzi pictured a happy family life within its interiors. "That's probably influenced by my childhood, being in multiple different houses," he says. Born in London, after his parents divorced he was brought up by a stepfather who was a serial doer-upper of properties, so the family moved frequently. "You realise how important spatial planning and interiors are to how the family interacts, and creating those moments for everyone to come together is key." He started to put his design ideas into practice at an early age. "At school [Radley College], I'd be the first person to go in and spend two hours making my room look perfect — with my lava lamp and my tie dye or whatever it was I had. I wouldn't be comfortable sleeping in a room that wasn't perfect." Fortunately for prospective buyers of number 4 Mulberry Square, Mapelli Mozzi has moved on from his teenage signature style, but his passion for creating welcoming, nurturing habitats has only grown. And in this sumptuous Belgravia project, the real luxury, he reckons, will be the family time spent there.

The Banda-designed townhouse at 4 Mulberry Square, Chelsea Barracks, London, is on sale for £42 million via Savills and Knight Frank, chelseabarracks.com

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