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BLAIR'S WAR

An extraordinary behind-the-scenes
account of power and the powerful

COVER STORY

15



PRIME MINISTER AT WAR
Peter Stothard and Nick Danziger gained unprecedented access to Tony Blair and his inner circle as he led the nation to war with Iraq. In this special issue of *The Times Magazine*, we publish a unique behind-the-scenes portrait of politics, people and power

RR The section for the space in your life



54 WHO? WHAT? WEAR?
The word on the street



61 HANNAH BETTS
on the new scent-sation



65 GILES COREN
at The Yew Tree and
The Junction Tavern

68 INTERIORS
At home in a
Shoreditch warehouse

REGULARS

- 7** KATE MUIR
Fraught & Social
- 8** COLD CALL
Alan Jackson calls Celia Imrie
- 10** GILES WHITTELL
Hollywood Husband
- 60** READER OFFER
Mediterranean holidays
- 74** ROBERT CRAMPTON
Age of Enlightenment

Readers' Notes

From Jennifer MacCallum

I would be most interested to know how long Damon Albarn actually spent growing up in Leytonstone (Long Player, April 19). He was, in fact, Stanway (Colchester) School's most famous son, transferring to Colchester Sixth Form College for A levels. He actually lived in the village of Aldham in Essex throughout and prior to his school days. I should know. Many times I babysat with him!
Jennifer.Maccallum@tesco.net

From Elizabeth M. Billett

I dly reading through Giles Coren's article at South (Feeding Time, April 19) I was suddenly appalled by the following words, which no doubt Mr Coren thought urbanely witty. To quote, on page 56, "a schlumph of very sticky apple beneath a crackling mitre of filo pastry that had to be thoroughly destroyed to be dealt with [rather like Iraq]". If I were an Iraqi mother watching the suffering of my child, injured needlessly and

mindlessly in the horrific bombing of Baghdad, my response would be contempt.
Kettering, Northamptonshire

From Tim Mickleburgh

Monty Berchten (Readers' Notes, April 19) claims "there can be no doubt about it - the grey squirrel is a vicious pest". I beg to disagree. Here in Grimsby they are one of the few examples of wildlife that can be seen around the town. And it is a pleasure to see these attractive creatures amid an urban landscape of concrete miserablism. Your correspondent should realise that the grey squirrel was there before many of today's housing construction, and thus has a right to his or her abode.
Grimsby,
Lincolnshire

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Clockwise from above: an external view of the glass-roofed penthouse; Gregory Brackett in the open-plan kitchen area; the honed slate floor and sunken bath in the bathroom

RAISING THE ROOF



Roosting pigeons and rotting floors meant years of hard work for Gregory Brackett when he took on the renovation of a Shoreditch warehouse. But the addition of a light-filled penthouse has made sure his investment of time and money has paid off

AS A WAY OF RECOUPING HIS INVESTMENT ON THE RENOVATION

of an old Shoreditch warehouse, Gregory Brackett built himself a penthouse on the roof. Although at times funds were tight, he admits now that the money he tied up in the three-year building project would have been worth about half as much today if he had put it into equities on the nearby Stock Exchange.

But Brackett isn't your average city slicker or property developer. He is, he says, a "hands-on type of guy". Having worked on a farm in his native Boston, and during college as a carpenter on building sites, he finally settled in the IT industry, and it was this last job that led him to become a property developer.

"I had spent ten years on the move, going from hotel to corporate apartment in Luxembourg, London, Italy and France, and I got to the stage, at the age of 38, where I wanted to put down roots, to know that if I fixed a tap it would be worth the effort because I would be there to use it again."

While living in a flat nearby, Brackett started to hunt for the building that would provide him with the project he longed to undertake. Eventually, in April 2000, he came across a disused warehouse built in 1890. Due to ten years of neglect the place was in a bad state – rotten floors, leaking ceilings and a large proportion of London's pigeon population in residence. Besides ▶



Report by Vinny Lee Photographs by Ray Main

◀ which, before renovation work could start, a special archaeological survey had to be carried out due to the building's location in an area of historic interest.

"I bought the building from a speculator who had already got planning permission to convert the place, and the architects who had put the planning application through were from Gregory Phillips's practice. Although I did consult other architects, Phillips and his team already knew the building so I decided to stick with them.

"It took from April to December to get through the paperwork and planning permissions. The project was spec'd to the nth degree so there were no surprises and it stayed on budget – I think my experiences as a carpenter helped me get the project tightly planned."



'BECAUSE THERE ISN'T A LOT OF ROOM FOR FURNITURE I DECIDED THAT WHAT I DID HAVE HAD TO BE INTERESTING'

At their second meeting the architects showed Brackett their sketch for the penthouse and that was it: starting from scratch it was constructed on the roof of the warehouse. Due to planning regulations you can hardly see the double-height space outside; you have to walk halfway down the street on the opposite side before you catch a glimpse of its shining glass roof.

Its distinctive shape – a parallelogram – caused headaches in its construction. "The steel-encased beams are exceptionally long, and the cross transom bars had to be re-cut on site. Then the original glazing company pulled out and the second company had to start from scratch; waterproofing is essential so the job had to be done carefully," explains site architect Jay Salero.



Under the sail-like glass spread, Brackett's one-bedroom dwelling consists of a main living floor and a mezzanine bedroom and bathroom. "When I met Greg he told me he had six metres of clothes that needed hanging space, but I also think that good storage is vital to successful open-plan living," says Salero. Thus deep cupboards with featureless doors were built in on the small landing area at the top of the staircase, and on either side of the bed.

The mezzanine bedroom, which has to be open-plan to comply with building regulations, has french windows on to a small balcony at the back and the vast glass roof to the front, but only an opaque voile curtain, operated by an automatic switch, to block out the light.

When asked about the problem of early waking due to intrusive daylight, Brackett is dismissive. "Business travel has made me able to sleep anywhere," he says. "But if it did worry me, it would take no time at all to add a blackout panel to the curtain." Brackett also sleeps well because it is incredibly peaceful here. "It's comfortable and tranquil, a bit like a spa," he adds with a smile.

There are indeed spa-like facilities in the en-suite bathroom with limestone-clad walls and a honed slate floor. The Jacuzzi bath appears to hang out over the back of the building in a three-sided glass pod which is, in fact, part of a new rear stairwell. In front of the bath is a shower with a pencil-thin gutter that takes away the water from the overhead rose, as well as from the bath overflow.

Throughout the penthouse the floors are covered in dark herringbone parquet and the walls in a stucco polished plaster which has a rich but subtle sheen. The bespoke staircase and balustrade of the mezzanine were custom-made and brought to the site in sections, where they were welded together.

Downstairs, the area closest to the rebuilt front parapet is a seating space. "Because there isn't a lot of room for furniture I decided that what I did have had to be interesting, so I went for this multi adjustable Flap sofa by Edra, and it has certainly proved to be a talking point," says Brackett. A series of wall-mounted, built-in cupboards with sliding doors are fitted along the shallow section of the wall, and contain CDs to be played on the wall-mounted Bang & Olufsen system.

Under the rise of the staircase Brackett has a small study area. Beyond that is the dining area and a high sheen, gloss polyester kitchen with steel worktop and splashback by Boffi. "I thought it was never sunny in England," jokes Brackett, "but in the last months it has been too sunny and I haven't installed the blinds yet."

Looking back over the past three years, one of which Brackett took off work to be more directly involved in the building's final fitting-out stage, has it been worth the effort? "I really enjoyed the project, it gave me a sense of balance. Working with my hands and getting involved in the building was the ideal contrast to the IT business, which is mainly sedentary and mental rather than physical."

And his bank balance can't be in bad shape, either. ●



THE SOURCE

Fixtures and fittings

The interior of Gregory Brackett's penthouse was created with the help of a wide variety of suppliers

1 Black polyester WK6 kitchen with stainless-steel worktop and panel by Boffi, and Gaggenau appliance, from £27,000, at Alternative Plans, 9 Hester Road, London SW11 (020-7228 6460; www.alternative-plans.co.uk).

2 The Flap sofa by Edra, £6,270; Sedia 130 dining chairs by Emmembobli, £284; Ufo table, £2,995; and VuVuVu desk, £2,175, all from Chaplins, 118/120 Brompton Road, London SW3 (020-7589 7897), 477/507 Uxbridge Road, Pinner, Middlesex (020-8421 1779) and 17/18 Berners Street, London W1 (020-7323 6552). For brochure, call 0800 328 7570; www.chaplins.co.uk.

3 Bulldozer custom-built and made-to-measure furniture, such as the bedside light cabinets, prices on application (020-7284 3234; www.bulldozerfurniture.co.uk).

4 Jac's Interiors custom-made staircase and balustrade, from £15,000, Jac's Interiors, 1378 High Road, Whetstone, London N20 (020-8446 7060).

5 Honed slate is from £35.25 per square metre from Stonell (01892 833500; www.stonell.com).

6 Gregory Phillips architects, 66 Great Cumberland Place, London W1 (020-7724 3040; www.gregoryphillips.com).

7 To view the property on screen, visit www.45tabernaclestreet.co.uk.

Clockwise from far left: the stone-clad bathroom; the bespoke staircase; the living area seen from the mezzanine; the bedroom