

When they were doing up the Clock House, an exquisitely refurbished home in the heart of Chelsea, the developers decided to throw the kitchen sink at the project – quite literally. Not for them mundane monoblocs or mixers: in pride of place in the £100,000 scullery are gleaming taps covered in the purest 24-carat gold.

Such fripperies should come as standard with a pile that's on the market for almost £20m, you might argue; along with, say, a moat, a shark tank or a hall of mirrors. The Clock House – with its state-of-the-art electronic dumbwaiter to transport hors d'oeuvres from the second, staff kitchen up to the ground-floor dining room, its sauna and its plush cinema room – may sound like the last word in vulgarity, dreamt up by a despot's decorator. But the five-bedder is actually a masterclass in good, if astonishingly expensive, taste. The six bathrooms alone cost more than £435,000, of which £180,000 went on the master ensuite, with its bookmatched marble floor.

From the outside, the redbrick corner house on a well-heeled southwest London street – a stone's throw from where Pippa Middleton and the cast of *Made in Chelsea* hang out on the King's Road – is unassumingly neat, its main distinguishing feature being the huge black and gold clock on the outside, from which the property takes its name.

The timepiece was built more than 100 years ago by Potts of Leeds, a West Yorkshire firm renowned for fashioning clocks onto public buildings. The fact it is now ticking again after years of being stuck permanently at lunchtime (the hands stood still at 1.57) is probably the only thing that would alert passers-by to the amazing transformation that has gone on within.

When the boutique company Albyns London bought the house for £5.55m in October 2013, it was a typical old-money Chelsea pad: chintzy wallpaper, a poky, outdated kitchen and a preponderance of net curtains. There was, however, a frisson of faded glamour in the form of Felix Moscheles, the painter, peace activist and advocate of Esperanto, who built the property in 1894. Moscheles liked to host glitzy evening soirees and, according to Simon Sebag Montefiore's biography *Young Stalin*, guests at one such event in May 1907 included Stalin and Lenin. "Their hosts expressed surprise that they were not kitted out in white tie," Montefiore writes.

More than a century later, the developers, who work under the radar on one-off luxury homes in Kensington and Chelsea, spent 2½ years and millions of pounds turning Moscheles's old stomping ground into a home that would have the Marxists choking on their blinis.

The first item to be restored was the clock, a task undertaken by Will Salisbury, the owner and head horologist of William Mansell. Over the course of three months, his team



Matthew Davis

A dramatic staircase links all six floors. The developers paid meticulous attention to detail, sourcing gold taps and a 19th-century billiard table from France, and spending three months bringing the clock that gives the house its name back into working order, far right



sourced and fitted original dials, hands and inner mechanics.

This almost monomaniacal attention to detail is echoed throughout the 6,263 sq ft property, which has been entirely reconfigured "to maximise light, space and flow", says Lizzie Dunlop, a senior design consultant at Albyns. A huge architectural staircase now seamlessly links the six floors, while a garage was sacrificed in the overhaul of the ground level. This now contains a spacious hallway lit by a striking vintage-effect lantern from Jamb, a cosy dining room and a chic sitting room that opens out onto the sunny, surprisingly verdant garden, which is surrounded by trellises covered in crab-apple trees, an English country-house touch that was the brainchild of the landscaper Jonathan Snow.

The basement was enlarged and expanded to two storeys to house,

on the lower-ground floor, the main kitchen and family dining room, a commercial kitchen (for the staff to prepare the nibbles) and a guest bedroom with dressing room, the wardrobes lined with a soft yellow velvet.

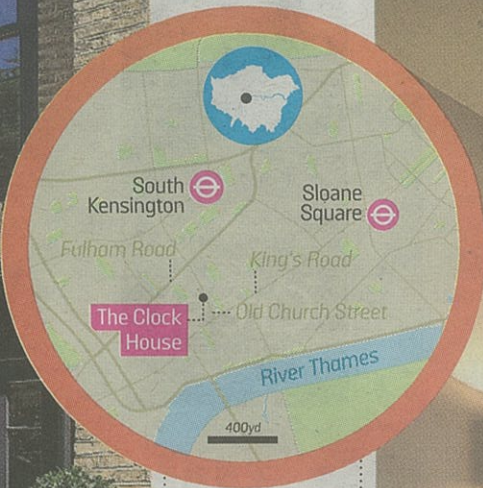
On the floor beneath is a wine storage wall (fitting it came in at just under £70,000), a study, a gym, the sauna and a leisure room. This contains a posh football table from the Games Room Company, the players clad in Chelsea and Arsenal strips – the managing director of Albyns is a huge Blues fan. At the centre is a chic pool table sourced from France.

"We couldn't find any pool tables we liked in the UK, as they were all rather new and modern," Dunlop says. "We did a lot of research and chose this one from Toulet, which has been making billiard tables since 1857. This model is from about 1880 and, over four months, we had

it completely stripped back and refurbished with new leather and baize, then delivered to London."

In the corner of the basement is the cinema room, cocooned in a layer of thick concrete to ensure that sound can't penetrate in or out. The slightly curved screen in this pleasure den – which cost £290,000 to create – is a giant 137in, the large almost bed-type sofas were created bespoke for ultimate relaxation and the walls are hand-finished with cloth wallpaper.

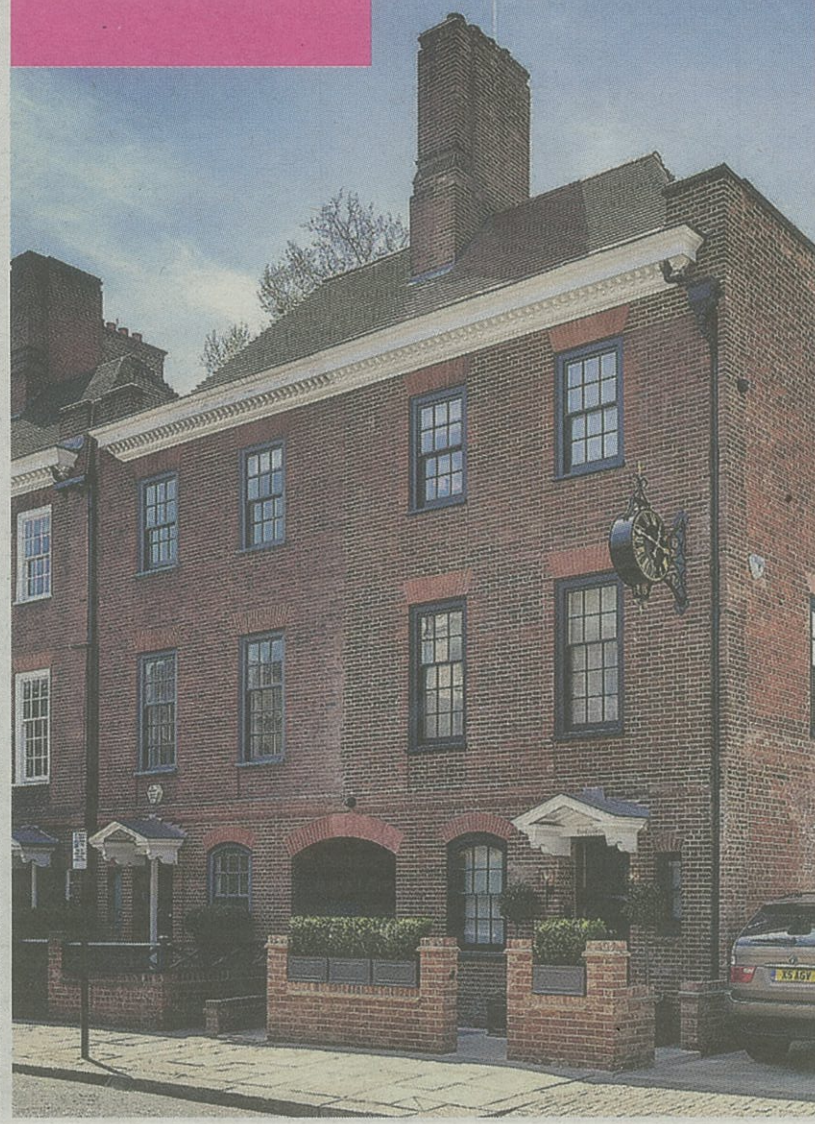
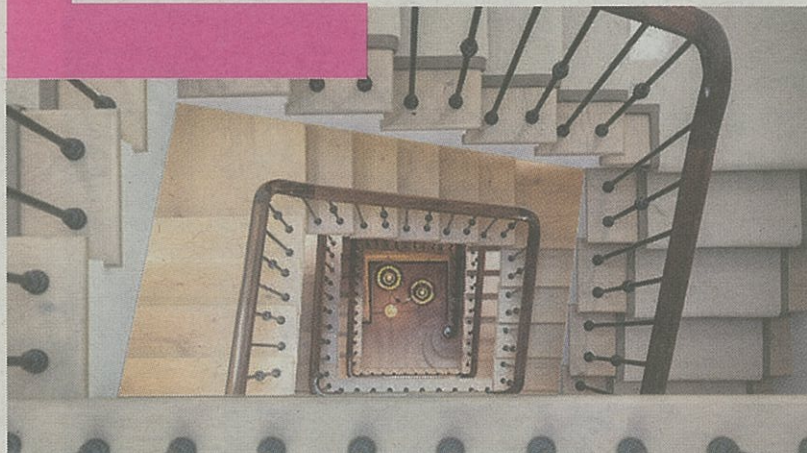
The whole property is a showcase for some of the most luxurious wall coverings imaginable. The master suite is papered in handmade khaki-coloured silk, which cost more than £25,000, while one of the basement cloakrooms is covered with a vivid navy acrylic sourced from America. "Sadly, the company is no longer producing it as it's so difficult to work with," Dunlop says.



A fresh face
Dark-grey window and door frames give the Clock House an air of Manhattan cool. Trellises of crab-apple trees, left, lend the garden a subtle English country feel

This lavish renovation whispers quiet good taste – even if it does have 24-carat taps and a £180,000 bathroom, says **Alexandra Goss**

Strike Chelsea gold



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GET THE LOOK

■ The kitchen taps were sourced from Dornbracht, then custom gold-plated. Standard boiling-water tap, £570; mixer tap, £634. dornbracht.com

■ Roundhouse created the bespoke kitchen, fitting bookmatched marble worktops and splashbacks. **From £90,000; 020 7297 6220, roundhousedesign.wordpress.com**

■ Above the kitchen table is a brass Meurice Rectangle Chandelier. **£1,595; uk.jonathanadler.com**

■ Weathered oak and metal stools. **£175 each; coxandcox.co.uk**

■ Large Globe hanging lantern. **£5,040; jamb.co.uk**

■ Gas log-effect fireplace, from AA Coal & Log Fires. **From £2,400; 020 7371 5070**

■ The house is wired up to a Control 4 home automation system, which came in at about £10,000, plus installation. **control4.com**

■ The Oda lights at the bottom of the stairs come in three sizes. **£690-£1,790; pulpoproducts.com**

■ Kickstart your evening with a Games Room Company football table. **From £2,475; gamesroomcompany.com**

The six bathrooms alone cost £435,000, of which £180,000 went on the master ensuite, with its bookmatched marble floor

Fiddliness and Krypton Factor levels of difficulty have been positively embraced in the Clock House aesthetic. One of the biggest challenges that the developers and their 80-strong team of architects, designers, engineers, planners, project managers and builders faced was ensuring that the basement levels were filled with as much light as the four above-ground floors, and were not subterranean bunkers suitable only for troglodytes.

As such, the team modelled the entire house using a 3D computer program to allow them to see how light moved through the rooms, refining the design on a weekly basis throughout the course of the project, layering in the electric lighting and wall and floor textures to ensure a holistic view. The result is that daylight floods in through a series of lightwells that echo the striking dark-grey architectural glazing panels throughout the property, which lend an air of Manhattan cool to the building.

Speaking of cool, the Clock House may have top-of-the-range air conditioning, heating, sound and lighting systems, but you'd never know it until you looked very carefully, as the five miles' worth of cabling and switches are hidden cleverly in panels and built-in storage. The television in the family sitting room rises gracefully from a cabinet when you press a button, and the two log-effect gas fires by Neville Stephens – a true artisan who has apparently lost his fingertips to his incendiary craft – burn instantly at the touch of another switch. Even plug sockets are deemed too vulgar to put on show, like airing your dirty washing in public, so are carefully covered in thousand-pound wallpaper.

Every possible glitch has been anticipated and ironed out. The two walk-in wardrobes have heel slots to hold Louboutins perfectly in place and are expertly lit to show off designer clobber to best effect. The door handles and cupboard knobs – which are different in every room, ranging from bone effects to delicate golden bees – are sourced from all over the world. And the edges of the £18,000 kitchen table, made by a specialist carpenter, have been sanded down so as not to present a hazard to children.

With such thought and care having gone into the furnishings and accessories – the Clock House even smells divine, its signature scent a mixture of Diptyque's Baies and Figuer fragrances – a buyer may balk to learn that these are all available by separate agreement on top of the £19.75m asking price. But at least those gilded taps are non-negotiable.

■ The Clock House is for sale with Russell Simpson; 020 7225 0277, russellsimpson.co.uk; albyns.com