



Award-winning extension
at Kew, seen from the
garden at nightfall,
including the aquarium
and living room with
passage into formal
dining room

FROZEN MUSIC

GOETHE'S FAMOUS DEFINITION OF ARCHITECTURE IS PERHAPS PARTICULARLY APPLICABLE TO THE COOL, REFINED MODERNIST INTERIORS DESIGNED BY GREGORY PHILLIPS. MEET THE MAN BEHIND THE PLAN



GREGORY PHILLIPS CYCLES TO WORK, WEARS TRAINERS AND doesn't smoke. The immediate impression is of a nice, regular guy. He looks younger than his 42 years and has a quiet, almost diffident manner. I'm not sure quite what I expected of an award-winning architect that presides over some of the most beautiful and superbly-finished residential projects in modernist vein, but it wasn't this.

His offices weren't what I expected either. They are on the first floor of one of those large stucco-fronted houses in Great Cumberland Place with a sweeping stone staircase. "I like this area of London. People expect us to be in some converted loft in Clerkenwell, but the atmosphere and high ceilings of these buildings suits us." The practice – 'us' – is in fact

just five architects and, to paraphrase *Mastermind*, no secretaries. "We're all fee earners, absolutely," confirms Gregory, "we don't have admin people, and I try not to be a manager. I design, I draw, I see clients."

"While the practice is, I suppose, in my image, I am very inclusive. I don't have to draw everything to make it mine. It's also theirs. This is important because it is empowering for us all. There's no hierarchy. We all work alongside each other and just get on with it.

"While we have done some commercial work, it's fair to say residential is our thing – it's what we like and what we're known for. We have worked on some commercial developments, where the developer has the right approach (ie is focused on quality), and we would be interested in doing a

Left: Ground floor living room of the house in Hampstead, extensively remodelled. The room has new oak flooring, new lighting, fireplace and cabinets designed by Gregory Phillips, with furniture from B & B Italia.

hotel. The crossover between hotels and homes is strong, with both trying to look like the other. I admire what Schrage has done putting design values at the top of his hotels."

Unusually for this country, Gregory Phillips provides full architectural and interior design services. His approach to a job is end-to-end. He will even buy the furniture, arrange the curtains and blinds, only stopping short of the art for the walls. "It's bad news that the world insists on specialisation. In this country we strictly separate the work of architects, structural engineers, quantity surveyors, interior designers and then buyers, but that's not necessarily in the interests of the finished project. It's difficult to get integrity or one strong idea to work when so many teams are involved.

"The overall expectations from a client spending typically upwards of £400k on a major house refurbishment are now high. Proper integrated audio-visual systems and electronically controlled lighting and security come as standard. Air conditioning for bedrooms is on the increase, although we prefer to use natural ventilation as much as possible. We do try to be green. If you are undertaking a major reworking of a house then many options fall into that category of 'we might as well'. If you're installing a large walk-in shower then you might as well create a steamroom, for example.

"We tend to work in areas of London where people like to live – Hampstead, Notting Hill, St John's Wood. But we are now doing more and more south of the river. We've new projects in Sheen, Richmond and Roehampton. The trend is for people to want the classic and historic exteriors provided by Georgian and early Victorian houses but not the inside spaces. Interiors have to be remodelled to reflect the way people live now. That usually means wanting larger, more open and very light spaces where dining and cooking can co-habit. Great bathrooms and walk-in wet rooms are standard. Strangely people think less about living rooms and bedrooms – they are harder to get right.

"My ideal fantasy is to do a modernist, 3-D sculptural object. I have built new houses in Salisbury and North London but these projects were all very contextual. We have just got a commission to design a new house in Oxford. When I was training to be an architect I didn't really envisage I would be doing all this refurbishment work. But the areas people favour to live in tend to be already filled with historic housing stock so remodelling is a given. The British attitude to style is that they like a modern interior but not a modern exterior – they don't want to upset the neighbours!"



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Gregory Phillips doesn't really do pitches. People tend to come to the practice for its work, and increasingly because of the growing number of awards and nominations. "Because projects never seems to end – there is always some new idea or requirement, I suppose getting an award is the nearest we get to an end. An award gives you that pat on the back, a warm glow." The practice has won D & D award for best contemporary room 2004, Salisbury Civic Society award 2004 for best new building for Ted Baker's Hermitage Annexe and is a finalist in the Daily Mail 2005 Interior Design Award. He was also a finalist in BIDA's FX interior design of the year.

Just occasionally a job has to be refused. "I was recently approached by a Russian who sounded charming and understood our aesthetic. Then I met with his wife who had a clear vision of this faux Baroque European fantasy house. It was a short conversation!"



BEYOND THE PALE

The owners of a late Georgian house in Hampstead, found Gregory through BIDA (British Interior Designers Association); had accessed the site and loved the pictures of his previous projects. They interviewed a number of practices but were completely into the approach taken by Gregory Phillips. The project took about six months end-to-end and finished right on target. "I always laugh at the bit in *Grand Designs* when the glazing is late. We all know glazing is always late. I schedule around this constant that the glass will arrive late. That way we can finish on time, on programme."

Gregory Phillips agrees that this Hampstead property is probably his most personal expression yet. "It was very much my project, which is unusual. We would normally work in a double-handed way, with one person doing the drawings and another offering advice. That seems to work. " In this case, though, the owners were so intensely involved, that Phillips made it his own.

"They were great: perfect clients. They shared my obsessions. They wanted clean, cool space." The house reflects his hard-nosed modernist approach, its absolute discipline and absence of clutter, and its close attention to detail. The house is listed, so Phillips' long track record in working within English Heritage restrictions and with local planners proved invaluable. The skeleton form of the house remained, its staircase and balustrade, fireplaces, window details and skirting cornices. The basement was reconstructed to create more space, a new tiled floor was laid with underfloor heating. "They didn't even want a kettle out in

the kitchen so we planned a way for every single appliance, every object necessary for daily living to be housed out of site, some of it in bespoke cabinetry. The kitchen has nothing on display: not a peppermill, nothing." The kitchen is by Boffi, who Gregory Phillips rates as the best. Worktops are made of reconstituted stone and stainless steel. "Poggenpohl is good but more expensive. Fifteen years ago you could not find good, readymade kitchens. Now there is so much excellent choice. It's the same with sanitaryware. I source everything from Alternative Plans. Clearly if you're after a wood kitchen then get it made, but for laminates, Boffi are simply unbeatable." Gregory designed new lighting, a cloakroom, chose the dove grey suede and steel dining furniture (from Co-existence), and designed a utility room. The existing conservatory remained.

On the ground floor, joinery Gregory describes as "horrible" was removed; new oak flooring laid. He designed a Japanese influenced

fireplace and cabinets for storage, chose B & B Italian furniture, installed new lighting. On the first floor a major refitting exercise had to be accomplished: new shower, oak flooring, cabinets in the guest room, sumptuous cherrywood cabinets and desk designed by Gregory in the study, macho black leather sofas.

The second floor includes a new bathroom with its walnut-clad bathtub (natch), sandblasted glass screens, walk-in shower, limestone walls and floor. The bed and cabinets were designed by Gregory himself and made by his preferred joinery company, with careful continuation of the panelling from one to the other.

As everyone knows lighting is now the make and break of successful interior design and Gregory Phillips is a passionate evangelist for making use of modern technology to control mood effectively. "If you have a single central lightbulb, then clearly a single switch is all you need. But once you have multiple light sources, dimmers, and the rest then you might as well install proper electronic controls. The alternative – huge switch panels – is



A frosted glass panel separates the sleeping area from the en suite bathroom to ensure space is used to the maximum with no loss of light

just not acceptable." Phillips has had great training for understanding light properly, from his many successful refits of art galleries from Anthony d'Offay to Sadie Coles and Stephen Friedman.

Every room in the house is equipped with audio visual systems that are integrated electronically, as you would expect.

"My main advice to anyone embarking on a major refit project is to employ an architect. Because of the plethora of TV programmes and magazines, people are better informed than ever before and think they know what they want. But knowing the effect you are after doesn't mean you know how to achieve it. Planning space properly – even something simple like a bathroom – requires professional input. Just because someone has been successful in business doesn't mean they know how to make the best of their reception space. The key issue is trust." **S**

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