



space and pause

Japanese design principles work their magic
on this once uninhabitable 60s home

Photos Anna Stathaki



An open space fosters an open mind, and so what better way to attack the brief for a pocket of calm in the city than with a design that prioritises an amplitude of space. “Ma is a word in Japanese that simply translates to ‘internal’ or ‘space’.

When you visit a zen garden in Japan, you will notice the abundance of empty space – pristine and uncluttered – a reflection of how your mind should be when you are meditating,” Yoko of Yoko Kloeden Design tells *enki*. As keen enthusiasts of Japanese design, Yoko shares how the clients doubled down on embracing this element. “We used an abundance of ma to celebrate the beauty of emptiness. We use it as a device to allow the mind to settle down.” But it’s not just about outlining open spaces, it’s about creating thoughtful ones. Where many return home to throw their shoes atop the gravity-defying Jenga stack in the corner, here the entrance has been purposefully elongated to allow for a floor-to-ceiling shoe cupboard that keeps footwear neatly tucked away. It’s a small nuance with a big impact – eliciting a sense of arrival and inspiring a small but significant daily ritual whereby the clients can open the door, take off their shoes and tidy away the weight of the day before really stepping into their home. “The client wanted a ‘proper’ entrance instead of walking into the living space straight after opening the door.” The remainder of the plan follows a similar pattern – creating moments to instil habits that imprint calm. This includes everything from shoji screens that delicately demarcate a corner of the main living space which can be opened and closed to create a yoga space (or indeed a guest room, as required), to the bespoke design and installation of tatami mattresses. In this considered embracing of the pillars of Japanese design, with a few personal touches thrown in for good measure, Yoko Kloeden Design has created a home that not only works for its owners, but mirrors them.



The vertical timber slats were utilised for not only their aesthetic, but also their acoustic abilities - softening any interior noise from neighbours



"WE INSTALLED SHOJI SCREEN DOORS IN THE CORNER OF THE LIVING ROOM"



OWNER'S BRIEF

Yearning for retreat from the city, a professional couple were looking for a place where they could genuinely relax at the end of the day. With a keen eye for Japanese design, they wanted the aesthetic and architectural features to embrace this Eastern way of thinking while also being as sustainable as possible.

HOME PROFILE

A two-storey home from the 60s undergoes a contemporary make-over at the hands of Japanese design principles. The now elongated entrance (complete with floor-to-ceiling shoe storage) leads into the multi-functional living and dining space. Here, shoji screens corner off a piece of the room as an adaptable space. Behind the screens, a built-in platform doubles as a guest bed and a yoga platform. A kitchen and utility sit the other side of the stairs while the bedrooms tucked above are installed with tatami floor mattresses.

LOCATION

Ealing, London





"NO TWO GRAINS OF TIMBER ARE THE SAME, AND IT'S BEAUTIFUL TO LOOK AT"



PROJECT NOTES

ARCHITECT & INTERIOR DESIGNER

Yoko Kloeden
Design

BUILDER, CONTRACTOR & STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

Canyon Design
& Build

FLOORING

AH Peck Flooring

LIGHTING

Dining table
pendant, J Adams
& Co; paper
pendant above
the stairs, Akari by
Isamu Noguchi

KITCHEN

The Main Company

BATHROOM

Design, Yoko
Kloeden Design;
marble tiles,
Artisans of Dezives

FURNITURE

Dining chairs, Carl
Hansen & Søn; sofa,
HAY; built-in tatami
room and shoji screen
doors, Wabi Sabi Design

TATAMI MATTRESS

Made to a bespoke
size by a small tatami
workshop in Tokyo.
Fit by a team in
Wabi Sabi Design

ARCHITECT'S QUESTIONS

What did the clients want from the design? The brief was to create a calm and serene oasis for a busy couple using as many Japanese interior features as possible. They also wanted the design to be sustainable, using an electric heat pump, solar panels, underfloor heating, use of biodegradable and reusable materials. The traceability of materials was also important.

In what ways were you inspired by Japanese design principles? Ma is a word in Japanese that simply translates to 'internal' or 'space'. When you visit a zen garden in Japan, you will notice the abundance of empty space – pristine and uncluttered – a reflection of how your mind should be when you are meditating. Ma implies the existence of boundary, something that defines the internal or space such as column or furniture object. In western design, we consider these as 'positive' while the empty space is 'negative'. But this is the opposite in Japan, and in zen gardens the space (ma) is understood as a positive element, and the designer use the boundary objects only to shape it.

How did you choose the material palette? This was kept to natural materials in neutral colours – oak, lime wash paint, rush grass, washi paper, marble and 100% linen curtains. Sustainably sourced timber touches all the senses (except the taste). No two grains are the same, and it's beautiful to look at, it's a joy to touch, it doesn't make harsh sounds like metal or stone and it smells nice.