



# BUILDING A home

MARK BLACKWELL EXPLAINS HOW THE DEDICATION AND EXPERIENCE OF BLACKWELL PROJECTS ENSURES THAT EACH CLIENT'S NEEDS ARE FULFILLED



When you are fitting out a £1 m-plus property and helping to turn a house into a home, it pays to have an eye for detail and an appreciation for craftsmanship. So although Mark Blackwell, the founder and managing director of bespoke interior contractors Blackwell Projects, may now be more used to fitting out large homes and commercial premises, it helps that he started out as a cabinet maker and antique restorer.

The feel for quality and sensitivity to materials that comes with such expertise is perhaps one reason why Blackwell Projects is recommended by architects and designers planning a new interior for high-end private clients looking to refurbish a new property, with the likes of homes for the fashion designer Karen Millen and the previous owner of Tony Blair's Connaught Square townhouse among them. But it is not the only reason.



Mark Blackwell

'Residential projects are as much about having a feel for people,' explains Blackwell. 'They are about building a relationship with the client and making the effort to understand exactly what they are after and how best to make that happen. In the commercial environment every penny has to be accounted for and is being used, ultimately, to move a business towards generating a greater profit. But, while budgets are always a consideration, residential projects are not about making a return, but about creating homeliness and helping to fulfill a client's vision for a place.'

That is sometimes easier said than done. Inevitably inexperienced in reading plans or articulating their ideas, clients often welcome Blackwell's help in articulating what they want for their home. This the company does through constant communication, perhaps a careful marking up of the site – explaining where everything will go and how it will work – through to, more unusually, creating a full-sized mock-up, especially for those interiors where a minor change may have a major impact on the overall scheme.

Blackwell Projects can also use its extensive contacts and close relationships to source the best specialist makers and suppliers in the UK. But its understanding of the more leading-edge commercial market – from creating stores for the likes of Tiffany & Co and Hackett, through to kitchens for the award-winning The Waterside Inn restaurant – pays in other ways too.

That extensive experience in programming and management over ten years of work at the top has, for example, given the company a fine appreciation of the importance of getting a job done on time, especially since residential clients are typically anxious to move into their new home as soon as possible, or may have had the disruption of moving out while work is carried out. It has also given Blackwell Projects access to the latest materials and interior technology, from lighting and heating through to exotic finishes and polished plasters, timeless timbers and spectacular stones.

Small wonder then that the scope of the projects it undertakes – with budgets often topping £500,000, from city apartments through to large country houses, whether ultra-modern in glass and steel or more traditional in warm woods and fabrics – allows Blackwell's to not only create a purpose-built, one-off interior, but to find the perfect marriage between its skills and a client's expectations.

'There are so many interiors magazines and TV programmes now and clients are so widely-travelled, that they pick up some often very adventurous ideas. Their spectrum of design experience is much greater than it used to be, which is a pleasure to work with,' says Blackwell. 'We may not be able to fit that dream of a Spanish villa into a two bedroom urban apartment, but we can certainly get close to it.'

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