



## Architect profile

# Johnny Holland

Judith Wilson meets Johnny Holland, of design company Hackett Holland, who restored the interior of this Grade II-listed, Georgian town house in Marylebone

PHOTOGRAPHS BEN ANDERS

Johnny Holland stands in the entrance hall, which combines neoclassical and modern elements

Johnny Holland studied architectural history at the University of East Anglia before working with historical paint consultant Patrick Baty. He subsequently studied architecture at the Prince of Wales Institute of Architecture, then worked for Porphyrios Associates and Peregrine Bryant, specialists in architecture and building conservation. Johnny and his wife, Jane Hackett, co-founded their multidisciplinary design practice in 2001. Johnny heads a team of six, taking on eclectic jobs both modern and period.

Current commissions include the refurbishment of two nineteenth-century houses, in Kensington and Notting Hill, a Regency town house in Bayswater and a newbuild house in Hampshire. Johnny divides his time between the London office and his Dorset family home.

‘This property was built by Robert Adam in 1772–4, and has been used variously as a private residence, as the US Embassy and as offices. My clients were converting it back into a house and it was being stripped out. My

background is in conservation and traditional architecture, and my original brief was to assist with an appropriate historic colour scheme. This expanded to include reorganising the plan and restoring all the significant historic features.

‘Much of the fragile Adam plasterwork was intact in the hall and on the stairwell, and I was excited because I saw that we could restore it. I don’t think the clients or builders had fully appreciated how much original detailing was in place. The upper level of the stairwell had >



FROM LEFT The drawing room is painted sage green to complement the gilt picture frames. The eighteenth-century plasterwork in the stairwell is by Robert Adam

been boarded up, but I glimpsed the original glass ceiling dome beyond and intricate mouldings on the wall. The house is Grade II listed, so we worked closely with various heritage bodies. We brought in Hirst Conservation to restore the Adam chimneypieces, and Colchester Lister to redecorate. It is a highly specialist activity to remove paint from plaster mouldings that are 250 years old. We used a poultice system that is peeled off after 24 hours. It was amazing to see the crispness of the detail underneath.

‘The wall colours are loosely inspired by the soft pastels favoured in the Adam period, but

centre stage. I knew this colour would work well with gilt frames and not dominate the room.

‘When you are working on an historic property, an understanding of building typologies, materials and techniques of the period is essential. We have added new materials sympathetically. I specified Portland stone for the hall floor. It is completely authentic, as it was the stone of choice for London buildings throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the drawing room, we laid an oiled, waxed English oak floor from Bernard Dru in Devon. It is a good conservation principle to employ

carved window architraves in the drawing room were probably added in the nineteenth century. We agreed with English Heritage that they should be retained because they are part of the story of the house and are pretty. The Portland stone staircase is original, but the decorative metal scrollwork is an addition to the balustrade. Once all the bones were restored, Kate Dyson, former owner of The Dining Room Shop, worked closely with my clients, choosing furnishings and furniture that were sympathetic to the Adam origins of the house, while still being comfortable for modern living.

‘As a practice, we are responsive to both client and building. I can operate in many different design languages, but as I like to think I understand buildings and materials, I also approach the work at a practical, earthy level. I foster good relations between client, contractor and designer. When a job is complete, I like us all to shake hands and leave with a positive vibe. It is so important to know that everyone is happy’ □

## *‘Period homes are to be lived in and enjoyed: they are not public buildings’*

we didn’t follow them slavishly. Instead, I tailored colour choices to my clients’ preferences. Period homes are to be lived in and enjoyed: they are not public buildings. The hall walls are painted in a Papers and Paints powder blue. It is a very gentle tone and appropriate for this space. We chose a stone colour for the stairwell, as this created a neutral “knuckle” from which all the coloured rooms lead off. The first-floor drawing room is painted pale sage green. My clients are art collectors, and the art had to take

new rather than reclaimed materials, so as not to confuse the archaeology of the building. Patina will build up in time. The Adam mahogany doors have been stripped and French-polished. A few of the eighteenth-century handles remained, so we had them copied by Brass Foundry Castings in unlacquered brass.

‘Every period house takes on a few accretions over the centuries. While I am obsessive about attention to detail, I did not adopt a completely purist approach. For example, the

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