

BRUTALIST HONESTY

At London's iconic Barbican Estate, designer *Bryan O'Sullivan* crafts a dreamy—and deeply personal—home for his young family

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AT THE LONDON APARTMENT OF BRYAN O'SULLIVAN AND JAMES O'NEILL, SALON-STYLE ART ARRANGEMENTS WRAP THE LIVING AREA, WHICH IS FURNISHED WITH A VINTAGE CESARÉ LACCA SOFA, CHAIRS OF O'SULLIVAN'S OWN DESIGN, AND AN ORIOR CREDENZA; 1950S CEILING LIGHT BY MAX INGRAND IN COLLABORATION WITH THE ARTIST DUBÉ.



LEFT LOCATED HIGH IN ONE OF THE BARBICAN'S THREE TOWERS, THE FLAT ENJOYS SWEEPING CITY VIEWS OF THE LONDON EYE, BIG BEN, AND BEYOND. **RIGHT** A TERRACE WRAPS THE UNIT. **OPPOSITE** O'SULLIVAN (LEFT) AND O'NEILL WITH THEIR SON, COSMO, AFTER WHOM THEY NAMED THE TABLE LAMP FROM O'SULLIVAN'S DEBUT FURNITURE LINE.



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here are buildings that loom as large in our imaginations as they do on the skyline. For Bryan O'Sullivan, the Barbican has been that landmark. "Ever since I was a student I've been obsessed," the designer says of the London icon: a cluster of Brutalist beauties by Chamberlin, Powell and Bon that date to the 1960s and '70s.

Visible from far and wide, its three towers transfixed the budding aesthete when he first moved to the city from Ireland. "You can't miss them," he notes, still awestruck at their jagged silhouettes. It was there, in the complex's beloved theater, that he graduated from university, there that he's reveled in countless live performances, and there, in its galleries, that he's absorbed exhibition after

exhibition. Put simply, O'Sullivan reflects, "the Barbican always pulls me back."

So when an apartment came up for sale in the westernmost tower, he and his husband, James O'Neill, jumped at the opportunity to lay roots amid the concrete. Set on the 39th floor, the unit offered a bird's-eye perch above the city, looking out toward the London Eye, Buckingham Palace, and Hampstead Heath. "At first I needed some convincing, but when I got there and saw the views I was sold," recalls O'Neill, a music artist who doubles as the commercial director (and jack-of-all-trades) at O'Sullivan's eponymous firm. "There is nowhere else in London like it."

The apartment had only ever been owned by one couple who had renovated the kitchen and baths, sparing O'Sullivan and O'Neill the guilt of disturbing original details. "I'm all for

preserving the past, but that 1970s kitchen would not have worked for modern-day life," notes the designer, who opened up the galley cookspace to create a more loftlike layout. The three existing bedrooms, meanwhile, were rejiggered to form a primary suite with its own bath and dressing room, a small guest room, and a cozy TV room. The result, O'Sullivan notes, were "two zones: an elevated entertaining area and a slouchier, cozier space."

He certainly knows how to set a mood. Prior to opening his own firm, O'Sullivan honed his craft under some of the design world's leading talents, among them AD100 titans Annabelle Selldorf, Luis Laplace, and Martin Brudnizki, plus the late great hospitality maestro David Collins. Since launching Bryan O'Sullivan Studio 10 years ago, he has built his own name in the hotel world thanks to a chance meeting with Paddy McKillen,

at the time the mastermind shepherding the Maybourne Group's portfolio of legendary properties. McKillen encouraged him to submit ideas for The Berkeley Bar & Terrace in London, ultimately falling in love with O'Sullivan's vision—a wood-paneled watering hole that braided homages to the Duke of Wellington, Brutalism, and Carlo Scarpa. That commission led to many more: the Red Room speakeasy and adjoining cigar lounge at the Connaught; another bar as well as suites, penthouses, and the newly opened brasserie at Claridge's; and an array of spaces at the Maybourne Riviera in the South of France. Today there are collaborations in the works in Beverly Hills and beyond.

Expanding on his love of hospitality, O'Sullivan says, "you get to push the boundaries and dig deep into a concept." He credits that creative passion to his mother and father,

ART: MARLENE DUMAS

IN THE KITCHEN, SURFACES OF RICHLY FIGURED MARBLE COMPLEMENT CUSTOM CABINETRY IN THE SPIRIT OF LE CORBUSIER; STOOLS BY O'SULLIVAN. OPPOSITE THE DINING AREA'S PENDANT LIGHT, TABLE, AND CHAIRS ARE ALL FROM O'SULLIVAN'S DEBUT COLLECTION OF FURNITURE; UPHOLSTERY FABRIC BY CLAIRE DE QUÉNÉTAÏN.



“Ever since I was a student I’ve been obsessed,” *O’Sullivan* says of the iconic London building he now calls home. “The Barbican always pulls me back.”





O'SULLIVAN DESIGNED THE BED, SIDE TABLES, AND TABLE LAMPS IN THE PRIMARY SUITE; VINTAGE MAX INGRAND MIRROR. LEFT COSMO'S NURSERY IS COCOONED IN A CLAIRE DE QUÉNÉTAIN PATTERN; DRAWINGS BY SAM WOOD.



who owned a number of bars and restaurants in the Irish town of Kenmare, where he grew up, as well as his maternal grandfather, a hotelier with properties throughout surrounding County Kerry. But today the designer is just as busy with private residential projects, the pace and intimacy of which engage different parts of his brain. “You can take your time developing a world that’s bespoke for the people who live there.”

AT THE BARBICAN, he has been able to apply that same rigor and attention to detail to his own home. Normally decisive, O’Sullivan admits to initially struggling with the total freedom that comes with designing for yourself. “Being your own client for a change is surreal,” he says. Ultimately, the couple tied as much of the interiors as possible back to the era of the Barbican but reinterpreted for the 21st century. The entry is clad in oak-burl paneling, the walls and ceilings slathered in Marmorino plaster, and the floors lined in end-grain blocks of wood. Furnishings, meanwhile, mix vintage finds by the likes of Gio Ponti, Jean Royère, and Max Ingrand with O’Sullivan’s own creations—from the dining table (inlaid with brass vegetables and mother-of-pearl psychedelic mushrooms) to the entry’s starburst mirror. Both pieces are part of O’Sullivan’s debut furniture collection, which elegantly blends bygone glamour with present-day pizzazz.

The apartment’s overall palette, though subdued, stays cheerful, punctuated with notes of pink and blue reminiscent of sunsets. “Our goal,” explains O’Sullivan, “was to counterbalance all that concrete, to make the spaces feel as uplifting as possible.” These days, the space is bringing smiles to many faces as the couple hosts regular dinner parties for their families and friends, among them like-minded neighbors. O’Sullivan, an avid chef, finally has enough space to entertain a crowd, cooking in a showstopper kitchen with oak cabinetry that echoes the Barbican’s jagged façades.

And there’s a new mouth to feed. This past year, the couple welcomed the arrival of their first child, Cosmo. Come bedtime, he gets his bath in the marble-lined tub then settles into his charming nursery, previously the guest room but now wrapped in Claire de Quénétain wallpaper. Then it’s downtime for daddies as O’Sullivan and O’Neill snuggle into the television room for a show or just gaze out across the city—looking out from the Barbican after so many years looking up at it. “We always get a sunset,” notes O’Neill. “At magic hour the whole apartment seems bathed in honey. It feels like a real retreat up in the clouds.” Adds O’Sullivan, still awestruck: “You can see everything.” ▀

ART: SAM WOOD

“Our goal was to counterbalance all that concrete, to make the spaces feel as uplifting as possible.”



THE GUEST BATH IS LINED IN CIPOLLINO MARBLE, WITH A MATCHING SINK CARVED FROM A SINGLE BLOCK OF STONE; FITTINGS BY WATERWORKS.