

UP IN THE AIR

A secret garden lies at the heart of this highly unusual rooftop retreat in an Amsterdam penthouse

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SITTING ROOM
The redesigned interior plays on the bold, industrial architecture, with a decisive colour palette and the graphic detailing of new joinery such as this fitted bookcase/TV unit. Matching armchairs, Minotti. Valencia bespoke rug, Rug Society. Rea table, Tonin Casa



DINING AREA

The apartment's hidden surprise is this central entertaining area, where the sliding roof glides back, turning the room in to a rooftop garden.

Blue and white chairs upholstered in Odyssey, Perennial Fabrics. Aldo Bernardi Ellicriso floor lamp. Viadurini. Split table. Gloster. Remire chairs, Coco Wolf

Hester Stolk has been familiar with the tall, slender canal-side houses of Amsterdam since her childhood. 'But I have never seen anything like this,' says the interior designer of her latest project – a penthouse apartment set in an un-touristy backwater of the city. A lift whisks you up four storeys to the two-bedroom home, where the rooms wrap, cloister like, around the dining room that sits at the heart of this square-shaped apartment. At the push of a lever, the glass roof glides back, revealing a canopy of winter-blue sky. Suddenly you find yourself in a secret garden that feels more south of France than central Amsterdam.

This unique feature derives from a twist in planning regulations. Built in the 16th century, this former factory was bombed during the Second World War by the Luftwaffe. 'The building survived, but the roof had to be rebuilt,' says Hester. 'As this meant that technically, the roof was not part of the original, heavily listed structure, the former owner was allowed to rip off a chunk of the roof to create the sliding roof and this wonderful outdoor space.'

Drawn by its unusual configuration, Hester's clients, a Dutchman married to an American, bought the apartment as a base to explore Europe and visit their family. They approached the designer with a minimal brief. 'At first, all they wanted were a few tweaks to introduce more light, but when I suggested ways in which we could improve the flow of the space, they said yes to it all,' says Hester, who owns her own studio, Büro Kif, in Amsterdam.

'We started again and treated it like a jigsaw puzzle. The potential was wonderful,' says Hester of the changes that have brought logic and light to the floorplan. In the kitchen, a cloakroom was removed to enlarge the space and panels of opaque glass inserted between original beams to 'fill the space

with the changing light of the seasons.' Here, a once-lacklustre wall was rebuilt using bricks handpicked from a reclamation yard. 'It looks industrial, but not overly contemporary,' says Hester. Opposite, grasscloth-covered walls 'provide texture without too much pattern'. Because this is a home of views, where one room offers tantalising glimpses of the next, the marble granite panel at the end of the L-shaped counter is incised with a grid-like design. 'It's the first thing you see from the sitting room, so it had to stand out,' explains Hester.

The clients shipped several containers of their furniture from the States with an open-ended message – 'We were told to keep what we wanted.' An antique pharmaceutical cabinet and some classical seating made the cut, but almost all the furniture and objects are new. The 'boldly reframed' artwork was found at auction, and designer pieces have been added into the mix, too. Hester enjoys the malleability of metal and she designed some pieces for the apartment herself, inspired by the elegant lines of French bistro tables.

For most of the year, the owners bask in the sunshine of the southern United States, 'so they were keen to capture some of that climate here,' says Hester. To counteract the gloom of a Dutch winter, a Mediterranean palette of ochres, petrol blues and whites with flashes of brass, courses through the rooms. Bathroom tiles are a chorus of ocean blues; through a door you glimpse the 'sunbeam' flash of a yellow slipper chair, positioned to draw your eye. In the guest bedroom, Hester chose a long, Japanese artwork to hang opposite the bed. The golden panel, she explains, was hung deliberately low so that at night, it glows 'like the setting sun,' transporting guests to a place, far, far away from here. 🌅

■ Büro Kif, burokif.com

INSPIRATION



DINING AREA

The central space with its sliding glass roof doubles as a rooftop garden in summer and light-filled, entertaining space throughout the year.

Grasyl candleholder, AYTM. Tvis cutlery, Broste Copenhagen

KITCHEN

The bespoke cabinets, painted in translucent layers of blue to reveal the wood grain, were designed to conceal kitchen paraphernalia and be a focal point when viewed from the sitting room.

Bespoke units, Büro Kif



INSIDER INSIGHT

Interior designer Hester shares her style vision

BIGGEST INDULGENCE The trust of our clients. They gave us the freedom to make big changes and never interfered. In fact, they told us they felt the more they interfered, the weaker the design would become.

SMALL CHANGE, BIG IMPACT We were on a budget for the art, so we bought most of it at auction. Bold frames have given every piece a new personality.

GO-TO DESIGNER OR BRAND I deeply respected the late architect David Collins – I even once wrote to him, applying for a job. He wrote back, thanking me for the analysis of his style.

FAVOURITE BUILDING The Westerkerk in Amsterdam – we can glimpse its tower from our home.

ON MY COFFEE TABLE *Modern Art Desserts* by Caitlin Freeman.



INSPIRATION



BATHROOM
The bright scheme was chosen to echo the rest of the apartment and to inject southern warmth into northern climes.
Linear **wall lights**, Original BTC. Picket blue and white **tiles**, Fireclay Tile



BEDROOM
Textural wallcoverings add intimacy and detail without introducing too much pattern.
Angui **mirror**, AYTM.
Sign **side table**, Lema.
Princeton glass **wall light**, Schoolhouse