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ARCHITECTURE /



ASK AN ARCHITECT

PROCTOR & SHAW

London-based architects John Proctor and Mike Shaw discuss the benefits of small-scale living and give their tips for creating homes with natural warmth



What kind of projects do you like to work on? 'We're still working out where to focus our attention,' says Shaw. 'A lot of architects start their own practices when they are young, but we've both spent many years in other practices. So while most of our work now is residential, we've both historically worked on museums, retail, restaurants and the education sector. We're open to anything, but what we're most interested in is achieving a level of quality.'
How would you describe your approach? 'Our skills as architects are traditional; it's about form, light, materiality. We're good at exploiting the opportunities of each project, whether it's a particular client or a specific material,' says Proctor. 'We strive for beauty and clarity,' adds Shaw. 'We look at the elements that make each project special, so we try not to go in with preconceived ideas.' ►

Above The open-plan kitchen of Quarter Glass House with a timber-framed ceiling, copper surfaces and duck-egg-blue cabinetry **Left** John Proctor (left) and Mike Shaw **Below** The angular extension at Quarter Glass House





What projects are you most proud of?

‘Quarter Glass House has become a benchmark. While it’s just an extension to a typical Edwardian house, there are specific conditions that allow the project to become unique,’ says Shaw. ‘Marylebone Apartment is an interesting study in small-living spaces, but refined materiality,’ adds Proctor. ‘It shows it’s worth pushing hard on a project to get that extra five percent, because it does make a big difference.’

Do you have an interest in micro living?

‘With the housing crisis, how we’re going to live in the future is very topical,’ says Proctor. ‘We hope our recent project, Shoji Apartment, might add a bit of fuel to that debate. For us, it’s a question of how you measure the quality of living space. Is there an opportunity to live smaller and in a more environmentally friendly way, but enjoy a better quality of space?’

How do you add a sense of warmth to your residential projects?

‘We come from a background where architecture and interiors weren’t treated as separate things, so we build in warmth and texture in a way that is integral to the architecture,’

‘WHAT WE’RE MOST INTERESTED IN IS ACHIEVING A LEVEL OF QUALITY’

says Shaw. ‘You see a lot of timber in our projects [like the kitchen of Snug House in Marylebone]. Sometimes it’s just structure that we’ve stripped back and exposed. For instance, you might gain some additional height by exposing the gap between ceiling rafters and beams, and you get the benefit of that warm material.’

How else do you bring wood into living spaces? ‘We do a lot of fixed furniture and joinery elements; we have a real interest in the way things fit together and the details in the joints,’ says Shaw. ‘It’s a lovely material to work with,’ adds Proctor.

Can you create warmth even in more minimalist spaces? ‘If a material is cold, you have to pair it with something that will bring warmth,’ says Proctor. ‘With Shoji Apartment, we had this idea about a lantern made out of polycarbonate, a material that can be quite cold. But, by pairing it with birch plywood and Clayworks plaster, we created a contrast that works well.’

What are the biggest challenges you face when designing homes? ‘Design is only half the battle,’ says Proctor. ‘When clients haven’t been through the process before, we have to empathise with their expectations, explain when to take a hard line and when not to, when to have sympathy for the contractor and when to step in and be resolute.’

Is there any advice you would give to someone planning their first self-build or renovation? ‘First of all, sit down and write a brief,’ says Proctor. ‘It should be a list of the essentials, then the things that would be nice to have. It will help you understand the difference between what the project has to deliver and what you would like it to deliver.’ proctorandshaw.com **ED**

Top Shoji Apartment in Camden, London, is a stylish prototype for micro living
Bottom Snug House, an extension of a Herne Hill home, has a refurbished open-plan kitchen and a new snug area looking out onto the garden



WORDS: AMY REARSON PICTURES: BEN BLOSSOM, STÅLE ERIKSEN