

The original town hall opened in 1910, a testament to Edwardian architecture and design



GO TO TOWN

We asked Jay to choose an interior scheme that he admires, be it a home or commercial space. He plumped for Town Hall Hotel, a Grade II-listed, former council town hall in Bethnal Green, the area where he grew up. Here, we speak to architect and designer Nathalie Rozencwajg, on transforming the space into a luxe hotel

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'Town Hall Hotel is traditional but relaxed, celebrating history in the now'

Set in London's vibrant, creative East End, the Town Hall Hotel is a beacon of good design, taking what was a proud civic building and deftly turning it into a hotel for the modern guest, while celebrating its original features and heritage. Built in 1910 and extended further in 1937, the place is a mixture of Edwardian, art deco and neoclassical styles, a challenge for architect and designer Nathalie Rozencwajg who took on the project (along with Michel da Costa Goncalves) of transforming it in 2007. 'It was one of our first commissions,' says Nathalie. 'And we were met with a building that had been created over two periods, with two sets of grand spaces that we had to work out what to do with, and two very different styles. At first it was hard to make sense of it, hard to say that it had one particular historical signature.'

Also, the building was in a state of disrepair. After being sold by the council to a private developer, a few rooms were used for filming, but only basic maintenance had been carried out. Once the current owner had been granted permission to transform it into a hotel, Nathalie's initial approach was to decide on which materials to keep. 'There was already a lot of wood, marble, stone and panelling, plus the cornice and decorative elements,' she explains. 'But one of the most exciting things was the ventilation grille in the council chamber. This was the main art deco feature, and the original designers had already taken its pattern and interpreted it over different areas of the building. That became our biggest inspiration and we developed a whole pattern language from that. We were able to tell a fresh story from this pattern, making the link between old and new by using it alongside the original materials.'

Thus began a new chapter in Town Hall Hotel's narrative, resulting in an award-winning, rejuvenated space with echoes of a glamorous bygone age that's both at the heart of the local community and a restful place for guests.



A central atrium floods the original marble stairway with natural light



LEFT A mix of different-style vintage and industrial lights are a feature in the restaurant

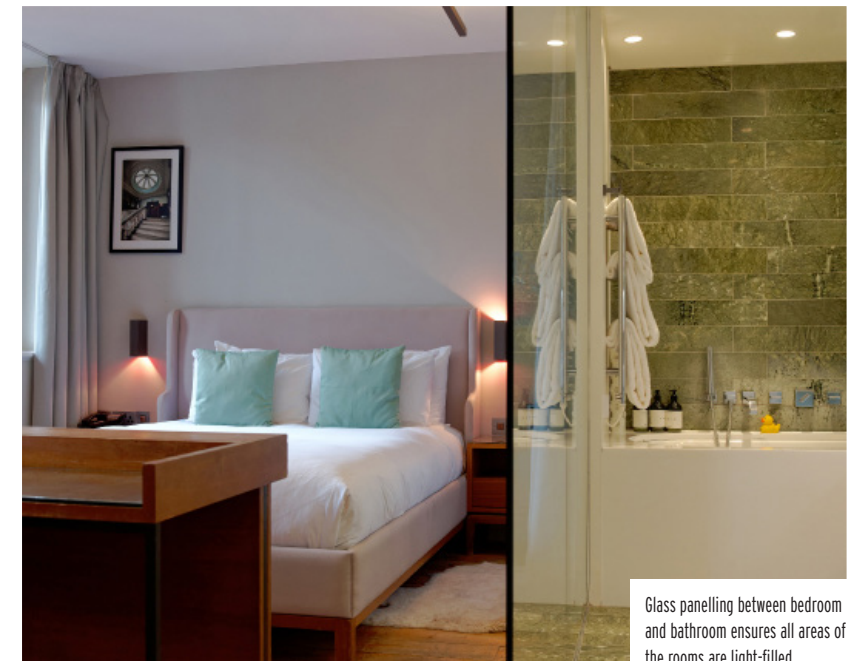
BELOW Elegant lights add atmosphere to the walnut-panelled former council chamber



Light & materials

One of the most impactful elements of Town Hall Hotel is its abundance of light. From the domed atrium flooding the main staircase with daylight to the vintage fittings and bright rooms, all the spaces are brought alive by careful use of light – something that can inspire domestic interior schemes too. ‘But not all the spaces originally had natural light,’ smiles Nathalie. ‘The rooms are quite deep, so we made a conscious decision to work with glass panels, so there’d be natural light coming into the bathrooms as well. In parallel to that, we discreetly added LED lights in the old council chamber, main lobby and decorative rooms. Not only do these add extra illumination but help hugely with lowering energy consumption.’

Most of the vintage light fittings are the originals. ‘A big part of our job was to go through the space and create a database of all the elements that we could either preserve, store or reuse,’ says Nathalie. ‘There was a very careful analysis of what was already there.’ And amplifying the original materials is another huge success. The elegant combination of wood panelling, stone, glass and marble is consistent throughout, and the colour palette is drawn from these natural elements, with white, green and earth tones, or abstract enough to complement rather than clash.



Glass panelling between bedroom and bathroom ensures all areas of the rooms are light-filled

RIGHT By renovating rather than demolishing the building, Town Hall Hotel is already sustainable

BELOW Heritage is maintained with materials, while the modern upgrade is discreetly hidden



The swimming pool is long and narrow to fit with the building's original foundations

Old to new

‘Just reusing an existing building is sustainable in itself,’ says Nathalie. ‘The biggest part of waste comes from both the embedded carbon used to make a new building and then demolishing it,’ she continues. ‘The fact we can keep a building and not demolish it is often overlooked.’

Town Hall Hotel is testament to why historical buildings should be preserved, but harmonising old with new takes some skill. As the hotel is Grade II-listed, many period features have to remain in situ. ‘There’s internal panelling that we couldn’t move; we couldn’t alter the windows, only change the panes to slightly better glass. As much as you want to upgrade the building, you’re quite limited when it’s listed,’ explains Nathalie. In fact, one of the most challenging elements of the project was the MEP (mechanical, electrical and plumbing). ‘You want to bring the building up to modern standards but you have to preserve so much – the high ceilings, the décor. You can’t just pierce through something to install the air con, you have to find a route,’ says Nathalie. ‘That’s always the biggest challenge when working with an old building – how do you hide the upgrade?’

But she’s definitely kept the upgrade discreet, while simple things, such as retaining and reusing the original door and window furniture, keep the hotel’s authenticity alive. And even the addition of a swimming pool complements rather than detracts from the overall atmosphere.



Period features, such as wood panelling and decorative plaster, reflect the hotel's architectural past



The bar is a celebration of understated elegance with muted colours and touches of brass



FIND OUT MORE
townhallhotel.com
 See more from Nathalie
 at namearchitecture.net



LEFT Much of the furniture was designed bespoke to complement the period features

BELOW Art has played an important role in the hotel's transformation, displaying work from local artists



Art & décor

The hotel's interior scheme is a careful reflection of the building and its heritage. 'We worked on the furnishing and fixtures too,' says Nathalie. 'That was the great thing about this project, it was very holistic. The furniture is a mix of some from the owner's private collection, which includes a lot of mid-century pieces. There's also a lot of bespoke furniture. We designed beds, desks and some of the furniture in the bar and restaurant.'

The pieces sit beautifully in each room, many of which are apartments with their own kitchen and living areas. And each one is slightly different. 'There are 98 rooms and we felt like we were working on 98 different projects!' says Nathalie. She finds it tricky to choose her favourite, but recommends the Grand and De Montfort suites, along with rooms on the southern side of the hotel, which have a clear separation between the bedroom and living areas.

Art also plays an important role in the transformation, and the hotel organised a competition for young, local artists to submit their work with the chance to have it displayed in the building. The result is another narrative layer, and guests now receive a guide to the hotel's art when they check in. 'The idea was to create an attachment between the local area and guests,' explains Nathalie. Further proof that this isn't just any hotel, but one in which the confidence of the Edwardian and art deco ages boosts the local community and London's hospitality scene right now. 📍



Each room is slightly different with its own individual look, and many are apartments