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The Lennon recording studio that's now a lavish £12m flat

This sleek Holland Park flat is part of rock history. But now it would be far too sophisticated for the Sex Pistols.



A lot of people say their kitchen is where the action happens in their home, but not many can boast that it's where John Lennon, Yoko Ono, Art Garfunkel and the Sex Pistols recorded songs. Yet in Audrey Lovelock's cavernous kitchen/diner, more than 300 silver, gold and platinum discs were produced between the late 1950s and the early Noughties.

Music history was made in this leafy corner of west London, from Lonnie Donegan's skiffle records to the psychedelic rock-outs of the Animals and Donovan's Mellow Yellow, as well as songs by Rod Stewart, Marianne Faithfull and Bryan Ferry.

The 31ft by 20ft room — in Lovelock's 5,000 sq ft Holland Park home — is now a sleek entertaining space, with vanilla marble floors, a vast *verre églomisé* mirror and striking contemporary art, all topped off by a mammoth £40,000 glass lantern. But it was once the main recording room at Lansdowne Studios, set up by Denis Preston, whose Sunday Times obituary in 1979 described him as "probably the most important figure to emerge from the British jazz business". It's hard to imagine that in this sophisticated room, back in 1976, the Pistols made their first recordings of Anarchy in the UK, spraying foam and spilling wine all over what were then state-of-the-art mixing desks.

These days, the analogue consoles have been replaced by Roche Bobois swivel armchairs, ancient Chinese cabinetry and wet bars. Lovelock, 51, bought the four-storey property — set over the lower floors of a Grade II-listed Arts and Crafts building on Lansdowne Road — when the studios closed in 2006, having seen the labyrinthine space as the ultimate challenge in creating a family home.

"I suppose I'm a serial renovator," says Lovelock, who has a background in catering, but has done up six properties, to the frustration of her financier husband, Jeff, 48, and their two sons, Harrison, 23, and Drew, 22. "I just can't help myself."

Having overseen the building of their last home — a five-bedroom contemporary house in Tewin Wood, Hertfordshire — Lovelock says she was ready for another project. “I’m really interested in spatial design, so this was particularly interesting, as well as difficult. It was really hard to get your head around the space, but I knew that this could make a fabulous four-bedroom home.”

It certainly took imagination. When Lovelock first saw the studios, there were four separate entrances, set over several floors and half-floors, with a control room, an engineers’ room and a percussion booth. The enormous windows had been blacked out and everything was covered in soundproofing materials.

Clues to its Edwardian past also lingered: Lansdowne House had been built by a philanthropist as a residence and studio space for a group of struggling artists in 1904, and there were remnants of the squash court, smoking room, thermal baths and coal chutes.

With the help of an architect and structural engineers, Lovelock drew up scores of floor plans, working out what connected where and the best way to transform the complex lateral space into a smooth, flowing series of rooms. “I realised it could work,” she says. “All the rooms are so enormous, with fantastic proportions and nothing poky.”

Having paid “less than £2m” for the property, she embarked on what was to be a two-year project, creating a comfortable flat with several entertaining spaces, a plush cinema room, a gym, a wine cellar and a starry-skied steam room. She installed new plumbing, electrics and a home-control system, and had floors taken up to lay underfloor heating. She also ordered more marble than you would find in a Venetian palazzo, direct from a Greek quarry.

“With huge proportions and ceiling heights, this place could easily have felt like a mausoleum,” says Lovelock, who put the main sitting room where the squash court used to be. She decided to use warm materials and antiques, set against contemporary features such as spiral staircases and glass-balustraded mezzanine levels, providing a “bridge”, as she calls it, between past and present, and keeping it homely. Original Arts and Crafts features such as fireplaces and lead windows were restored and wooden parquet flooring found around the property was reclaimed. Victorian-style fabrics contrast with thick impasto canvases by the Dorset-based artist Stephen Bishop; Gaggenau and Wolf appliances gleam in the minimalist kitchen.

The key is mixing and matching, says Lovelock, and textures are everything. The cinema room has walnut panelling, soundproofed silk panels and art deco-style seating, upholstered in a mushroom velvet. The benches in the steam bath are mother-of-pearl, and the four ensuite bathrooms and wet rooms make use of tactile materials such as rough pebbled flooring.

Despite her lack of formal training in architecture and design, an inquiring mind, coupled with constant research and travel, mean Lovelock never runs out of ideas. “Wherever I am, I am always stopping and looking. I take cuttings and get ideas from magazines, even when I’m waiting in the doctor’s surgery.”

Yet in her designs, Lovelock — who will only say that total costs for the project were “substantial” — has paid homage to her home’s past. In the wooden-panelled conservatory room, a cupboard retains the ornate Edwardian coat hooks that were used by the painters. And on the spotless white corridor walls are black-and-white photographs of the artists who recorded there: Shirley Bassey, Rod Stewart and, of course, the Sex Pistols.

Despite the disruption the building work created, Lovelock’s fellow neighbours in the building, which is divided up into about 10 flats, were so impressed that one of them has commissioned her to overhaul their own two-bedroom flat and create a sinuous living space. She has, however, decided to put her own place on the market for £12.5m. With their boys grown up and her renovation of the family’s chalet in the Haute-Savoie under way, Jeff often finds himself alone in a lateral space that is, well, too large.

Lovelock admits it isn't going to suit everybody: "It isn't a place for your auntie." Or, with those marbled stairs and floors — albeit nonslip — for small children. Moreover, you reach the roof terrace by climbing up a set of portable steps and over a windowsill, for which you'd need to be pretty limber.

So she is now on the hunt for another home, about half the size of the Lansdowne House flat and, unsurprisingly, one with project potential. "I couldn't take on anything that had already been renovated," she says, "as it would really annoy me. But I don't want anything quite so severe this time. Tired but habitable will do." Which will no doubt come as a relief to her husband.

No 1 Lansdowne House is for sale with VanHan (020 7409 5525, vanhan.co.uk) and Aylesford (020 7351 2383, aylesford.com)