

DESIGN FEATURE OF THE MOMENT

porthole windows

INDULGING CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE'S LOVE OF SOFT CURVES, THIS FEATURE BRINGS THE WOW FACTOR TO MODERN INTERIORS

FEATURE Keith Flanagan



Picture a regular window and you're bound to think of a rectangle. But sometimes the right window for your space doesn't require any right angles at all: porthole windows have come full circle as a means for whimsical and shapely facades, and the architectural feature is even popping up across interior walls.

'I think round windows are a trend as there is a boom in curved and organic shapes in both architecture and interior design,' says Antonio Mora of Madrid's Studio Noju, noting that the motif is not new but has returned in great force.

Traditionally installed on ships, portholes are compact, bringing light and air into cabins without weakening the vessel's structure. Over the years, especially in art deco and mid-century architecture, their circular forms were introduced at home to bring playful geometry and curiosity – and their smooth lines are all the more fitting for today's contemporary aesthetic.

'We see it as part of modern design's long-time love of naval architecture, which pops up again and again in every era,' say Jacob Esocoff and Henry Ng, principals of New York's Ideas of Order. 'The porthole floats nicely in a wall composition, not asking to be aligned to its surroundings.'

And while they are most common on exterior walls, installing a porthole in an interior creates soft connections between rooms while flowing light from one space to the next. 'Internal windows can be tricky to get right, and a porthole window is a more playful way to connect two spaces than a rectilinear one,' says Tom Surman, director at London's Surman Weston.

Sure, portholes may not be an obvious choice for your home – unless you live on a boat – but the maritime motif remains a clever way to infuse spaces with out-of-the-ordinary design. Here are a few ways architects have used portholes in residential designs. ➤

1 FULL CIRCLE
For clients with busy lives, architects created a spa bathroom that revolves around a pivoting porthole window facing a serene garden, creating a sense of calm while connecting to the outdoors. 'The rest of the design for the space fell into place and was a direct response to the porthole window,' explains Phoebe Lipscombe, associate at Studio Doherty. 'Introducing angular, monolithic forms and using a single colour in the room – via an apple green mosaic tile – was done in an effort to offset and amplify the impact of the porthole window.'

PROJECT BY Studio Doherty

2 ON VIEW
The porthole in this material-rich Melbourne home is both practical and aesthetic – it frames a view of the front entrance from the kitchen bench while also creating soft contrast. 'We use circular openings as they're a gentle form that punctuates the facade,' says Adriana Hanna, director of architecture at

Australia's Kennedy Nolan. 'Compositionally it can resolve a facade and prevent it feeling solid and austere.' Paired with other rounded elements like a double cylinder range hood and globe light fixtures, the porthole also softens the sharp lines of the interior scheme.

PROJECT BY Kennedy Nolan

3 DOUBLE VISION

In restaurants, porthole doors allow servers to see if someone is approaching from the other side. Conjuring fond memories of food culture, this Buenos Aires home by Estudio Karina Kreth features a porthole door that creates visual interest – and connection – between the living room and kitchen. 'The only caveat to take into account with the porthole is the quality of the finish because it will be at the level of your eyes,' says architect and designer Karina Kreth. 'And keep in mind that we will always be seeing what is on the other side, both on the shot and shot reverse.'

PROJECT BY Estudio Karina Kreth





LINE BREAK

For a rather novel idea, this home office in Wimbledon features with straight and circular lines alike. 'The idea here was to incorporate the window into a piece of fitted furniture so it feels like it's floating among the books,' says Christian Ducker, director at London's Gundry + Ducker, who constructed a bookshelf to surround the round window. 'Among straight lines, it provides a visual contrast.' Situated at eye height when sitting down at the desk, the intimate window offers a sweet view of the outdoors when the owner needs to rest their eyes.

PROJECT BY Gundry + Ducker



PHOTOGRAPHS (LINE BREAK) ANDREW MEREDITH;
(PANE LESS) JOSÉ HEVIA

PANE LESS

Exterior portholes are usually glazed while interior ones can remain open, maximising light flow between rooms. The porthole-style opening in this Madrid apartment channels light from a tinted glass-brick window in the adjacent room. 'The fact that the window has rounded edges produces a more atmospheric effect when light passes through the opening,' says Antonio Mora, architect and interior designer at Studio Noju. 'We wanted this opening to "capture" the evening light passing through the yellow glass block recreating a sunset inside the house.'

PROJECT BY Studio Noju >



INSIDE CIRCLE

Placed at head height, a porthole connects a Manhattan kitchen with a hybrid space that serves as an office and kid's room. 'It's an invitation to have a playful interaction across the wall between two people,' says NYC's Ideas of Order. To create an even more dynamic feature, the designers added another surprising element. 'There are also shutters on the bedroom side that add a playful element to interact with,' says the studio. 'These additional moves encourage a more layered reading that prevents a theatrical design move from feeling like a one-liner.'

PROJECT BY Ideas of Order