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Fast forward



Interior designer Emma Baddeley completely overhauled her flat in Edinburgh in three weeks, keeping things classy and simple

IT IS fascinating to see what interior designers can do when they're given free reign with someone else's time and money, but what do they do in their own houses, when the constraints of budget and deadlines hit a little closer to home?

Emma Baddeley might spend her days designing chichi interiors for the show homes of luxury house builders, but when it came to her own property in Edinburgh's Stockbridge, she had three weeks to complete it and a shoestring budget.

When she first came up from London to view the two-bedroom property three years ago, she hadn't even got as far as the front door of the first-floor flat when she knew she had to have it.

"I decided in the stairwell. I could tell this was it. The light was stunning, flooding through from the back green, and it had that lovely New Town feel about it," she says.

While the stairwell and location might have been the answer to Emma's dreams, when she did make it over the threshold the interior was something of a nightmare. "It was a hideous mess, with bright green Doris Day built-in furniture and polka-dots – way before that was cool again – but it had high ceilings, ornate cornices and working shutters. You know when you just walk in somewhere and it's the one? I asked the woman who owned it how much she wanted and put an offer in the next morning."

Emma's working life may entail weeks debating the finer details of toilet height for million-pound penthouses, but things had to move a little faster on the home front. In the space of just three weeks, she sorted out problems with damp, put in central heating, a new kitchen and bathroom, and entirely redecorated. "The secret is to be organised and be here every day to oversee the work in person, keeping everything on schedule," she says.

There was also the added motivation of living in a caravan with her daughter Daisy, then a toddler, while the 1880s property was overhauled. "It was an incentive living in a caravan with an 18-month-old, but it was also an adventure," she says.

"At that point I had just finished doing an interior design course and just used everything I had learned – more on the project management side, dealing with tradesmen when they turn round and say you're talking rubbish and try to undermine you. You have to know exactly what you want and understand what you want, because otherwise they will take the easy way and do things that aren't according to the regulations, just because you're a woman. However, the other side is that a woman can be assertive and cheeky without it becoming aggressive, and that's what you have to do," she says.

Stripping the flat back to its classy bare bones involved a less-is-more operation, and it's more a case of what was taken out rather than put in. Out went the green plastic cladding and avocado suite from the bathroom, and the terracotta and salmon-pink colour scheme – all from what Emma describes as the "minging" school of design. In came period pastels and creams, to complement the original features and proportions. In the kitchen plain blue tiles and a slate floor complement white cupboards and stylish stainless-steel appliances, and the same blue carpet throughout gives continuity and a sense of space. The bathroom is an oasis of contemporary calm, with porcelain-effect limestone tiles used on both the floor and walls.

"I wanted low-maintenance easy city-centre living, and rather than doing anything spectacular, it was more about doing everything very quickly." With a moving-in date looming, Emma's one brief hesitation concerned the flat's antique thunderbox toilet, which bears the legend 'Volcania' on the bowl, in a WC located just off the hall. "I kept thinking 'how many people have sat

Clockwise from top left: the kitchen has blue tiles; a blue carpet is used throughout; the hall light is made of plastic strips; the mirror over the fire was bought for £1

on that old wooden toilet seat?" and considered replacing it, but at the end of the day it was an original feature and I grew to love it!"

Used to working to tight schedules on show homes, Emma refused to panic over the flat and admits to having nerves of steel. "I like when the deadlines are looming, because that's when it's more fun – doing that final fix and turnaround is the best time. Having a short timescale is far better than six months or so, because then it just drags on for ever and ever."

With the flat decorated in record time, the final job was to choose furniture and soft furnishings. Emma made a feature of the windows with simple yet luxurious curtains made by Amanda McLeod of Amanda McLeod Interiors, and installing window seats in the kitchen/living space overlooking the mature trees on the back green.

Keeping things classy and simple, she added a twist with eye-catching details such as the Habitat light in the hall, which is made from plastic strips. "I love lighting and like what they have at John Lewis, Cotterell, Laura Ashley and 100% Design. My shell lights are as cheap as chips, but look much more expensive," she says.

For the furniture and accessories Emma mixed classic and contemporary finds from Habitat, Tony Walker, Ikea and TK Maxx.

"Houses are all about personality – they are emotional and should reflect the owner. It's not just about what you spend. It's all



OPEN HOUSE



'I wanted easy low-maintenance city-centre living, and rather than doing anything spectacular, it was more about doing everything very quickly'

very well working with people with lots of money, but when you go home it's a reality check. One of the things everyone admires in here is the mirror over the fire, which I got at the Meadows Fair for £1. It was painted white, and I started to strip it off and never finished it, so it's half done. People walk past my red velvet sofa from Habitat to look at it," she says.

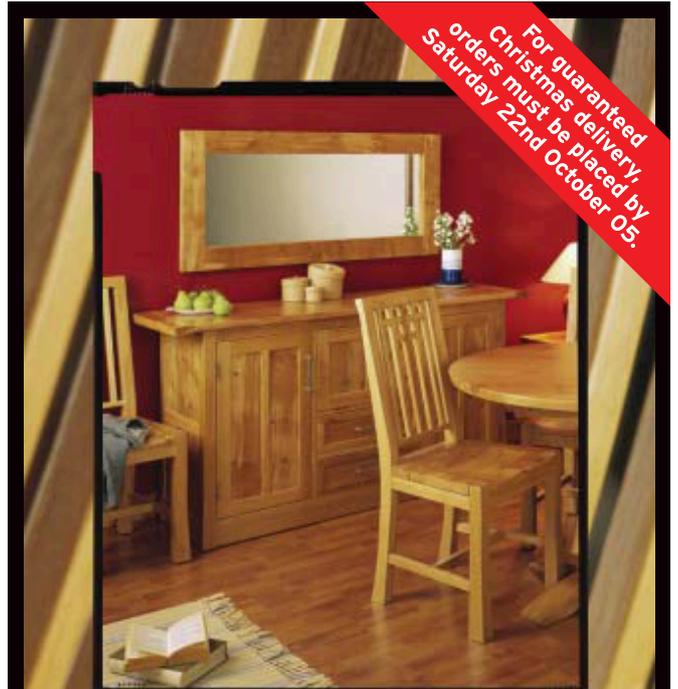
Renovating a property in such a short space of time has many advantages, but is there anything Emma would do differently, with hindsight? "Yes, lots! I would change the front room into the living-room and the living-room into a bedroom, close the kitchen off from the living area and put in a new door from the hall! Because I'm so impatient and I came in and did it so quickly, I didn't get to know the property and spend time thinking how I live in it."

However, having the front room as a bedroom means Emma has enjoyed having the largest room as her own and has space for a sofa as well as a large double bed. The walls are covered in a subtle ivory paper, which she extols the virtues of and has used horizontally to great effect on one wall in the living-room. "I spend my life using wallpaper now because there are big benefits to it – it covers a multitude of sins."

Now that Emma is moving on, she has designs on another property to renovate and knock into shape in double-quick time. But will she be setting herself a similarly punishing three-week schedule? "No, my next house will be even quicker," she laughs. "I'm hoping to get it all done in 10 days!" □

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