

French FANCY



EXTERIOR
A fresh coat of paint and newly laid shingle have spruced up the exterior of this previously dilapidated home

Inspired by the simplicity and sense of style of our European neighbours, one couple has turned a faded property into a period gem

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HOME PROFILE

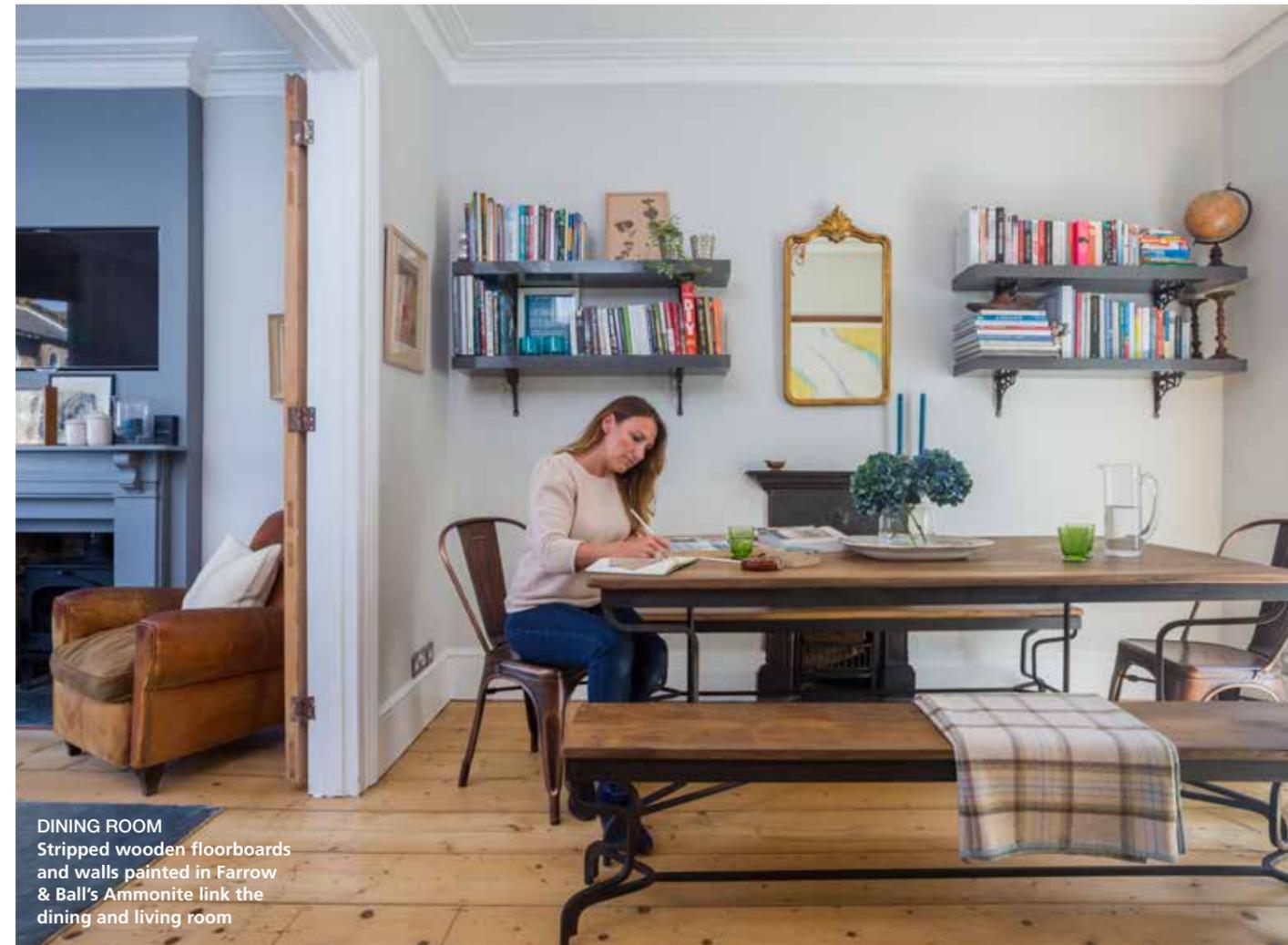
WHO LIVES HERE
Claire Orders, 39, who owns Maison Claire Interiors, her husband David, 38, a trading strategist, and their 18-month-old son Oliver
THE PROPERTY A four-bedroom, semi-detached Victorian house built in 1890 in Greenwich, London
PRICE £535,000
MONEY SPENT £200,000
WHAT IT'S WORTH NOW Around £925,000

LIVING ROOM
When buying the London scene painting above the sofa, Claire asked artist Richard Knight to add a few teal touches to tie in with the couple's Bagsie brushed cotton sofa in Peacock from Loaf

‘The house had a lovely feel, good bones and a wealth of original period features,’
SAYS CLAIRE



KITCHEN
For the newly extended space Claire chose Neptune's Chichester kitchen and island units, painted in contrasting Limestone and Juniper



DINING ROOM
Stripped wooden floorboards and walls painted in Farrow & Ball's Ammonite link the dining and living room

It was the depths of winter and, as Claire and David Orders lay shivering in their makeshift bed in their chilly living room, the novelty of ‘camping’ during a major renovation project was wearing off faster than they’d anticipated. ‘Snow was falling and as our loft conversion had begun, all that stood between the rafters and the elements was a tarpaulin. In hindsight the timing was far from ideal,’ says Claire. ‘The boiler was also being replaced and, as we huddled together for warmth around two electric heaters, we began questioning whether the upheaval would be worth it.’

They’d known when they’d first seen the house in March 2012 that it needed a lot of work, but they fell in love with it. However, the reality of the renovation was proving very different from the dream.

‘When we started looking, we were living in David’s warehouse conversion in Shad Thames,’ says Claire. ‘We’d tentatively talked about starting a family and were keen to track down our first “together” home, with room for us to grow into. Then I found this house in Greenwich on the internet and couldn’t resist taking a look. The area is fabulous, with a leafy village-like feel. It’s also just a 10-minute cycle from David’s work at Canary Wharf.’

Claire had already renovated three properties and David is good at DIY, so the pair weren’t afraid of taking on a house that needed work. ‘As we strolled around the dated property, I knew that other househunters would be put off by its appearance, as the lurid interior included practically every colour of the rainbow,’ says Claire. ‘The kitchen was dark blue and bottle green, one bedroom was blood red, the next an overpowering lilac

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SETTING THE SCENE
Claire created moodboards for every room when she planned the renovation

‘I was keen to replicate the French style by enhancing the period features with a muted palette and adding tasteful accent colours,’ SAYS CLAIRE



MAIN BEDROOM
A palette of grey and cream with an accent of mustard gives a contemporary look. The lampshades have been covered in Osborne & Little's Tabriz 04 to match the curtains



BATHROOM
Osborne & Little's exotic Butterfly Garden fabric has been used for the Roman blind and injects a vibrant splash of colour into this stylishly monochrome room

and another lime green. The living room was painted in buttermilk.'

But Claire could see beyond the colours and began working out how to reconfigure the layout and redecorate to create a sophisticated home. 'My business, Maison Claire Interiors, reflects my love of the effortless simplicity that so many French homes exude,' she says. 'I was keen to replicate that style in our home by enhancing the period features with a muted palette, and then adding some accent colours.'

Having stepped into the courtyard garden and seen where neighbouring properties had been extended, the couple reckoned it wouldn't be difficult to gain extra space by converting the loft and extending the kitchen at one side. 'The house wasn't listed or in a conservation area and had vast potential,' says Claire. 'It had a lovely feel, good bones and a wealth of original features such as beautiful cornicing, sash windows, lovely fireplaces and stripped pine doors.'

Buoyed up by their find, the pair bought the house and, having moved in during June, started on the first phase of their renovation. 'One of David's friends had recently converted his loft and we were so impressed with the quality of the work and attention to detail we decided to use the same building company,' says Claire.

They hired an architect who told them that planning regulations had recently changed, and this meant they would be able to extend at the back by a further three metres. 'This was an unexpected bonus,' says Claire. 'Instead of the proposed main bedroom and tiny ensuite, we'd have enough space to be able to create a much larger

bedroom, separate dressing room and good-sized ensuite.

'The builders were absolutely fantastic. However, we hadn't bargained for the amount of disruption the project would cause. To gain enough head height for the loft, the ceilings in two of the first-floor bedrooms had to be lowered. At the same time we'd decided to turn another bedroom on that floor into a new bathroom, replace the boiler and have the whole house rewired and replumbed. All of this coincided with trying to plan our wedding so it turned out to be a very stressful and hectic time.'

After their honeymoon the couple embarked on the second phase of the project in September 2013. The same team was hired to make the kitchen bigger with a side return extension, as well as strip the floorboards and revamp the garden. 'By then I was pregnant so we were on a tight deadline to finish the work,' says Claire. 'A fortnight before Oliver came along I was teetering precariously at the top of a ladder with paintbrush in hand when, really, I should have been sitting on the sofa enjoying a few chocolates!'

Now the work is complete, Claire's passion for interiors and impeccable eye for colour and design are evident in every room. 'There have been times when it's been hard going but I've absolutely no regrets,' she says. 'To be able to restore the character and breathe new life into a home we all love has been incredibly rewarding.'

● Find out more about Maison Claire Interiors at maisonclaire.co.uk or call Claire Orders on 0795 094 9966

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