



This is the house that was

With seven children between them, Alice Windsor-Lewis and her fiancé John Barker initially started to look for a new home when they decided to move in together.

The pair wanted a home that would comfortably house nine people, but equally, a house that wouldn't swamp them if it was just the two of them. John also needed a space from which to run his humidity-control business.

Realising that finding a seven-bedroom home in Goring was going to cost upwards of £1m, they approached Kate Cooper from Absolute Architecture.

With Kate's help, the couple realised that Alice's spacious four-bedroom detached home in Goring had the potential to provide the space they needed – they just needed a flexible solution and a lot of creativity



You don't get much change out of £1m for a seven-bedroom home in Goring. So, when one couple found their family had expanded, they altered the house they lived in and saved a considerable amount of money. Margaret McDonnell looks at the results

to transform the tired 1950s dwelling.

"We wanted to be involved in the design and finish but the build was not our area of expertise or interest. So, to allow us to enjoy the bits we wanted to we had to be supported by excellent professionals. In Kate, we knew we had someone we could trust looking after us the whole way through the project, making it a pleasant experience," John said.

The couple wanted a more contemporary look for the property, and the new exterior is unrecognisable from the old.

Contemporary and clean, with new and distinctive architectural features and a symmetrical frontage, the house now stands out among others on the street. Alice and John also had key requirements for the interior.

"We asked for a couple of reception rooms for the kids so that they wouldn't be on top of each other and could disappear to do their own thing," said John. "We also needed the bedrooms designed with flexibility in mind so that they could become dressing rooms or studies when the children moved out."

Kate was able to give a fresh perspective on the property. A large extension was required to the rear of the property, but the key to making this work was to transform the existing circulation. An internal bathroom was removed to open up a lovely central landing space, allowing space between bedrooms to flow. A central skylight and void on the landing created a vertical connection and allowed light to flood through the entire house right down to the ground floor.

A dark and tired kitchen has been extended to provide a stunning open kitchen, dining and living space, with larger doors overlooking the garden and a feature wood burner, making this room the social hub of the space, allowing the family to gather and socialise. Existing areas have been sensitively renovated to provide the additional break-out reception rooms and allow the family some privacy and breathing space.

The exterior of the property has undergone a complete transformation. Kate has given the building a new updated identity by creating a new feature gable at the front of the property and rebuilding an awkward flat-roofed dormer window. To the rear, the extensions are more substantial, providing the main living spaces and a master bedroom with Juliet balconies.

Kate oversaw the replacement of the windows, fascias and gutters. Walls were rendered and combined with the warmth of new brick in selected areas. An oak porch was added and the grounds were landscaped.

"In restricting ourselves to a palette of simple, natural materials the intention was to add a sense of warmth, quality and craftsmanship to the exterior" she said.

The couple also wanted their home to be healthier and to minimise the noise from the nearby train line, and Kate was able to work with John to achieve this. Although his humidity control business usually caters for commercial properties such as museums and galleries, he was keen to apply his technology to the house and add climatic controls throughout.

A dehumidifier was installed in the utility room and a discreet mechanical heat recovery unit to filter fresh air into the property in an energy-efficient way, so that the trickle vents in the windows could be removed. This, together with sound-proofing and acoustic windows and a raised landscape feature, provided the necessary acoustic barrier.



Home improvement



Opposite page, house facade before and after. Top, kitchen before and after. Centre, above and right, dining/living area before and after

The renovation was completed earlier this year while the family moved out. It took just over year to finish and £300,000.

"The challenge was to make a house that would work, however many people were in it, by looking at the proportion of the rooms and making one big key space that would fit everyone when they're together, that can also be defined for two people with separate areas," said Kate.

Since the renovations, Alice and John's home has increased in value by 60 per cent. It now comfortably sleeps them and their seven children and has space for John to work.

And, once the couple were happily installed in their new home, they felt that the time was right to tie the knot. "The house facilitated getting married," John laughed. His advice to prospective developers: "Focus on what you really want, know and stick to a



realistic budget and then hire good people to make it a reality. Kate has nailed it. The house can hold 15 to 20 people comfortably and doesn't feel overcrowded. And, if it's just the two of us, it's still homely.

Since the work was completed, Kate is now in demand with the neighbours. "I've been approached by a number of householders in the same road who have been impressed by the striking 'before' and 'after'," she says.

For more information

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