



WHEN Fiona Duncan bought her four-bedroom, semi-detached home, within a leafy suburb close to Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Gardens, she couldn't believe her luck. But having congratulated herself on securing a property during Edinburgh's boom period at the end of the 1990s, she found that a full and costly refurbishment was necessary.

"At the time, it was really difficult to get a property in Edinburgh and people were paying massive amounts for surveys," recalls Fiona, mum to Lucy, 11, Hannah, 5, and Hamish, 4. "I loved this house the minute I saw it but someone had done a good whitewash on it. It was a wreck – it had dry rot, woodworm; you name it, it had it. Every bit of wood, every skirting board, every joist had to be taken out. I had a joiner who practically lived here for a year as he came every day and replaced all the wood. When we pulled up the lino in the kitchen there was dry rot. We were just about falling through the floor."

Sitting in front of Fiona's open coal fire in her lovely light-filled kitchen, it is hard to recognise the property from this description. She has clearly given it a new lease of life. On moving in, the first task, in addition to treating the woodworm and dry rot, was to knock down the lean-to at the back of the house, then replace the kitchen. She also installed double-glazed wooden sash and case window and built a double garage.

"We knocked down the lean-to and decided to add a conservatory so I brought in Mozolowski & Murray for the conservatory and windows," she recalls. "Rushworth & Rose installed my kitchen. All that initial work took about a year, which is when I started to run out of money."

It has to be said that Fiona is a woman with very good taste and a natural eye for styling. Her £40,000 wooden kitchen boasts black granite worktops and a Falcon range cooker, which sit atop rustic antique oak flooring. Around five years ago when Fiona and her solicitor partner Neil MacArthur decided to give the house its second refurbishment, they updated the kitchen units by painting them white.

They also decided to go against the grain by removing the Mozolowski & Murray conservatory that they had installed and extend out, creating a family sitting room off the kitchen with direct access to the garden. They moved doors and walls around on the second floor to give Lucy her own en suite, removed a bath from the downstairs toilet to create a larger cloakroom and turned half of the double garage into a playroom.

"When we took the conservatory down we gave it away to someone who was able to re-fit it, so it was recycled," smiles Fiona. "Neil is friends with William Anderson of Jefcoate Anderson Architects so he came out to have a look. We just said that we wanted more light in the house and William came up with a plan."

The sloping, tiled roof on the kitchen was lifted off and opened up to double ceiling height, with high windows installed to flood the room with light. The sitting room leads off from the kitchen and enjoys various uses throughout the year, with a large, cream L-shaped sofa providing summer seating. Both rooms feature artwork created by the children, with a central pillar in the kitchen having been customised with black and white photos.



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Clockwise from top left: into the garden; Farrow & Ball whites, a black slate coal fire and leather sofa in the lounge; Fiona and Hamish in the airy kitchen



Fiona has a penchant for quirky accessories too, with a 1950s diner phone sitting close to a grandfather clock in the hall. A 9ft church pew – acquired from an Edinburgh church for £50 – is in the garden in the summer but comes indoors in winter. She also commissioned October First to install lighting that throws columns of green and pink down the sitting room walls.

"I got the kids to look out their favourite pictures and photocopy them. We then stuck them to the pillar," says Fiona. "We just keep adding to it – there's everything from old school photos to pictures of family and friends on there." She adds: "In the winter we move the cream sofa into the kitchen. It makes it cosier."

Throughout the house, Fiona has cleverly used a palette of colours that flow from room to room – from the monochrome wallpaper and chequered tiles in the vestibule to the black and white photographs of the children Fiona took herself and hung in the hallway, to the use of Farrow & Ball's Old White and New White on the lounge walls and woodwork. She added a black slate coal fire here, along with cream and brown leather sofas and throws from Ania for a splash of colour.

The couple added a rope banister to the steep Victorian staggered staircase that leads up to the top floor – this would have been the maid's room in the original property. The family compare the staircase to a step machine at the gym as it provides a 'good workout'.

And having spent 12 years perfecting her own home and adapting it as her family has grown, would she be happy to go through all the trials of renovating again? "I do love my house but if the right property came up with the same kind of potential then I would definitely go for it."
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A light touch

Words Jennifer Harper
Photographs Neil Hanna



Clockwise from above: stairs that could present a challenge in the dark; the family bathroom complete with personal touches; Neil in the sitting room; garden access from the living area; Fiona's light and bright £40,000 kitchen and open-plan living-dining space; family photographs decorate a supporting pillar in the kitchen

Fiona Duncan likes a challenge. Which is just as well, as she and her partner Neil have replaced everything in their family home, right down to the kitchen sink