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101 EASY LIFE UPGRADES



FAMILY SPACE

By taking away the original chimney breast, Alex had the opportunity to create a kitchen, living and dining room with glass sliding doors. The family now find they spend more time together in the open-plan space, which has become the hub of their home. It's also flexible enough to be adapted as the children grow.



“We created our own

BESPOKE HOME”

Removing a chimney breast became the start of a much bigger project for the Cotton family, as it created new opportunities to change their home

Embarking on a rebuilding project was not the Cotton family's intention when they bought their house. “It all sounded straightforward,” says Alex. “We'd just remove the ground floor chimney breast then we'd be ready to decorate.

But then the architect pointed out just how many opportunities would be unleashed throughout the house when the chimney breast was gone. Before we knew it, we were living in rented accommodation while the interior of the house was practically



demolished and rebuilt,” says Alex. “We chose the property because it had a large downstairs footprint – perfect for our vision of a sleek, contemporary kitchen and dining area. But at that point, we didn't anticipate where it was all going to end.”

Alex and her husband Jonny lived in the house for two years with their children, Jessie, 11, and Tom, nine, as they came up with a new design and waited for planning permission. With architect Imogen Planner, they realised they had a golden opportunity to >>



ADD COLOUR

A vibrant sofa makes an impact against the room's muted tones. Maxalto Lutetia sofa, £4,520, bebitalia.com. Katakana Lounge chairs, £1,650 each, darestudio.co.uk. Tracery rug by Kelly Wearstler, £1,035sq m, therugcompany.com

missing and what was left was propped up with steel."

Even living in a compact rented house provided to be a positive experience. "As space was restricted, we ruthlessly threw away or sold any old furnishings we didn't want. This meant I could concentrate on buying things more suited to the new configuration." Alex envisaged a smart, contemporary family-friendly interior. "I love the clean lines of Italian and Scandinavian design," she says. "I was also keen to use bold wallpaper patterns, which work particularly well in the children's rooms.

"Ultimately, this renovation gave us the chance to create a bespoke home for our family," reflects Alex. "And although it turned out to be far more dramatic than we'd anticipated, we all appreciate the fresh, flexible space that we now have. Doing away with that chimney breast was the best thing we ever did."

See alexcottontinteriors.co.uk

create a tailor-made home from top to bottom. The intention was to move the master bedroom, originally at the front of the house, to the rear, and create a new en-suite bathroom and dressing room, plus two guest rooms at the front of the house. A loft extension would provide the children's bedrooms, playroom and bathroom.

As the house is in a conservation area, compromises to the original designs for the loft extension had to be made before building work finally began in spring 2010. "The builders were great," Alex says, "and I enjoyed collaborating with Imogen, who project-managed the renovation. Although, I do remember wondering what we'd taken on when half the house was



OLD AND NEW

This classic marble fireplace is original to the house but Alex added the ornate overmantle mirror from minerva-antiques.co.uk. The funky coffee table is from Porada at harrods.com

TRANQUIL RETREAT

Choose a subtle blend of silver and metallic grey shades to create a sense of tranquillity. Savoir No 2 size bed, £13,025, Savoir at [savoirs.com](http://www.savoirs.com). For a similar ottoman, take a look at Rossini, £1,162, [rossiniandchair.co.uk](http://www.rossiniandchair.co.uk)

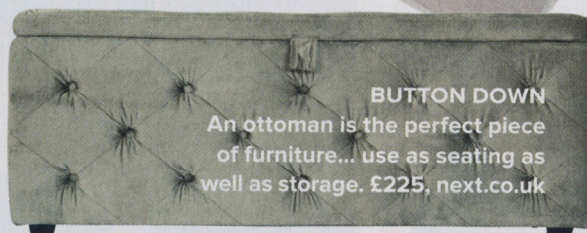


SIXTIES STYLE

Alex's armchairs have a *Mad Men* look about them and this striped one will add comfort in a retro way too! £419, dfs.co.uk

SILVER LINING

This gorgeous velvet throw will add warmth and glamour to your bedroom. £150, BIBA at houseoffraser.co.uk



BUTTON DOWN

An ottoman is the perfect piece of furniture... use as seating as well as storage. £225, next.co.uk

STYLE STEALS

GOLD RIMMED

A big gold mirror over a fireplace is a statement piece! £325, chandeliersandmirrors.co.uk



ROUND TABLE

Add a modern twist to your lounge with an elegantly designed coffee table. £349.99, dunelm-mill.com



PURPLE CRUSH

Add colour and comfort to a room with this gorgeous sofa. From £1,198, dfs.co.uk; cushions, £40 each, lauraashley.com w&h



CLEAN LINES

This suspended sink unit, by Alex Cotton Interiors, has been designed to appear almost weightless. The iridescent grey-green tiles add an air of calmness. Glass Elements tiles in Oak Apple, £2.98 per tile, firedearth.com