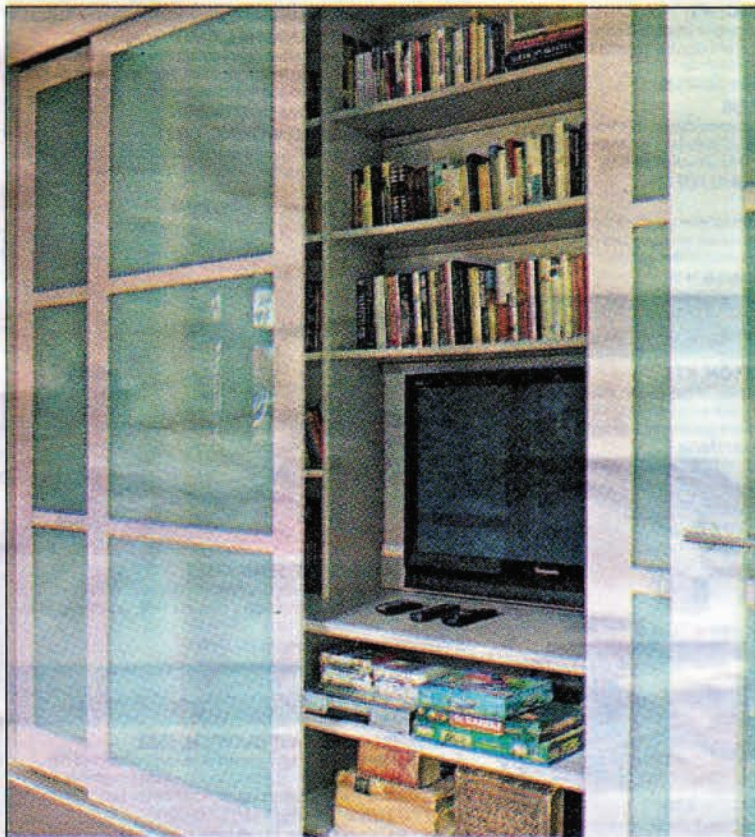


Setting footprints: Annie Stevens renovated her 1930s home in such a way that it is now easy to be adjusted to her family needs



A HOME MADE FOR CHANGE

Annie Stevens designed a house that would adapt as the family grew up – she says it's not about fashion, it's function that matters. By **Rebecca Winward**



Clever: in a clever storage unit, the television is hidden behind glass sliding doors



ALMOST a decade ago, interior designer Annie Stevens moved into her 1930s Wandsworth home in south-west London with her two small children – Sebastian, now 18, and Bella, now 16.

The single-storey house was in need of a radical overhaul. What Annie had in mind was not a home for the present but a flexible house that they could adapt as the family grew up and moved onto other things – the perfect lifelong home. “Though it was quite a wreck, it had what we wanted,” she says. “It had off-street parking, it was a short walk from the common and I could work with its layout. I believe 1930s homes offer more potential for creating a contemporary living space than buildings from other periods. They’ve got an easier footprint to work with.”

The revamp resulted in the doubling of the home’s square footage. “We moved into the house for about a year, during which time I finalised my design, and sought the necessary permissions, then we all moved out again for a year while the renovation was being completed,” Annie recalls.

The loft was used to add a floor to the property, and the internal garage space became a living space. At the rear of the building a single-storey extension became kitchen and dining areas, designed with plenty of glass panels to maximise natural light as well as ease access to the garden. “When we moved back, we were delighted with the way that the house functioned. Every inch of space proved useful, in exactly the way I had hoped, and it was a joy to live in.”

However, as a family grows up, a home must meet the demands of changing



People forget that you don't have to dispose of the old to achieve the new'



Covered: bold red upholstery and zingy green cushions revitalised the sitting room



Room outdoors: the garden was a playground for the children but was remodelled once they got older and a studio built at the end

must meet the demands of changing circumstances. "When I first chose the property, the 70ft garden was one of its selling points, as I wanted the children to have room to run and play. But, as their interests altered, they hardly went out there." Always sensitive to useful space inside and out, Annie decided to utilise the plot for more grown-up pursuits, and had a studio constructed at the bottom of the garden.

"It was the perfect solution for me, since I feel most creative when I'm at home. And with the 24/7 nature of my business and the need to really get to know my clients well in order to create something that really suits them, it's absolutely invaluable to be able to work in a relaxed atmosphere. When my clients come to see me, they can see for themselves how a well-designed space really works, rather than it simply looking stylish."

A year ago she revamped the décor throughout the house. "When I remodelled the property I was careful to get the bones of it right. But I found that things were starting to look a little tired, and the time was right for a bit of updating."

The limestone floor and work surfaces in the kitchen were replaced by large-format ceramic tiles and stainless steel respectively, but most fixtures remained, and she made few changes to furnishings and accessories. "People forget that you don't have to dispose of the old to achieve the new. It's amazing how easily good-quality pieces can be reinvented to suit a different scheme.

"I had our upholstery re-covered, and moved pieces around in order to ring the changes a little. I did pick up some additional items – such as a set of four vintage chairs that originally came from a hair-dressing salon, and some prints and posters purchased on a trip to New York – but on the whole I was able to create a new look simply by taking a different view of my own belongings."

It's this ability to look at the composite parts of an interior and imagine their value in an utterly different scheme that is the hallmark of Annie's approach to decorating. "The most valuable service I can offer is to imagine the possibilities



Pink poster:
daughter Bella's
bedroom

when incorporating a customer's own possessions," she says. "I don't like the idea of something being disposable, since it just doesn't make sense financially. One of my longest-standing clients has had several revamps done by me, and a coffee table that she first obtained for a room with an 'American country' theme over a decade ago has been re-presented in the same space – first in an elegant Eastern-style interior, and then in a much edgier, contemporary scheme."

In an industry so often assumed to be something of a hostage to trends, Annie does not succumb to the "latest styles". "In fact I think they should be banned. It's not about getting the latest fashionable look. The most important thing is having a home that delivers on both form and function. That's what I tell my clients, and it's also how I live my own life."

Photographs: Red Cover/Chris Drake
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