

LIVING ROOM (above) Bathed in soft daylight from the large bay window, the formal living room's simple backdrop of cream walls showcases the couple's growing art collection, including a pair of leaf artworks found at Ecco Trading in London's Battersea. Period details are highlighted in bright white paint, from the picture rails to the charming fireplace.



new beginnings

Styles and lives dwell harmoniously together in the elegant renovation of this

STORY & STYLING RUTH WELSBY PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH



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LIKE ANY GOOD RELATIONSHIP, Simon and Caroline's home, in a leafy south London suburb, is a happy compromise between his exotic, ethnic style and her romantic and modern taste. In fact, the unlikely marriage of light and dark, soft and strong has positively transformed this three bedroom Victorian terrace.

A union, decorating or otherwise, wasn't on the cards for Simon when he was on the lookout for a bachelor pad back in 2002. Then unattached, this owner of a market research agency was searching for a solo renovation project when the property caught his eye. "The house screamed potential," he recalls. "It was rather dated but it had plenty of original features, well-proportioned rooms and was spread over three floors." First on his to-do list was to modernise and extend the lacklustre kitchen. Next came a revamp of the two bathrooms, then raising the roof in the loft guest bedroom. With all the structural works completed within two years, Simon gave the rest of the house a quick onceover with the paintbrush and settled in.

Unbeknownst to Simon, his home and world were destined to be turned upside down with the arrival of Caroline in his life. A blind date led to a whirlwind courtship and an abrupt, happy end to his bachelor days. Within nine months, with an engagement ring on Caroline's finger, his much-loved pad was to be thoroughly reinvented. "The house needed some cosmetic help to turn it into our marital home," explains Caroline. "We wanted to create chic, relaxing interiors that reflected our new life together and merged our styles, but we weren't sure where to start."

With the pressures of a wedding to arrange and their differing styles to combine, the couple called upon the talents of Anne Marie and Nicola, aka Life Style Interior Design, to streamline the process and project manage the makeover. "Simon and Caroline have quite different tastes; she likes French provincial styles and he likes ethnic designs, so we needed to achieve an agreeable compromise on the overall

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KITCHEN {above} Creating an airy, open-plan, contemporary kitchen and dining room was one of Simon's top priorities. It's hard to imagine now that it was once a cramped space, almost entirely clad in tongue and groove panelling. "It really needed dragging into the 21st century," recalls Simon. "I like to



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decor," explains Anne Marie.

The team focused on building a cohesive look with the couple's existing furniture and artwork, which led to the discovery of common ground in their differing tastes. This meant certain pieces had to go, but as Caroline admits, "It was a good excuse to have a good clear out and get rid the stuff we didn't need."

The points of commonality were used to create a scheme the couple would both love, loosely based around Caroline's passion for French interiors and Simon's interest in African art. The front of the house saw the bulk of the makeover, with minimal work undertaken in the kitchen and bathrooms. "The entire redecoration took place during the couple's week long honeymoon, so we had to act fast," recalls Anne Marie.

With the transformation complete, Simon and Caroline returned to an elegant, relaxed home, unrecognisable from the one they had left. Much to their delight, the bright orange floorboards that dominated the ground floor had gone, now rationalised in crisp white. A neutral canvas of muted creams and soft whites enveloped the light, airy rooms, while bursts of colour and texture had been introduced by furniture, artwork and accessories. Spaces were also reconfigured and defined: formal and informal living rooms had been created at the front of the house, and swathed in a sumptuous palette of rich aubergines, warming tans and delicate greys. On the first floor, a study had been created and guest bedroom freshened-up, while the master bedroom had been re-imagined as an elegant boudoir, complete with soft lavender walls, silk cushions and chic glass lamps.

"I love walking through our house and seeing our favourite furniture mixed together and looking great," says Caroline with a smile. "It's such a fantastic house to live in. We couldn't be happier

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"I work with colour every day, so at home I prefer to be surrounded by *monochrome tones*"



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Inside story

Who lives here?

Cele and her husband George, a builder and carpenter; and their sons, Sam, seven, and Ray, five.

What's the story behind the beloved red chair?

Cele: "We were shopping for furniture many years ago in Melbourne and I saw it in Natuzzi and immediately fell in love with it. I sat in it and told George I wasn't getting up unless we bought it! It was our first expensive piece of furniture and we spent years paying it off. It's part of our history."

What's your favourite feature in the house?

"It has to be the walk-in-pantry – or my office, as I like to call it! It was one of my few must-haves; the other was the hot tub on the deck, which we use surprisingly often."

Top tip for novice builders?

"Know what you want but don't get stuck with one idea. Listen to other people and



MASTER BEDROOM Up on the first floor, the couple's master bedroom was transformed from a drab white box into a sumptuous retreat. Draped in luxurious textures and relaxing colours from delicate lavenders to chic greys, the sophisticated room exudes boutique hotel style. Stocked with the couple's existing furniture, the room's elegant look has been created with some clever design tricks. "Simon wanted to keep his king-sized bed which is very comfortable, but its black frame is rather unattractive, so the girls added large,



we love
A clever display

The quirky picture frame wall is a great way to add interest and impact to a simple space. "I had lots of old frames featuring photos of friends and family. We hung them in a slightly haphazard way to create a playful focal point in the hallway. Simon and I love photographs so it was a great way of displaying them without

style notes

caption caption caption

the details

1. Master bedroom:
Old Stone Wall, Porter's Paints

2. Guest bedroom (pink):
Wimbourne White, Farrow & Ball

3. Living rooms:
Braidwood, Porter's Paints

Sitting room:
Sand Dune Shag in Sepia, Designer Rugs (purple rug) Black & white cowhide rug
Stockists, page ???



BATHROOM Delicate glass jars are filled with hand-picked shells and starfish for an organic, seaside touch. "My father was born



BATHROOM Renovated by Simon before the marital makeover, the first-floor master bathroom radiates contemporary rustic charm.

The *taupe tiles* on the walls and floor help to create a sophisticated bathing haven and don't show marks



GUEST BEDROOM One of Caroline's favourite rooms in the house, the loft guest bedroom has the added bonus of a smart

FLOORPLAN HERE