



HOME AT LAST

The long and winding road from buying a new place to making it yours is easier with an expert leading the way, as the owners of this Edinburgh property discovered

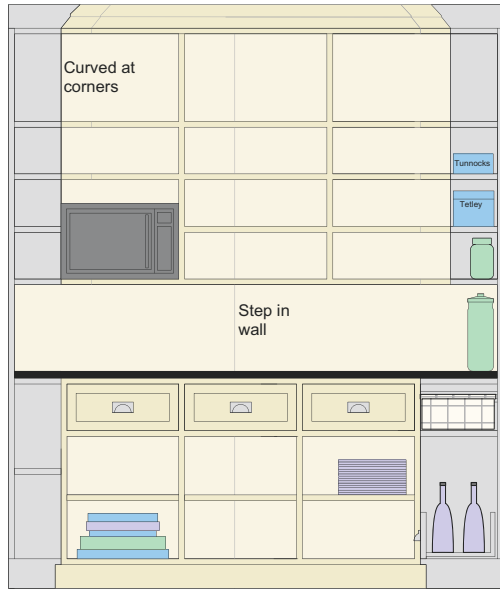
Photography Graeme Hancock Words Judy Diamond

DETAILS

What A ground floor and garden flat in a Georgian townhouse

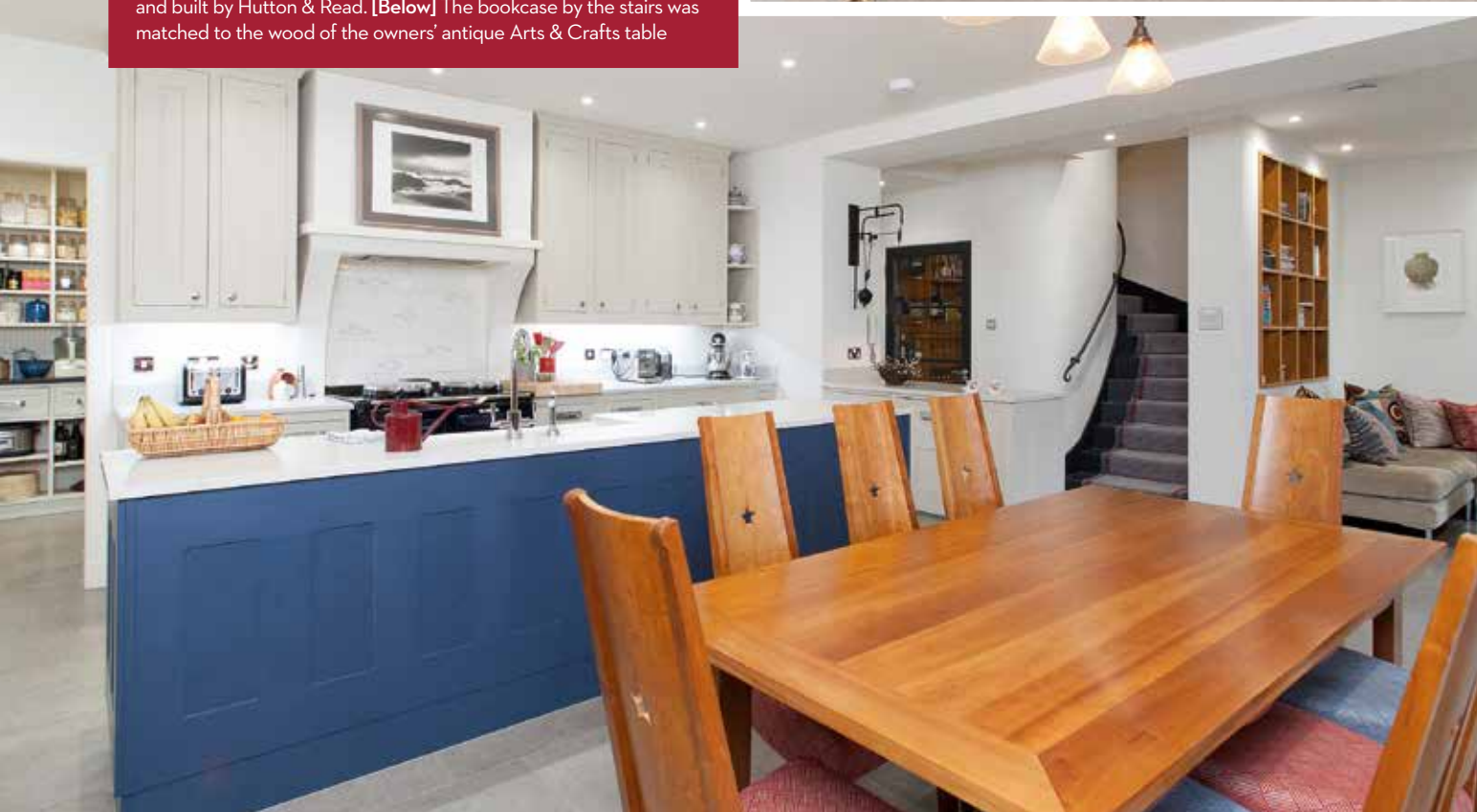
Where Edinburgh

Interior design
Ampersand Interiors



LARDER PLAN

[Previous pages] The kitchen is in the sub-basement but is a bright, airy space now that the lowered ceiling has been removed and the wall that used to be on the left has been taken down. Joiners Hutton & Read built new cabinets here and all the work surfaces were replaced with CaesarStone. A Belfast sink and a wood-burner were added and the existing Smallbone cabinets were painted in Zoffany's Como Blue. [Above] The walk-in larder was designed by Ampersand architect Susanne Barnes using every scrap of available space. The old black marble worktops were recycled here. [Opposite] A Roger Oates runner on the stairs; the wine cellar was designed by Susanne and built by Hutton & Read. [Below] The bookcase by the stairs was matched to the wood of the owners' antique Arts & Crafts table



Inviting an interior designer to work on your home can sometimes feel a bit like a leap of faith. After all, if you don't know what you want, how on earth is anyone else supposed to figure it out?

Nevertheless, there was never any doubt in the minds of Ken and Martha Barker that they would need professional assistance to knock their new home into shape. They had no shortage of ideas about what they liked; the problem was how to reconcile their taste for everything from Art Deco and Danish Modernism to Biedermeier and Arts and Crafts. They also wanted to know how best to display their growing collection of paintings, and how to make the most of their home's period features without being a slave to the past.

Their new home, the lower half of a townhouse in one of the elegant streets off Moray Place, is arranged over three floors. The rooms at street level, the formal dining room and drawing room, have all the benefits of gracious Georgian architecture – high ceilings, elaborate cornices, tall windows. Down a level are bedrooms, a study and a lounge. One more flight down is the kitchen, which opens to the garden.

The property had been used as offices in recent years, and although it had been returned to residential use, there were still lingering reminders in the form of industrial brown carpeting and poorly built alterations. "When we viewed it for the first time, we could see it had all the attributes of a Georgian townhouse," recalls Martha. "It was just that many of these had either been covered up or, worse, decorated so they actively detracted from the house."

They got in touch with Ampersand Interiors before they'd even moved in. Jackie Fiskien, the principal designer, remembers being impressed by the property's potential, and by the fact that Martha and Ken were so interested in the whole design process. "They both had so much input," she says. "It doesn't work if it's just us doing it – we need the clients to do their bit too, and they did, 110 per cent."

Work began on the middle floor, in the guest bedroom, to produce a stylish, restful space reminiscent of a boutique hotel room. "This is probably closest to what I'd have come up with myself had the decoration been left up to me," says Martha, referring to the strong blue wall and red headboard and lamps, colours she loves. What she'd never have thought of, she admits, is the Cole & Son's Ex Libris wallpaper that Ampersand specified for a corner of the room. It was a ▶





game-changer; if she'd been waiting to see how Jackie and her team handled their first task, the success of this room erased any doubts.

"Wallpaper just felt so old-fashioned to me – I grew up with stuff that was all florals or weird metallics," she explains. "And then Jackie started showing me all these lovely things. I had no idea it could look as good as this. I fell in love with it." There are signs of this love affair all over the house – a vibrant blue grasscloth in the music room, Timorous Beasties' iconic Thistle design in the TV lounge, a rococo extravaganza in the dining room and one of De Gournay's breathtaking handmade papers in the main bedroom. "I wanted it everywhere – there weren't enough walls to put it all on," laughs Martha, opening the hall cupboard to reveal Timorous Beasties' Edinburgh Toile on the back of the door.

It's no surprise that such papers should have appealed; she loves pattern, colour and texture, all of which can be found in the paintings in the couple's collection. A Frances Macdonald seascape hangs in the music room, just off the drawing room, its thickly applied greens and turquoises echoed in the tactile Thibaut grasscloth. One of James Morrison's powerful Angus landscapes hangs next door, ►



[Above] The study has a Shiir rug and a Thibaut grasscloth wallpaper. The bespoke bookcases were designed and built by Ampersand. The armchair is from BoConcept. Martha's sister designed the blind fabric. [Below] Looking into the master bedroom, whose dressing room, on the right, was another exercise in precision planning by Ampersand's architect. [Opposite, top] Another view of the bookcase built into the kitchen wall to allow light to filter through. [Opposite, bottom left] The middle landing – the house's original servants' stair on the left is now blocked off. [Opposite, bottom right] Timorous Beasties' Edinburgh Toile covers the inside of the hall cupboard





“WHEN EVERYTHING MATCHES, IT CAN FEEL LIKE A SHOWPIECE. THIS HOUSE IS NOT LIKE THAT. IT’S A BLEND OF THINGS ALL BROUGHT TOGETHER – IT FEELS LIKE A HOME”

[Above and below] In the guest room, Julian Chichester lamps and cabinets flank the bed. The headboard is covered in Jane Churchill’s Delta fabric. Cole & Son’s Ex Libris wallpaper and a Charlotte James armchair (in Jonathan Adler’s Coria fabric) sit in one corner.
[Right] A Tim Page runner on Susanne’s elegant new staircase



the purples and lilacs of its brooding skies picked up in the colours of the Charlotte James armchair beside it.

Here, on the ‘top’ floor, are the formal rooms of the house, but they are not reserved for special occasions. Martha doesn’t believe in the concept of ‘keeping things for good’ – “Why have something in your house that you’re not going to use?” she asks. “Now that it’s winter, we sit up here a lot with the fire on. Looking out at dusk as the street lights start to come on is just magical.”

Taken as a list, the furnishings in this room sound quite random: a 1960s Italian console, a classic marble fire surround, a gold sofa, a blue chair, a modern chandelier. Nevertheless, it’s a deeply harmonious space. Everything is beautifully balanced. Martha doesn’t like what she calls ‘matchy-matchy’, but this is not deliberate anarchy – every element is there for a reason, producing a sense of comfortable elegance. Jackie’s deft touch with colour is a key reason for this, with the blues and copper tones of the artwork picked out and brought into the centre of the room via the cushions. “When everything matches, it can feel like a showpiece,” the designer points out. “This house is not like that. It’s a blend of Martha and Ken’s things, all brought together – it feels like a home.”

Across the hall is the dining room. “We love having dinner parties and wanted a really amazing space in which to host them,” says Martha. “This was the one room where we thought, ‘Let’s just really go for glam.’ And we did!”

A reproduction Beidermeier table makes a stunning centrepiece, as does the modern chandelier by Ochre, but it’s the bespoke Lewis & Wood wallpaper that grabs the attention first. “The whole room is a lovely juxtaposition of the contemporary and the traditional,” says Jackie. “It’s totally unique to Martha – it makes a statement.”

Other rooms make their own statements. The study, on the middle floor, is sober and sensible, but with quirky personal touches: the fabric for the blind, designed by Martha’s sister, features leaping salmon – Ken is a keen fisherman. Next door, the den is for relaxing and watching TV, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t deeply stylish. On the floor is a Fisk rug whose design was inspired by the crescents of the New Town, while a Danish Modern shelving unit adds storage but doesn’t block the Timorous Beasties wallpaper. In this room too, Ampersand’s architect, Susanne Barnes, worked with Home Control Scotland, who supplied the audiovisual system, to ensure the technology and the decor were compatible – so the pull-down cinema screen is ►



[Above] De Gournay's beautiful Plum Blossom silk wallpaper dresses the ground-floor landing. [Opposite and below] The dining room makes a glamorous statement with its Lewis & Wood wallpaper, specially made table and Ochre chandelier. The curtains are a Colefax & Fowler velvet, trimmed with gold braid





[This page and opposite] Charlotte James's Michelle sofa makes the TV lounge an easy place to relax. Its cushions are covered in a mix of fabrics by Ampersand and Timorous Beasties. The latter's Thistle wallpaper adds to the Scottish feel. The footstool is covered in a Nobilis fabric. On the floor, the Circus rug by Fisk is a nod to the location – the design is based on the layout of the New Town's crescents. William Yeoward curtains hide a cinema screen installed by Home Control Scotland

discreetly hidden behind the curtain pelmet when not in use, and almost-invisible speakers are built into the ceiling.

Susanne played a key role in other areas too. She designed a refined metal balustrade for the staircase to replace the clunky pine one installed during the house's office years. And she meticulously laid out the interiors of all the cupboards so that everything would have a place. But it's in the kitchen that her work has made the biggest difference.

Down here, in what is effectively the sub-basement, there is no shortage of natural daylight, thanks to the astonishing topography of this part of Edinburgh. At the back of the house, the land plunges down into the cleft of the Water of Leith, leaving a wide open view over the Dean Gardens to Telford's majestic bridge, Comely Bank and, in the distance, the Forth. But the ceiling had been lowered and flimsy shutters had been added, blocking the views and the light.

"We opened up the kitchen by removing a section of wall as you come down the stair – there's a huge structural beam now holding up seven floors!" says Susanne. "Ken and Martha originally planned simply to upgrade the existing

kitchen units, but it ended up being more of a total refurb."

Some of the original units were kept and Edinburgh joiners Hutton & Read were commissioned to build new ones to give more worktop space. The black granite work surfaces were replaced with CaesarStone, instantly brightening the space. A Belfast sink was added to the island, an Aga was installed, with a new mantel above it, and lots of clever storage was created, such as a pop-up knife block that emerges from the worktop.

Behind the scenes, it's just as impressive. A cook's dream of a larder has been built, using some of the granite

worktop. "This was a skinny little closet before Susanne expanded it," says Martha. "She went through all our food cupboards, looked at what we cooked, saw what we used, and then designed these shelves to fit everything exactly."

There's also a utility room, which has the rest of the marble, plus the old sink. Under the stairs, what was once a dusty old cupboard has been transformed into a wine cellar. The room has space for a dining table and a comfortable seating area, warmed by a wood-burner. "We spend so much time down here, cooking, reading, talking. We're so happy with it," says Martha. "But we're happy ►





with the whole house – the flow is just right, from the grand ground floor to the intimate middle level and then the kitchen. It's a real success."

To Jackie, much of that success is down to the effectiveness of their collaboration: "As a company we don't have a signature style. If this house reflects Martha's taste, it means we've done our job – we don't want to come in and make it like everyone else's home," she says. "Clients come to us because they don't know what's out there, or what's possible. We try to show them what they could do, what we think they've asked for, and it's up to them how far they want to go."

For Martha, it's straightforward: "Every day, Ken and I walk around, saying, 'This is exactly what we wanted.' We just love it. It's such a comfortable house to live in." ■

[Top] The drawing room epitomises the house's comfortable elegance. A Heathfield lamp sits on the Julian Chichester table. The Charlotte James armchair is upholstered in Osborne & Little's Ardee fabric. **[Right]** The music room with its deep blue Thibaut grasscloth and Porta Romana chandelier

