

DETAILS

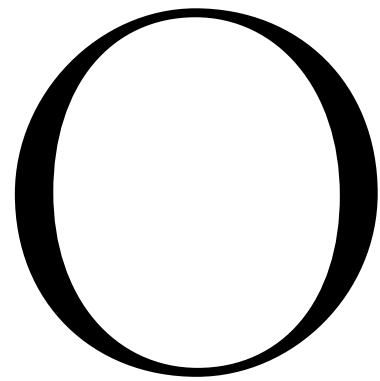
What A three-bedroom semi-detached house
Where Inverleith, Edinburgh
Interior design Emily Smoor, Fantoush



MADE TO MEASURE

Starting with a wreck gave the occupants of this house the chance to reshape it to perfectly suit their own life

Photography Susie Lowe Words Catherine Coyle



ne man's trash is another man's treasure, or so the saying goes. Whether it's true or not, there's a lot to be said for finding new uses for existing items.

That's the approach Emily Smoor, founder of interior design agency Fantoush, takes when she embarks on a new project – whether that's upcycling a standard lamp or rescuing a property from dereliction. Together with her husband Simon, she has 'flipped' several properties, not just giving them a surface makeover but in many cases transforming uninhabitable wrecks into desirable homes. She certainly had her work cut out when it came to her own house, a rundown suburban semi, as she went through the process of reshaping it into the polished, bohemian family home that the couple and their two young children now enjoy.

"The previous owner was a bit of a cowboy builder, and the house had been divided up into bedsits," recalls the designer. "All the work had been done illegally, so there wasn't a single aspect of the house that we didn't have to fix. There was a spiral staircase in what was the front bedroom, a hob in the eaves that had turned the walls black, and plants growing up the inside of the walls. The people who lived here were heavy smokers too, so the place stank."

Knowing the market and recognising that she was unlikely to bag a three-bedroom home with a sizeable garden in such a desirable part of Edinburgh for a better price, Smoor forced herself to look beyond the property's chequered past and try to reimagine it as a warm, sociable and functional space in which her family could live, work and play.

"The place was such a shambles that I had to ►



[Below] The kitchen units were sourced at DIY Kitchens and have been paired with Silestone worktops. The reclaimed door adds a welcome note of warmth.
[Previous pages, left] The walls of the lounge to the front of the house are painted in Farrow & Ball's powerful Hague Blue. The shelving was made to measure to fit a large collection of vinyl. The fireplace was opened up and given a corten steel insert so that the eye is drawn up to the canvas above – an oil painting by the owner, Emily Smoor. **[Right]** The micro-cement floor in the kitchen gives an industrial edge to this large space that is softened by Smoor's collected treasures – kilims from her childhood home, plants and objects from exhibitions

set about drawing my plans, to help me visualise what I wanted and to see how it could look,” she says. Her experience of renovating property meant she already had a list of tradesmen in her address book whom she could call on for the big stuff, but in the end she and Simon undertook the bulk of the work themselves, doing everything from skip dumps to plastering and upholstery.

After a career in TV development, Smoor retrained in upholstery and she cites this, as well as being raised by creative parents, as what steered her towards becoming an interior designer. She grew up in the countryside outside Dundee with parents who were very practical, hands-on people – self-sufficient farmers who could turn their hand to most tasks. Her father was also an architect; and, having spent her formative years surrounded by plans and listening to how properties were created, Smoor grew up knowing her way around a building site. Despite this, it has not always been plain sailing. “The first flat we did was in 2010 and I remember two weeks in, my husband snapped his Achilles tendon,” she recalls. “All he was able to do was strip skirting boards and paint them.”

Undeterred, the couple have since transformed eight properties. “It has been a steep learning curve,” she admits. “I’ve learned a lot about the structure of a building and how the services work, about the arterial bits of the job and how a house functions as a kind of mini machine.”

For her own home, Smoor has created a base that works efficiently for her brood. From the outside, it resembles any other suburban semi, but step inside and you find that the space has been rejigged to allow open-plan living. There are no predictable choices here, nor any compromising of her own, eclectic sense of style.

She and Simon got rid of the crumbling PVC conservatory at the back of the house, which gave them enough space to extend the previously narrow galley kitchen and make one big kitchen-diner that is open to the garden and connected to the living room to the side, which also has a floor-to-ceiling window. “We designed and installed the kitchen ourselves,” says Smoor, who was set on the black finish. “I wanted a salvaged kitchen

door to soften the look of the place; as a designer, texture is really important to me and I’m not a fan of lots of hard surfaces. I find it very inhospitable.”

The marmorino plaster splashback and quartz Silestone worktop, both tactile but unfussy, add layers of interest, with personal touches like the foliage and artwork keeping the space down to earth. Having inherited her parents’ can-do attitude, Smoor took up oil painting a couple of years ago; around the house are a selection of her works, from monochrome flourishes to colourful compositions designed to soften the space and do away with the notion of a ‘designed’ interior.

The living room is largely an overspill area for the dining-kitchen but connects well with the garden; Vibieffe’s Fast chair and footstool are a favourite place to sit and gaze out at the greenery beyond. The lighting, inspired by classic pieces by French industrial designer Serge Mouille, works with the kilims and rugs brought from Smoor’s parents’ home to give an unstructured warmth to a mid-century modern undertone. The wall-hanging behind the sofa came from a screen in a Chinese restaurant in Manchester. Smoor cut it down, framed it and reupholstered it. “I wanted to use it here because I put so much work into it!”

The lounge to the front of the house has a very different ambience, full of dark colours and moody corners that make it feel like a room for grownups. Bespoke shelving was designed and installed by Simon to house his enormous vinyl collection (he used to be a DJ), and the painting over the fireplace is one of Smoor’s own works. Farrow & Ball’s Hague Blue gives the room an inky backdrop, the all-over application of the deep colour making features where previously there were none. “There are often fewer interesting architectural details in modern houses,” explains the designer. “So ▶

[Right] The larch-clad extension at the back of the house has dramatically improved the internal layout, making the interior much better suited to family living. B&Q pendant lights direct the eye to the Gail Harvey painting, bought from Arusha Gallery. The rattan dining chairs are Habitat’s Mickey design





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[Opposite] Farrow & Ball’s Breakfast Room Green lifts the hallway and allows the artwork to pop. [Middle and above] The children’s bedrooms are age-appropriate without being predictable or dated. Most of the textiles are vintage finds. [Left] Bright, colourful trinkets add character



[Above] Chinese textiles are found all over this home – a reference to the designer’s heritage.
 [Right] The master bedroom is full of cool hues that put the focus on the textures, such as the headboard upholstered in Uzbekistan silk ikat.
 [Below] The bedroom’s Ikea chests of drawers have been transformed by the addition of new handles and a coat of lavender-hued paint.
 [Below right] The downstairs WC is small but bold – the House of Hackney wallpaper packs a punch, as do Bert & May’s Bejmat Moroccan tiles.
 [Opposite page] The designer’s office is in what used to be the garage; it’s now linked to the house



where white might have been the traditional choice, that just wouldn’t work here.” The family’s ‘winter snug’ also features eBay finds in the wall-lights, as well as homemade items such as the wire-basket and ostrich feather lamp.

The staircase was a labour of love, too. Smoor is a fan of ebonisation, a process where she uses iron oxide (steel wool in vinegar) to bring out the tannins in wood, making pine appear less yellow and leaving it with a faded grey finish. She took some chances in the family bathroom too, keen for a marmorino and black palette; but the quotes for the plastering were eye-watering, so her husband stepped in to create the look. Encaustic

floor tiles by Demosaica fit in with the monochrome styling, but the profusion of plants provides an injection of colour. Smoor is a firm believer in the concept of ‘biophilic’ design: “It’s the idea that we seek to be closer to nature to repair and rehabilitate our minds –having grown up in the countryside surrounded by plants both inside and out, it’s something that I’m very interested in.”

The upper hallway is washed in Farrow & Ball’s Breakfast Room Green, casting a warm glow through the house, with the three bedrooms paying homage to Smoor’s love of travel. There are subtle Chinese influences everywhere (her grandmother is Chinese, while her mother is Irish and her father is Dutch) and ▶





[Above] A Geyser black wall-hung radiator ties in with the vanity console and mirror – both of which are Ikea purchases that have been modified by Smoor. **[Right]** The black shower head was an eBay gamble that paid off, set against chic plaster walls

the master bedroom uses gently feminine tones to create a cosy boudoir. The headboard was fashioned from a tactile Uzbekistan silk ikat, while a length of Hmong fabric picked up online has been customised with some H&M pompoms. Basic Ikea chests of drawers have been upgraded with a coat of lavender paint and new handles from Lowe's (an American hardware store). "I think monotone is really soothing, particularly in a bedroom," says Smoor. It is also a way for treasured objects to become part of the decor scheme without displaying them like museum pieces and without feeling too contrived.

"This house suits us for the place we're at in our lives, with young children. It's nice that the neighbours are so happy with what we've done. It was such a mess before. Now people tell us they want a house just like ours." ■

