



Polly in her kitchen

Juggling ACT

Polly and David Richard refused to be defeated when undertaking a huge renovation project alongside managing their busy careers and impending parenthood. Living on site only made the realisation of their dream home that much sweeter

FEATURE AMY MAYNARD PHOTOGRAPHY RICHARD GADSBY

It takes a certain amount of grit and determination to live on site during a major renovation – and that is not even taking into account holding down high-pressure careers and expecting a baby. But that is exactly what Polly Richard, 36, and her husband David, 38, did after buying their detached Victorian property in Surrey.

The couple bought the four-bedroom property, which was built in 1884, in 2016. They had been living half a mile away and had often walked down the street looking at the houses on their way to and from the train station during their commute to work. “We had always admired the houses but assumed they would be out of our budget,” says Polly. ▶



The walls in the sitting room are painted in Setting Plaster by Farrow & Ball while the ottoman is by Penny Morrison and the wall lights are from Jim Lawrence. Polly has accessorised the Delft tiles fireplace with paper chains by Mark Heard.



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Luckily that was not the case. The house they eventually bought was a probate sale, which meant Polly and David were forced to stay with friends and family for six months until the grant of probate came through and they were able to complete on their purchase. "We wanted it so much we were willing to wait," says Polly. By the time they had moved in and building work began, a year had passed and Polly was 11 weeks pregnant with Ralph, now five.

The previous family had owned the house for 60 years and, suffice to say, the couple faced a huge project, all the while juggling Polly's work as a lawyer and David's job in finance. "There was no central heating but coal fires in every room, even the bathrooms," Polly explains. "We had no choice but to live in the kitchen while the work was being done. We had no bathroom, heating or electricity. We both worked such long hours that we showered and ate at work."

Rewiring, plumbing, carpentry, full redecoration – there was a long list of things to get done. So it was not long before things did start to, rather literally, get a bit on top of them. One unfortunate day, a few months into the build, when Polly returned home from work late one night, she found the ceiling had caved in. The builders had been stress-testing the floor above the kitchen to check whether it could bear the weight of a cast-iron bath and the ceiling collapsed onto their bed, which was set up below.

Things soon went from bad to worse, especially given emotions becoming heightened as Polly's due date neared. "We had started decorating and all the carpentry had been done," she says. "And because the house didn't have central heating, we had installed a Megaflo hot water cylinder in the loft. The plumber flushed the system because he thought the first fix had been done, but the pipes weren't connected, so the rooms got flooded. I just burst into tears, it was a total nightmare and everything had to be redone. Another low point was finding a piece of pizza in our bed ▶



ABOVE Fabrics from Penny Morrison, Fermole and Christopher Farr bring the sitting room scheme to life.

RIGHT Polly and David's home is a Victorian villa on a leafy street in Surrey.

OPPOSITE The shelving in the snug is painted in Green Smoke and the walls in Bone, both by Farrow & Ball. The fender is from The Rye Emporium, while the wall lights are from Jim Lawrence and are topped with shades from Pooky.





ABOVE In the kitchen, units from The Shaker Workshop are teamed with bar stools from Neptune and pendant lights from Industville. The island is painted in Railings by Farrow & Ball. A range oven from Mercury is perfect for cooking for all the family.

LEFT The units are painted in Shaded White by Farrow & Ball. Perrin & Rowe taps for deVOL are perfect for the period scheme.

when I pulled back the covers one night. We had nowhere to eat other than in bed!"

The work took six months and the builders finished a week before Ralph was born. The final piece of the puzzle was the kitchen renovation, which was undertaken a year later. The couple went on to have Cecily, now three, and the family are happily ensconced in their beautiful home, along with mini dachshund, Mabel.

Polly has always had a flair for interiors, something inherited from her mother. "I lived in a Jacobean house growing up in Northumberland and my mum has always had a really classic English country house style," she says. "My friends used to laugh at me as I furnished my first flat with antiques and called my dark brown dining table my 'granny table'."

David, meanwhile, had different taste when the couple got together. "His style was more modern and minimalist, but he has come round," Polly says. "He now pretends everything in the house was his idea!"

The end result is a serene and stylish home bedecked with beautiful soft furnishings, accessories and antique pieces. The kitchen and dining area is a masterclass in simple period style with its dark kitchen island and taupe cabinets, complete with brass fixtures and



French windows lead from the dining area of the kitchen onto the patio garden furnished with a table and chairs from Kettler. The leather chair is from Laura Ashley.



'I love the usability of the house. It is somehow family-friendly without me knowing what having children would entail when the project began'

ABOVE LEFT The bedding from So Souk in Cecily's bedroom is accessorised with a cushion by Katy Takla in Molly Mahon fabric and a canopy from Nobodinoz. Above the drawers from Franklin's Antiques & Interiors in Brighton is a print from Ralph & James.

ABOVE RIGHT A freestanding bath from the Cast Iron Bath Company makes a smart focal point in the bathroom by being set at an angle along the fireplace.

fittings. The ground floor also features the sitting room and a snug which doubles as a playroom. The former is painted dusky pink with bolder pops of colour in the choice of accessories. The focal point is an open fireplace, surrounded by Delft tiles which were in place when the couple bought the house. The snug, meanwhile, has alcove shelving painted in a moody green and lined with books and pictures.

Upstairs, there are four bedrooms and two bathrooms. The children's bedrooms feature wonderful prints by Ralph & James – the storybook art business run by David and a friend in their spare time. Polly's clever use of fabrics is on display in all the rooms, from the vanity unit curtain in the en suite to the canopy above Cecily's bed. She likes to spend time acquiring pieces for the house rather than rushing and buying everything at once. "I buy pieces really slowly over time, when they catch my eye, and love visiting the fairs, like Ardingly and Kempton," she says.

Something else that has grown organically is Polly's Instagram account. "I started posting bits about the renovation on my personal account – it used to consist of dog and horse pictures and then it became interiors pictures," she says. "It was at a time when people were very interested in following renovation projects – particularly DIY. I only post what I want to, barely anything is sponsored. It has been a really positive thing and I have become part of a nice community and made friends through it."

Polly and David are delighted with their revitalised and inviting home. "I love the usability of the house, especially now we have children. It somehow manages to be family friendly without me actually knowing what having children would really entail when the project began," Polly says. "We spend a lot of time in the kitchen, especially in the summer when we have the doors open and the children run in and out with Mabel." ■

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