

A photograph of a kitchen interior. The kitchen features blue-painted wooden cabinets, both upper and lower. The upper cabinets have glass doors, revealing glassware and other items inside. A central island with a thick wooden top and blue base stands in the foreground. Two metal bar stools are tucked under the island. The backsplash is made of small, square tiles with a yellow and brown geometric pattern. A white sink and a gas stove are visible in the background. The floor is made of dark wood. A large orange diamond-shaped graphic is overlaid in the top left corner, containing the text 'Homes & more'. To the right of the island, there is a tall blue cabinet unit. The overall lighting is warm, with a bright patch of light on the floor in the bottom left corner.

# Homes & more

Scotland on Sunday  
26.05.19

## Open Sesame

Listed flat uncovers  
a kitchen behind the  
living room wall



# Balancing act

Modernising a listed flat in Edinburgh's New Town needed imagination, tact and a helping hand

Words **Nichola Hunter**  
Photographs **dapple photography**

**W**hen Devon McHugh and Jeff Sanders decided to modernise their Victorian apartment, they brought in some expert help to ensure they maintained its integrity.

The couple bought the two-bedroom flat in Edinburgh's Broughton Street in 2012, and whilst they knew right away that they wanted to make some changes, it took them five years to pluck up the courage to get started.

"It needed a decent amount of cosmetic renovation when we moved in and we redid the bathroom almost right away, but aside from that we lived in it quite nicely for the first five years," Devon explains.

However, in 2017, with baby Gabriel on the way, Jeff and Devon took the plunge and enlisted the help of Calum Duncan Architects to bring the flat into line with 21st century living.

"We had a pretty good idea of what we wanted to do," Devon recalls. "We knew we wanted an open plan living space, and we knew that the addition of an en-suite would be part of the project and it would require the negotiation of cupboards in our hall to create it. That's where Calum really came into play, it was for the practical and clever aspects of the design. We knew roughly what we wanted to achieve, and he designed it so it would work utilising the space we had in the most effective way."

The original layout consisted of a

sitting room and a long, thin bedroom at the front of the property. In the middle was a spacious hallway with a bathroom and at the back was a further bedroom and kitchen. There was also a basic WC in one of the hall cupboards.

"When I viewed Devon and Jeff's home, I knew instantly it would be more generous in terms of lighting and public space to have the kitchen at the front," Calum explains. "We explored the opportunity to open up the narrow bedroom and sitting room at the front and bring them together to make a modern kitchen/living/dining space. It offered more flexibility, was the better side of the property for public living, with its connection to the street and the views out, and suited how they wanted to use the flat. There was also the advantage of increasing the natural light at the front of the property by uniting the three window bays."

The hallway had one of many doors which Calum tried to rationalise. "We blocked up the door to the former front bedroom and created an en-suite for the master bedroom, the old kitchen, from another cupboard and then incorporated the little study/desk space which made the hall itself feel more like a library. The bookcases and the hidden door to the bathroom were Devon's idea and I thought it was a really nice thing to do."

Another of Devon's ideas was how to maximise the light in the en-suite whilst maintaining a level of privacy. "We discussed having a door between the bedroom and en-suite," says Calum, "but Devon was keen for the bath to benefit from natural light. The solution was to



Clockwise from main: a narrow bedroom and sitting area were joined to become a communal space; the hall became a library; the custom built kitchen area







fit a sliding door on the WC. It became a little space in itself, leaving the bath area open to the bedroom."

Everyone agreed that as the property was a listed building in Edinburgh's historic New Town, any alterations needed to be respectful. "It was unusual but there was a timber load bearing wall in the sitting room which was just a peculiarity of the historic building and we had to be careful in terms of movement. Whilst we could have had an opening of any size between the kitchen and living space, we wanted to

achieve a balance between being able to tuck things away in the kitchen and still maintaining a visual connection with the sitting area."

Devon is full of praise for the team who worked on the conversion. "Thank goodness for Calum, Karl [Mott, contractor], Guy [at Broadworkshop] and the rest of the team," she says. "On a project this big we didn't really know what we were doing as first-timers. If I had been left to my own devices, I would have removed all the cupboards in the hall. Thankfully, Calum pointed out how



impractical that was. 'Where would you put your ladders, your ironing board, the buggy?' he said.

"There was also a lot of balancing between form and function and sometimes function won out. Especially when it came to the kitchen worktops. My first choice was white marble, but then we thought about how we cook and eat. We're vegetarians who eat a lot of turmeric-based curries – white and porous is not a good idea. We decided to go for concrete; it's cool and durable, and it's a bit unexpected in a Victorian flat.

Devon believes there's an art to managing expectations. "It's hard when you want to modernise a Victorian flat and you don't want to betray the building but at the same time you don't want a pastiche. For the kitchen we went down the custom-built route so we could maximise the proportions of the room. Guy had already made the bookcases in the hallway and we were confident he could do what we wanted in the kitchen. To minimise costs, we bought Wickes carcasses and Guy built the kitchen around them."

Devon was keen to have a two-tone look in the kitchen and did a lot of experimenting. "We used Farrow & Ball's Stiffkey Blue, which was the colour the living room was painted before we did the renovations. Since all the walls were replastered during the project, I knew I wanted to take advantage of the smooth, fresh surfaces by keeping them light, but I wanted a two-tone effect in the kitchen in terms of the cabinets. We painted the island in Blue Black so it wasn't too matchy-matchy."

Whilst the flat is still evolving – Gabriel's highchair isn't tall enough to reach the island to participate in kitchen suppers, for example – the everyday workings of the renovation have ticked all the boxes. "It's such an easy use of space and I feel our flat is a happy building because we've done this," says Devon.

Calum adds: "Any successful project is when the client and the architect can work together collaboratively – this is a success."

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You don't want to betray the building but at the same time you don't want a pastiche

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Clockwise from above: the master bedroom with en-suite; the dining area overlooks the street; a wash basin in the en-suite and the sliding door for the WC; decorative tiling above the bath