

# 'We bought a house mid-development, so completed the design to our taste'

Emma Kirkham and her husband Seth were looking for a house during the property boom and found one they could put their own stamp on as part of the purchase agreement

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BEFORE

AWAITING BEFORE PIC - The Kirkhams' house had potential and was already being updated



## FACT FILE

### THE OWNERS

Emma Kirkham, a former PR now studying to becoming a barrister, and her husband Seth, who works in finance

### THE PROPERTY

A six-bedroom Victorian townhouse built in the late 1800s

### THE LOCATION

Fulham, west London

### WHAT THEY SPENT

The couple bought their home for £1.8m in 2006. As a developer had previously started to renovate the house, they negotiated the cost of having the work finished to their specifications within the sale price

**Above** Now fully restored for modern living, the Victorian terraced townhouse was halfway through its transformation when it was offered for sale on a buyer's specification deal

Emma and Seth had both bought and sold several properties individually before setting out to look for their dream home together. Having settled on Fulham, as near as possible to the King's Road, Chelsea, the couple narrowed their search to the Peterborough Estate, essentially a number of streets all built by the same company, Nichols Lion, in the late 1800s. These properties had originally been built for Harrods and

other department store workers in and around the Knightsbridge and Kensington area.

Finding a house proved much harder than the couple had first imagined, however. 'The property market was booming when we were looking to buy, with many purchasers all chasing after the same house. We were outbid on several properties before we clinched this one,' explains Emma.

'We eventually bought our house from a developer who had already



'This open-plan arrangement works perfectly when there are just the two of us or for entertaining friends and family'

undertaken most of the structural work required to extend the property, including the installation of several new bathrooms, and was just about to tackle the kitchen. We were lucky enough to be able to strike a deal whereby we could have a say in the rest of the work and he and his team would complete it to our specification.'

The couple were able to choose the design and style of all the fittings and also to work with a decorator on the finishing touches. This was all included in the purchase price. Work creating the kitchen-diner had already been started, forming an open-plan space at the rear of the house with folding doors leading out to a small, walled garden.

'The space was fantastic,' says Emma. 'With the main building work done, it meant we could concentrate on all the fun things, like choosing the kitchen and the wall colours.'

The kitchen proved to be the most ambitious part of the project for Emma and Seth, as they had a major input in terms of the design. 'The back of the

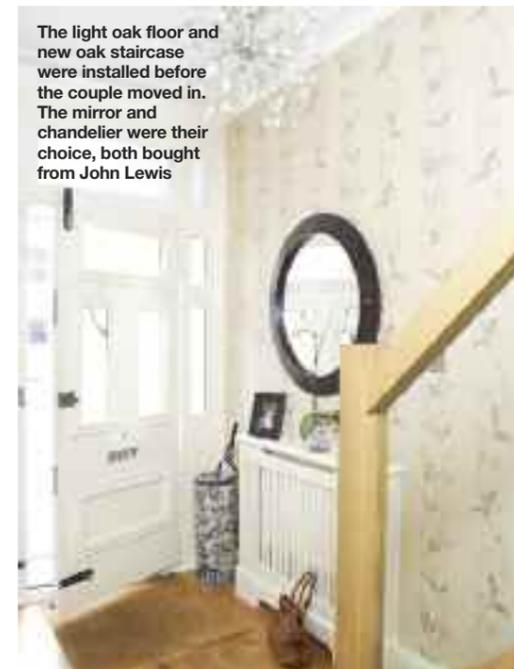
**Above** One end of the new open-plan space is a chill-out zone. The sofa and footstools were bought from Heal's, the rug is from WovenGround and the dining table is from Lombok

**DESIGN IDEA**

Don't leave your existing rooms in the middle of the house in the dark when you extend. Look at your floor plans and work out how to add new window openings and how to bring in borrowed light from adjoining rooms – perhaps through enlarged doorways, or by removing walls and creating a more open-plan layout, such as this kitchen-diner, which features floor-to-ceiling glazing and rooflights in a side extension



Complementing the kitchen design, the barstools, from Gallery Interiors, and stainless-steel accessories and appliances, from international firm Küppersbusch, complete the look



The light oak floor and new oak staircase were installed before the couple moved in. The mirror and chandelier were their choice, both bought from John Lewis



A floor panel of toughened, tinted safety glass is a modern addition to the fabric of the 150-year-old building, bringing light down into the floor below

‘We divided the space into three zones, with a dining area, a chill-out lounge at one end and the kitchen at the other’

**Above** The open-plan kitchen-diner has views onto the garden and patio through folding-sliding glass doors, from Sunfold, fitted with electric blinds, from Cameron Broom. The kitchen units were ordered from Italy by the local firm that supplied and fitted them, Just Kitchens of Chelsea

house had originally been divided into two rooms, but when the developer bought it, he removed the central wall and extended the space, leaving one large open-plan space.

‘We knew we wanted something state-of-the-art in terms of styling and practicality. We also planned to source our kitchen locally, so we visited all the showrooms in the local area. In the end, we found a style, actually from Italy, through a local specialist. We chose units in dark wood with gloss-white tops for a dramatic contrast.

‘In terms of the room, we decided to divide the space into three zones, with

a dining area, a chill-out lounge at one end and the kitchen at the other. All the units and appliances were sited in an L-shape, within arm’s reach of a long, rectangular central island, where the bulk of the cooking is done.

‘This open-plan arrangement works perfectly when there are just the two of us or for entertaining friends and family. Whoever is cooking can still be involved in what’s happening at the dining or lounge area, making it a really sociable space. We both felt this was important when designing the space.’

One of the main appeals of the house originally was the fact that many

of the original features had been retained. The couple were then able to inject a contemporary look in terms of furniture and furnishings, which blends the old and new in a stylish way. All the wooden sash windows, doors and Victorian coricing, for example, have been fully restored, with the rooms now redecorated in modern, neutral tones.

The drawing room was originally two rooms and the developer had knocked these into one by the time Emma and Seth came to purchase the house. Fortunately, though, the two Victorian cast-iron fireplaces had been retained lending a grandeur to the overall feel.

‘We also loved the fact that a lovely, classic oak floor had been recently laid and we brought this right up to date with polished white plaster walls, which involves a special layering technique that gives a lacquer-like effect. We originally saw this treatment on a previous house we had viewed and the owners had explained that it was practical as well as stunning to look at, offering really good insulation and easy cleaning,’ Emma explains.

Their inspiration for the style of the house, Emma says, comes from their love of contemporary art, with their imagination being fuelled by a summer spent in New York. ‘We spent a lot of time visiting modern galleries while we were there, such as The Guggenheim, MoMA and Metropolitan. This definitely



Polished plaster was applied to the interior walls throughout by the developer, to create a shiny lacquer-like effect



Twin cast-iron fireplaces with original tiles are among the many Victorian features retained when the house was renovated from top to bottom. The glass coffee table is from Harrods



Above Two traditional-style armchairs, sourced via Gallery Interiors on London's Old Brompton Road, sit in the drawing room area. The painting came from the Chelsea Art Fair

influenced our design choices in terms of colour schemes for paint and fabrics, which are probably more ambitious than they might otherwise have been.' On the upper floors, the bathrooms had already been refitted with new suites, contemporary white designs from The Bath Store, and marble and travertine tiles. The couple then had a feature wall of black tiles in a flocked design installed in their en suite bathroom. The bedrooms, meanwhile, were finished with neutral walls and floors, and plenty of storage built in.

'We brought very little furniture from our previous flat,' says Emma, 'so we had the luxury of buying most of the items from new. We quickly discovered that we both have very strong opinions on style, but luckily it all seems to work really well together.' In the main living space to the front of the house, Emma and Seth zoned the area with a pair of modern, slouchy sofas at one end, piled up with cushions, followed by a reading area featuring a pair of matching country house-style armchairs, a coffee table

and stools at the other, with statement modern pieces elsewhere. Furniture for the room is a combination of modern and traditional, but the colour palette throughout the downstairs – aubergine, lighter purple, cream and black – gives an overall, unified effect. Seth and Emma also invested in original art for their new house. 'Our New York trip had inspired us to buy paintings by modern, living artists and this is a real feature throughout the house,' she says. 'Again, in keeping with our desire to keep it local, we've

**DESIGN IDEA**  
Give your walls the look of polished marble, stone or any number of other interesting effects using polished plaster. Also known as Venetian plaster, marmorino or stucco, it is traditionally made from lime and marble dust, with optional fine aggregates such as silica sand added for creating textures. Major brands include Armourcoat ([www.armourcoat.com](http://www.armourcoat.com)) and applying it is a highly skilled job, but there are courses available (try [www.polishedplastercompany.co.uk](http://www.polishedplastercompany.co.uk))



'One of the main appeals when buying this house was the fact that many of the original features had been retained'

sourced from nearby London galleries and from the annual Chelsea Arts Fair; but in addition to original works, we've also bought posters from New York galleries and online. Our one guiding principal is that we have to really like something before we buy it.' Once the work was finished, the couple moved in. They'd been living in the house for about a year before they

encountered a major problem. 'We were well and truly settled when we discovered some major cracks had started to appear in our main bathroom,' says Emma. 'When we had it checked out, we discovered that the builder employed by the property developer hadn't reinforced the floor sufficiently when he'd originally taken down the walls.' As a result, the couple

had to have all the fittings – including the bath, shower and WC, and all the tiles, removed, stripping the room back, while the floor was reinforced. 'It was a bit of a nightmare, because we had to get another builder in to effectively redo the original job,' recalls Emma, 'but it was essential – the bath could have easily come crashing down through the ceiling at any time.' ▶

Above The two aubergine sofas in the living room were bought from Cameron Broom; the white rug is from John Lewis. The ornate timber-framed windows are an original feature restored by the developer



**DESIGN IDEA**  
 A roll-top bath set in the middle of a bathroom is the ultimate luxury, provided you have the space. Don't be put off having features like this by your builder, just because it makes the plumbing a little more complicated – some will offer design advice based on what is easiest for them. Design what is best for you and then get your plumber, designer and builder to make it work in the most practical way

A colour scheme of brown and beige in the master bedroom includes a bed from Feather & Black, as is the pink bucket-seat chair, an oatmeal carpet from M&C Carpets, plus cushions and a throw from John Lewis and curtains and blinds from Gallery Interiors



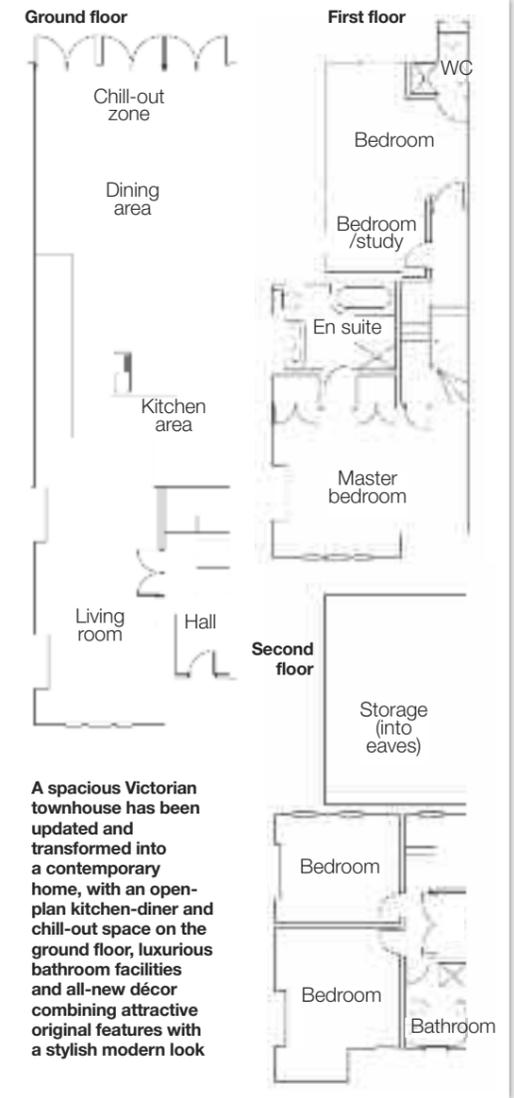
A his-and-hers shower cubicle and twin washbasins, too, all from The Bath Store, make the en suite a practical and luxurious space



Above The couple chose black flock tiles, from Porcelanosa, for their new en suite bathroom, creating a stylish backdrop for the white freestanding bath, from The Bath Store

Below The Japanese-style screen in one of the spare bedrooms is a floor-to-ceiling fitted wardrobe, built to order by The Closet Company. The tailor's dummy is from Next

**PLANS**



A spacious Victorian townhouse has been updated and transformed into a contemporary home, with an open-plan kitchen-diner and chill-out space on the ground floor, luxurious bathroom facilities and all-new décor combining attractive original features with a stylish modern look

**'We wanted to keep the house personal and, hopefully, we have achieved just that'**

Apart from this setback, the couple are absolutely thrilled with their dream house. There are just a few things Emma says she would change if she were buying again. 'For example, Seth wanted to lay shiny white tiles in the kitchen, which I thought would be too slippery, so I vetoed his choice. Instead, we ended up with a composite material – it doesn't look as nice and the tiles are a devil to clean. I also regret buying the pale carpets we chose for some of the spare bedrooms, because they are

simply impractical. However, I really love the stair runner in 'Chanel' beige with black edging, which I sourced from a local carpet supplier, as it is more practical than you would expect.' What Emma likes best about the house is that it was very much a joint project for the couple and, although it features a lot of design-inspired choices in terms of furniture, fabrics and fittings, it feels like a home, not a showcase. 'We both felt that the key was to keep it personal and, hopefully, we've achieved just that.'



Framed posters throughout the house were sourced from the Allposters.co.uk website. The bed was purchased at Dreams and the curtains and cushions are from John Lewis



For stockist information, see page 151