

Leanne searched high and low for a vintage shop counter she could transform into a kitchen island, before designing this one, painted in Dulux Black (00E53) in Diamond Eggshell. She now creates bespoke cabinetry for Bird & Bone. The Heritage Black Ash counter stools are by Ercol.



## *Creative* JOURNEY

Leanne Kilroy and Eric Fulwiler knew that they had unearthed a gem when they came across this former lodging house – despite the extensive work needed to give it new life

FEATURE EMMA J PAGE PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH

ABOVE Leanne sits on a vintage Danish bench in the hallway, where walls in a gentle pink, Faded Blossom by Atelier Ellis, and restored woodwork create a clean, contemporary feel.



‘A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush’, and in the case of this family home in London, it is a saying that could not be more apt. Its purchase nearly fell through several times for Leanne Kilroy and Eric Fulwiler, so, when the Victorian terrace finally became theirs, the prospect of renovating while living on-site, or contending with its lodging-house layout alongside three small children did not faze them. “In fact, I had a big appetite for the work,” says Leanne. “We wanted to make our own imprint on this home. For us, the second-floor bedsit kitchen, which may have deterred many, was a bonus. We knew it would come in handy when we renovated the ground floor.”

The couple, who relocated from Massachusetts via New York City to London in 2016, have a relaxed international sensibility that comes from various stints abroad, including Italy, Australia and Canada. They chose to settle in the capital with their children – Stella 12, Vesper, seven and Domino, five – as they were attracted by its cosmopolitan nature and, as

Leanne puts it, “because we feel at home among diversity, in a city that we’re familiar with.”

Though both grew up in period homes in the USA, Leanne is the first to admit that a British terraced house produces its own unique challenges. “Neither of us is unfamiliar with the Victorian vernacular, but of course, terraced city homes tend to be narrower, lack rear access from the street and can suffer from a lack of light. So we both knew that spatial planning would be key and that we’d need to think carefully about storage.”

Favouring a circular layout with no dead-ends, Leanne reworked the ground floor, incorporating a loo, coat storage and pantry, without having to disturb the property’s architectural bones too much. She also knocked through the front and middle sitting rooms, removed the existing kitchen extension and pushed further outwards and to the side, creating an elegant timber-and-wood orangery-style addition, whose steeply pitched roofs, when seen from the rear, create pleasing graphic angles against the original ▶

ABOVE Natural textures create an atmosphere of simplicity in the sitting room. The Bryher ottoman is from The House Upstairs and is upholstered in Pencil Stripe Linen by Buchanan Studio.

OPPOSITE Trailing vines, open shelving and an engineered ash floor topped with a jute runner keep the look in the kitchen relaxed. The Bianco Eclipsia Quartzite worktop is from PGQ Worktops.



ABOVE The couple knocked through this space, adding a pair of reclaimed pine double doors. The middle room also serves as a play area for the children.

brickwork. “That style excited a feeling in me that we could bring the house right back to its bones. I do also enjoy contemporary glass treatments, but this approach felt right because we wanted a sense that the kitchen had always been there,” says Leanne.

The former lodging house also featured exposed brick throughout, which proved impractical in places. So, the couple retained some elements and replastered or painted in other areas. “We took the opportunity to turn what was once an exposed-brick bathroom on the first-floor landing into Eric’s study, requisitioning part of it to create a separate laundry room,” explains Leanne. The brickwork was painted in a softening taupe and the room opened to the eaves to create additional patina. On the second floor, the kitchenette

was eventually removed, and replaced with a bathroom for the children, complete with playful pink grouting.

Throughout, Leanne, who runs interior design studio Good Bones, eschewed trends, preferring to tune into her intuition. On the first floor, she turned a bedroom into a spacious bathroom complete with twin vanities inset into each alcove, a generous bathtub and a shower enclosure finished in micro-cement. “Losing a bedroom may not be a standard move, but we wanted a family bathroom that also provided easy access for guests,” she says of its two entry points.

That keen eye for detail is evident in dozens of touches around the house, from the mustard-coloured kitchen pantry shelves installed after carefully measuring the couple’s collection of Kilner jars,



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to the Cy Twombly artwork hanging on the chimney breast in the bathroom, which, subtly hinged, opens to reveal a secret storage cupboard. “Many of our decisions have been informed by budget, which rarely gave us much wriggle room,” says Leanne. “But for me, that meant getting more creative, whether scouring vintage stores or tapping into online resources. It gave us the opportunity to reflect on what was important.”

Key finds include an antique settle, which now defines the dining area off the kitchen, and a pair of salvaged doors, upcycled to grace the pantry.

The daughter of a dealer in mid-century and antique furniture, it is little surprise that Leanne is drawn to pieces imbued with stories and sentiment. In the bathroom, a milking stool is etched with hers and Eric’s initials, carved when they were childhood

ABOVE The vintage glass pendant is from Agapanthus Interiors while the wall lights from Jim Lawrence are topped with lampshades painted by Leanne.



**ABOVE** A former bedroom, this bathroom features basins from Burlington, above which hand mirrors from Made.com teamed with sconces from Wallis Antiques. Brass basin and bath taps from Cast Iron Bath Company complete the look.

**LEFT** Walls painted in a soft rose, Wayfinder by Atelier Ellis, make an ideal foil for the red marble fire surround and an antique washstand, repurposed as a dressing table.

sweethearts, while the kitchen houses a Danish apothecary cabinet that Leanne bought from her father's shop more than a decade ago. "Above all, furniture is my guiding principle when designing," she reflects.

That passion for unique pieces prompted Leanne to set up a kitchen design business, Bird & Bone, with partner Sarah Hatcher, whom she discovered online. "My search for an old shop counter that I could rework as a kitchen island proved fruitless, so Sarah's company made one for me," says Leanne. "Later, after designing the kitchen myself, we decided to join forces to create custom-made options for other people's kitchens." Her own is a blend of elegance and informality: quartzite worktops with generous bullnose edges house a sturdy, industrial capacity stainless steel sink, while open shelving displays family mementoes, interspersed with languorous fronds of Devil's Ivy. "Indoor planting makes a home feel alive," says Leanne. "For me, it means someone is putting in daily effort; I see plants as an expression of love towards a space." Nowhere is that expression better realised than here. ■