



Real Homes
HOUSE RENOVATION

BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL

Interior designer Caroline Firth has introduced personality to a once-bland family home, creating a colourful backdrop for entertaining friends and family

DOUBLE-fronted Victorian houses rarely come onto the market in Bramhall, Cheshire, so when this beautiful property, built in 1865 for the local stationmaster, was put up for sale, Caroline and Ian jumped at the chance to buy it. 'We were looking to relocate from north Manchester, and this was our dream location,' she explains. 'It's got a great village feel, a large, private garden, and there are brilliant schools nearby.' The house itself offered potential in terms of its size and period features, but the interior was bland and uninspiring. 'It had been done up to sell, so it was livable, even if it wasn't what I would have chosen,' she adds. The house had been painted cream throughout, with budget bathrooms, laminate floors and a characterless kitchen added. As an interior designer, Caroline was desperate to introduce personality back into the house, using her signature combination of bold colour and characterful pieces. 'I'd noticed that some of the rooms had limited daylight so chose strong colours for those spaces to give them a sense of energy,' she explains. To keep costs down, furniture and accessories have been gathered from Ebay and charity shops, while pieces from high-street favourites, such as Ikea, have been customised for an individual look. Although the couple were keen to keep structural changes to a minimum to reduce costs, they knocked through between the front and rear living rooms to maximise light, and also installed large frameless glazed doors in the kitchen-diner to create better links to the garden. 'By being creative and spending time finding the right pieces for each room, I've been able to create our dream home on a relatively tight budget,' adds Caroline. ➤

DRAMATIC DINING

Caroline has recently redecorated the dining room, swapping pale grey walls for Farrow & Ball's bold Stiffkey Blue. 'The darker colour creates a real sense of grandeur, which helps the furniture and accessories to pop,' she explains. The vintage Tulip chairs were recovered in Alchemilla Varesse velvet by Designers Guild. The picture above the fireplace is by Maria Rivans, at The Contemporary, in Chester. Caroline customised the gold candle holders and added pink candles. The dining table is an Ebay find. For a similar chandelier, try Laura Ashley





COSY SETTING

The colour scheme in this snug sitting room was inspired by the eye-catching **yellow chair** from Oliver Bonas. The walls are painted in Plummet by Farrow & Ball. Caroline loves reading and wanted to create a library feel so chose **cabinets** with plenty of storage - these are from Ikea and were upcycled with paint. For similar **parquet flooring**, try Haywoods, and for a similar **chandelier**, try Laura Ashley. **Glass coffee table**, Made.com. Airi antique gold mirror, Oka. **Grey throw**, M&S. **Bon bon jars** with fairy lights inside, LSA. Michael Aram **torched wine cooler**, Amara. **Slate chopping board**, BE Lifestyle

'TACKLING THE GARDEN EARLY ON ALLOWED US TO ENJOY IT MUCH MORE THAN IF WE'D LEFT IT UNTIL THE END OF THE PROJECT'



ROOM WITH A VIEW

The kitchen-diner links to the garden through tall **glazed doors** from Frameless Glass Curtains. The space was already open-plan when Caroline bought the house, but she has considered knocking through into the adjacent utility room to widen the room and allow her to include an island. The floorboards and dresser are **painted** in Little Greene's Dark Lead, while the bespoke **Shaker-style units**, created by local joiner Philip Howard, are **painted** in Farrow & Ball's Strong White, with durable quartz worktops. The floorboards have been laid horizontally to emphasise the width of the room. Orange **pendant lights**, Habitat. Black **light shade** above table, Made in Design. **Tulip dining table**, Nest. **Dining chairs**, John Lewis



THE OWNERS

Caroline Firth, an interior designer, lives here with husband Ian, a musician and music teacher, their children, Sam, 15, and Erin, 10, plus Leo, the Persian cat

THE PROPERTY

A five-bedroom, semi-detached Victorian house built in 1865, in Bramhall, Cheshire

CAROLINE LOVES

Rockett St George
The Cheshire Art Gallery
Shopping locally
Eero Saarinen's Tulip chairs
BE Lifestyle Boutique in Bramhall

TOTAL PROJECT COST

£28,000

FORMAL LIVING ROOM

An off-white colour scheme maximises the sense of light flooding into the main living room through the original windows and French doors. The walls are painted in Strong White from Farrow & Ball. 'I wanted a really bold piece of art to add colour to the room so commissioned my friend, illustrator Gabrielle Dow, to paint the two butterfly canvases, which I absolutely love,' says Caroline. Local joiner Philip Howard built the cabinets around the marble fireplace, which provide storage and somewhere to conceal the TV. Miss Clementine cream sofas, Sofa Workshop. Cushions and throws, Habitat. Rug, City Cows. For similar side tables, try Made.com. For grey radiators, try Castrads





**CAROLINE
COMMISSIONED
AN ARTIST FRIEND
TO PAINT THE
PRETTY BUTTERFLY
CANVASES TO
BRING COLOUR TO
THE WHITE WALLS**

'WE KEPT STRUCTURAL CHANGES TO A MINIMUM TO HELP KEEP THE COST OF THE RENOVATION DOWN'



HOME OFFICE

Above A blackboard calendar wall sticker, from Ferm Living, allows Caroline to keep track of appointments. The Mid-century desk was originally a dressing table bought on Ebay for £40. For a similar chair, try Made.com. Lamp, Anglepoise

LIGHT-FILLED SPACE

A large sash window floods the family bathroom with natural light. The vinyl flooring, from Karndean, echoes the wooden parquet on the ground floor but provides a more practical choice in a bathroom. For a claw-footed bath, try Fired Earth, and for a double sink, try Victorian Plumbing. The large mirror was an Ebay find; for similar, try Wayfair



TEEN HANGOUT

Left Son Sam's room, which is located on the top floor of the house, has a cool, loft-style feel thanks to the monochrome colour scheme with yellow accents. For a similar wall colour, try Hudson Black by Abigail Ahern. Bed, Get Laid Beds. Yellow floor lamp, Ikea

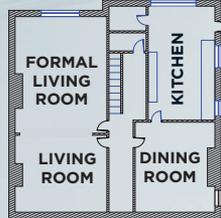
For 18 great master bedroom ideas, see realhomes.co.uk



PLANS

AFTER

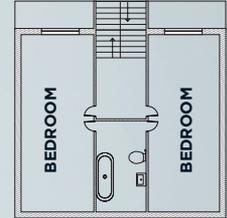
GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



PERFECT LAYOUT

Caroline and Ian limited the structural changes they made to keep costs down. They knocked through between the two living rooms to maximise light and installed glass doors out to the garden

MASTER BEDROOM

Caroline painted the walls in her and Ian's bedroom in Lead IIII from Paint & Paper Library. The bed is from M&S, while the statement headboard, which Caroline bought for £10 in a charity shop, has been upcycled with blackboard paint. Bedside lights, B&Q. Bedding, John Lewis. Cushions, Harlequin. Artwork, The Cheshire Art Gallery

'DARKER WALL COLOURS WITH BRIGHT ACCENTS ARE A GREAT WAY TO BRING ENERGY TO ROOMS WITHOUT MUCH NATURAL LIGHT'



ENGINEERED WOOD FLOORING IS A PRACTICAL, EASY-TO-CLEAN CHOICE IN A BEDROOM

STYLISH SPACE

Left Daughter Erin's room makes a real style statement thanks to the Swan Lake Black wallpaper from Nina Campbell. **Bedding**, Zara Home. Caroline sprayed the chair, which was from her parents' house, in a pale bronze; for a similar **chair**, try the Mauricette from Maisons du Monde. For a similar **desk**, try Made.com. **Bed**, Ikea, and **bedding**, Feather and Black. For oak **flooring**, try the Natural Wood Flooring Co.



COSTS & CONTACTS

Kitchen **£11,000**
Bathroom **£8,000**
Glazed doors **£4,000**
Flooring **£2,000**
Building work **£1,500**
Decorating **£1,500**
TOTAL **£28,000**
House purchase cost **£725,000**
Estimated current value **£980,000**
Potential profit **£227,000**

Interior design
Cheshire Interior Design,
07932 048686,
cheshireinteriordesign.com
Glazed doors
Frameless Glass Curtains,
01732 848088, fgc.co.uk
Joiner Phillip Howard
Cabinet Maker,
0161 456 4144
Paint Farrow & Ball,
Paint & Paper Library

GUEST BEDROOM

Above Caroline has created a cost-effective feature wall in the guest bedroom by positioning framed **prints** and **fairy lights** from Ikea above the bed. The animal **plates** are from Etsy. For a similar **wall colour**, try Plummet by Farrow & Ball. **Bed**, Feather & Black. **Bedding** and **cushions**, Ikea and John Lewis. **Lamp**, Moth in Disbury 