

A home with BIG personality



Want to pack your rooms with individuality? Caroline Firth's bold colours, budget-friendly quick fixes and characterful contrasts show how it's done

The right location was top of Caroline Firth's wish list when she and her husband Ian began house hunting. They were keen to swap North Manchester for a more family-friendly

THE BOOK ROOM

'I have lots of books, so I wanted a library feel in here,' says Caroline. 'It's a lovely place to sit and read.' The striking colour scheme was inspired by the eye-catching bright yellow chair.



area, with good schools for their young son, Sam, and a convenient commute.

'I fell in love with the idea of an older house,' says interior designer Caroline. 'When one of the few Victorian ones in our chosen area of Bramhall, Cheshire, came on the market, I really wanted it!'

The house, built in 1865 for the local stationmaster, was a double-fronted semi with the high ceilings, fireplaces and elegant proportions that Caroline loved. Thankfully, she and Ian struck lucky, stretching their finances to buy the house, and moving in shortly before their daughter Erin was born.

Inside, the rooms were all cream and fitted out with budget fixtures. 'It had been decorated to sell, so it was liveable, even if it wasn't what I'd have chosen,' says Caroline. 'I was desperate to add some character, so as soon as we were settled and Erin started sleeping through, I was ready to spring into action on the house.'

She soon discovered that parts of the house could feel a little dark at certain times of day, so opening up the space and boosting light were important. Rather than opting for a pale, pared-down look, she was keen to introduce colour and character. She was also aware that she →



KITCHEN

BELOW Painted in Little Greene's Dark Lead, the flooring is laid horizontally to accentuate the kitchen's width, while the bright orange accessories add punch to the mid-grey colour scheme. Caroline invested in durable kitchen fixtures, like the Shaker-style units – painted in Farrow & Ball's Strong White Estate Eggshell – and quartz surfaces.





SITTING ROOM

The off-white colour scheme and bright bursts of colour maximise the natural light. A local joiner built the elegant cabinets around the marble fireplace – one of which neatly conceals the TV. Caroline's friend, illustrator Gabrielle Dow, painted the two butterfly canvases. 'I'm so pleased with them,' says Caroline. 'They bring the room to life.'



This month ...



WALL CALENDAR

On one side of the dining room, a nifty calendar wall sticker defines Caroline's office area. She can use chalk on the wipe-clean surface. The retro-style desk was originally a dressing table that she bought on eBay for about £40.



HALLWAY

A graceful, period staircase is a feature of the roomy hall and Caroline's smart stair-runner highlights the simple lines. The eye-catching station-style clock is a reminder of the history of the house.

would need to think creatively to achieve her vision on a limited budget.

Caroline tackled the narrow, dark kitchen first, paying attention to the window and back door either side of the central range cooker that looked odd. She designed a single symmetrical run of units and a slim dresser opposite to boost storage space. She framed the cooker with a false chimney breast and had the back door turned into a second, matching window. To reduce costs, she found a local joiner to make the Shaker-style cabinets at an affordable price. Having splashed out on quartz work surfaces, she cut back when it came to the flooring. 'We lifted the laminate, relaid it horizontally – to accentuate the width of the room – and painted it,' she says. 'We love it.'

Next, Caroline turned her attention to knocking through from the small 'book room' at the front of the house to the larger living room at the back, to increase the amount of light. 'The living room was so dark and uninviting,' says Caroline. 'The front room was a non-space, but it got the afternoon sun, so I wanted to even out the natural light between the two.'

To further balance the spaces, Caroline chose a dramatic dark grey and yellow scheme for the book room, contrasting it with the living room's fresh off-white and vibrant green. 'When there's limited light, strong colours enliven a room,' she says.

A wooden parquet floor extends from



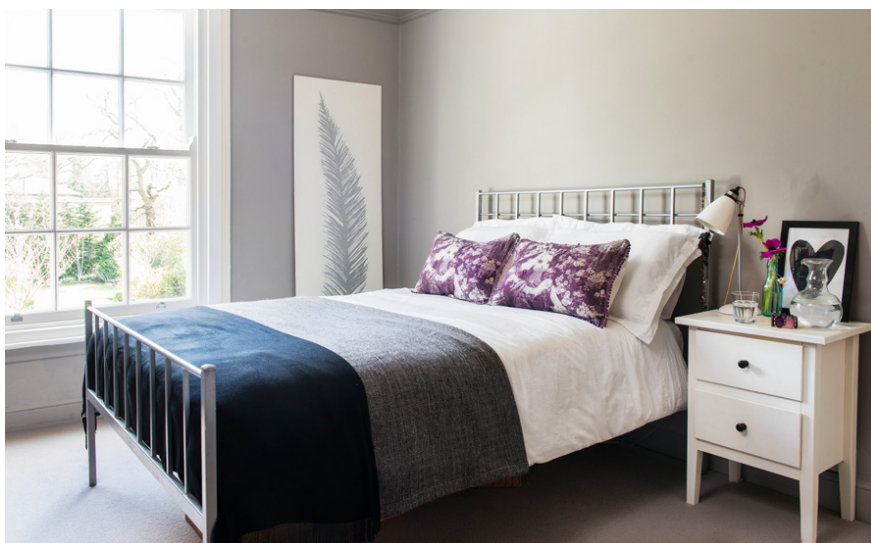
'We've created a comfortable home that's also full of character'

the hall into the dining and living rooms, bringing a unified feel throughout the house. The parquet, supplied locally, was a surprisingly cost-effective fix.

Furniture was gathered from eBay and charity shops, while pieces from high-street stores, such as Ikea, have been customised for an individual look.

Even the old kitchen cupboards were recycled to fit out the utility room.

The overall result is a lively interior with a brave and unique mix of styles. 'I wouldn't want to move from here now,' Caroline adds. 'It's a comfortable home, full of character, in a lovely place – we've put our heart and soul into it.'



GUEST BEDROOM

Caroline has decorated the inviting guest bedroom without major outlay. She's had the metal bed for many years, and the bedside cabinet is an upcycled Ikea piece bought some time ago. She made the artwork herself, painting the delicate silver feather design on to a leftover MDF panel. Walls painted in Mole's Breath Estate Emulsion by Farrow & Ball.



MAIN BEDROOM

LEFT Made-to-measure shutters provide privacy while also allowing light into the master bedroom, and have been softened by white voile curtains. Crisp touches of black and charcoal grey anchor the neutral scheme, creating a stylish retreat. The decorative headboard is one of Caroline's best eBay finds.



No place like home

Unfold **pendant light**,
£119, Muuto at Paper Rooms



Patterned butterflies **wall sticker set**, £22, Spin Collective



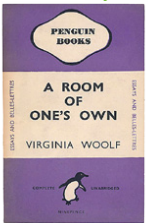
Floor **lamp**,
£139, Rigby & Mac



Ombre **cushion**, £27, Oliver Bonas



Shakrha **cushion**, £18, La Redoute



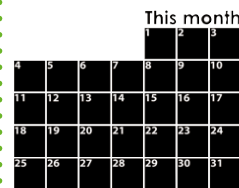
Penguin Books **print**, £10, John Lewis

Get Caroline's colourful, quirky look...

Polka **tealight holders**,
£20 for 4, LSA International at Amara



Station **clock**,
£55, The Great Gift Company



Chalkboard **calendar**
wall decal, £24, Etsy



Pepper mill,
£24.95, Le Creuset at John Lewis



Tub **chair**, £395, Oliver Bonas



Naga **throw**,
£80, Amara

For where to buy, see page 152



CHILDREN'S BEDROOMS

ABOVE AND LEFT Erin and brother Sam have the two bedrooms on the top floor. The butterfly theme continues in Erin's bedroom, thanks to an easy-to-apply wall sticker. Sam's modern furniture, black feature wall and acid-yellow highlights make the room perfect for a boy.

BATHROOM

The vinyl flooring in the bathroom echoes the wooden parquet on the ground floor, but is a more practical choice. There's also underfloor heating for added luxury. The huge mirror was an inexpensive online buy, while the little wooden stool was a charity shop bargain that was painted soft grey to continue the tranquil feel.

