

The basement kitchen has striking Zebrano wood units and silestone worktops from Palmer and Palmer Kitchens. The Habitat table and benches can be pushed against the wall to create more space when needed



Going underground

A couple increased the size of their family home by turning the basement into a bright, modern kitchen. Heather Dixon reports

PHOTOGRAPHS BY COLIN POOLE



Emma and Andy Gordon had already submitted an offer on one house when Emma decided to look around just one more property – a Victorian townhouse in Halifax, West Yorkshire – out of curiosity. ‘The first place was expensive and needed a lot of structural work but this was just tired and dated,’ she said. ‘I loved the proportions of the rooms and the size of the house and, best of all, it had a huge cellar.’

Her immediate thought was to turn the basement area into a spacious kitchen and create more family living space on the ground floor as well as add significant value to the property.

Although Andy struggled to see its potential, he agreed that it made better financial sense to buy this house than ‘do up a wreck’.

The couple managed to raise enough cash to keep the place they were living in while their new home was renovated. Their son, Rudy, was just a year old so Emma project managed the structural and interior work with him in tow, holding meetings on site while he slept.

‘I was juggling my job as an interior designer with the renovation and



Left and below: Osborne and Little Sakura wallpaper on the chimney breast and Marston and Langinger's Portland on the walls. All the woodwork is Farrell & Ball Clunch. Side table is from Ice Interiors
Top The Audrey Sunrise stair carpet is from Crucial Trading. The yellow sideboard is from IKEA. Habitat framed photographs add simple but striking finishing touches
Right: Zoffany Taupe walls, halo sofas and an Eames style chair and footstool from Havershams Interiors create a Gentleman's Club atmosphere in this sitting room

looking after a young child, so there were times when it was stressful,' said Emma. 'But I love a challenge and had a great team of people behind me. I just had to be organised. I would often lie awake at night thinking about the things I had to do the next day. Rudy thought it was great. He saw the whole project as a big adventure.'

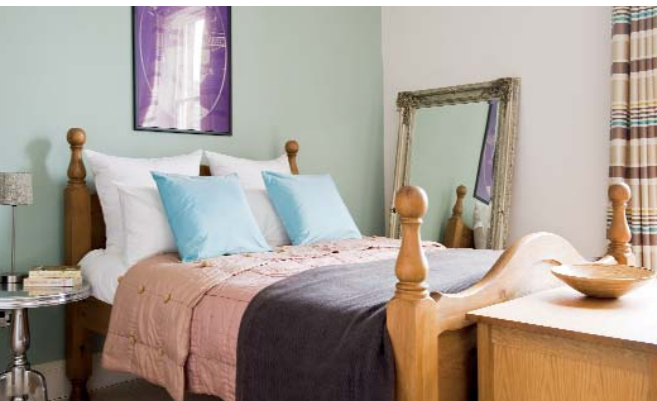
The biggest job was restructuring the series of small cellar rooms into an open dining kitchen. The floor had to be dug



Left: Emma has mixed colours to great effect in the bedroom, which is dominated by a four poster bed. Bold accent wallpaper creates a lively backdrop to the furniture
Below: Blanket box, made by Eye Candy Interior Design is covered in Casamance fabric. Ghost chair from Ice Interiors, wall lights from Graham and Green, pink throw from Next



Below: The guest bedroom is painted in Zoffany Duck Egg and Dulux Sail White to create a neutral but welcoming look. The bedding is from Habitat.
Right: Stripy IKEA bedding and an accent wall colour of lime green give Rudy's bedroom a light, colourful look



out to create extra headroom and all the rubble – five skips worth – taken through the small window. A support beam was installed to keep the ceiling strong and the room tanked out to prevent damp.

‘Everything had to be taken by hand through the window or up and down the cellar steps,’ said Emma. ‘Andy enlisted the help of some of his rugby-playing friends because some things were just too difficult to manage by

ourselves. It took six men just to manoeuvre the stone sink in through the window.’

Emma was tempted to keep the original flagstone floor but it made the space look dark, so they sold the flagstones and laid Sienna marble tiles instead, to keep the kitchen looking light and open.

They continued this theme up into the hallway and throughout the main living rooms, which still have many

original features. ‘Luckily for us the house hadn’t lost any of its character,’ said Emma. ‘We had to update obvious things like the electrics and plumbing and reinstate some of the fireplaces, but for the most part all we had to do was highlight its features and keep within the original layout.’

This involved removing a partition wall which divided a fifth bedroom and ‘tiny’ bathroom to create a much bigger house bathroom. ‘It meant losing a



This room is created from two smaller ones – the house bathroom and another bedroom. Zoffany Aqua walls draw the eyes round the room and contrast well with the limestone floor. Cole and Son Orchid wallpaper Limestone from About Stone. All the fittings, including the cabinets and mirrors, are from Bathstore

bedroom but we still had plenty of space,' said Emma. 'This is a big, family house and we wanted a large practical bathroom, not for it to be an afterthought in a corner.'

Emma and Andy liked the idea of combining the period features with a modern interior, with the emphasis on wallpapers, fabrics and tactile furniture.

'We wanted to respect the age of the house while giving it a contemporary twist,' said Emma. 'We both love soft greys, which are very neutral and surprisingly warm, and taupe which are flexible and slightly more masculine. To prevent it becoming boring, we've introduced big splashes of colour in feature walls and a few bold pieces of furniture. I think you have to be a bit restrained otherwise it becomes difficult to live with.'

Emma and Andy stripped all the wallpaper themselves and painted the first base coat before employing a decorator to put up new paper and paint throughout. 'We didn't want to rush anything and make mistakes,' said Emma. 'Although we used a lot of our old furniture we still had to buy new pieces because the rooms are so big.'

Some of the ceilings are 13ft high so Emma and Andy reinstated the picture rails to lower the eye-line and create balance in the rooms. 'It was important to get the balance of furniture right, too. If we had bought small pieces they

would have looked completely wrong and out of proportion,' said Emma. 'We try to choose things of good quality so that they will last, without looking dated. We save up for things as we go along and don't buy anything until we can afford it. It's worth waiting to get exactly what you want.'

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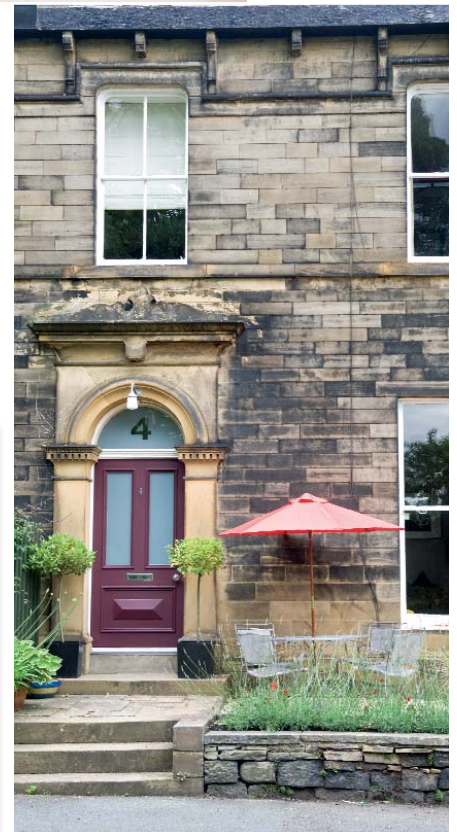
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The Gordon family home in Halifax



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