



Homes

Thinking outside the box

An innovative kitchen extension isn't the only quirky addition to this family home, says Kate Jacobs. Pictures by Rachael Smith

Anna Rentoul and Will White livened up their modern kitchen extension with a blown-up antique map of London (from printedspace.com), while Rentoul designed and assembled the dining table herself. Right: a contemporary Jeremy Cole ceiling light provides contrast to the heirloom furniture in the living room

The kitchen is firmly established as the hub of the modern home, so it's hardly surprising that we want to make them bigger, giving us more space in which to eat and hang out. Kitchen extensions, with their ubiquitous fold-back windows and seamless links to the garden, have become the must-have home improvement, and are unlikely to fall out of fashion any time soon, given the extra light and space they bring to a home. However, these bright, white boxes can jar with the main house, which is often much older, and end up looking a bit dull. Anna Rentoul, however, was determined it didn't have to be that way.

It helps if you have an interest in design. Rentoul, who lives in north London with husband Will White and their two daughters, is a lawyer, but she recently left her job and is looking forward to spending more time pursuing her passion.

She's got her own style mapped out and likes a calming, neutral palette with pops of bright colour, lots of warm wood, furniture with some history and a mix of eras and styles. But, for all her confidence, she knew that the most important part of the project was to hire the right architect. Based on »



In the bedroom (below), invisible bookshelves (from Amazon) help create blocks of colour on the wall. The velvet chair is an eBay find.

In the study (right), Rentoul added dramatic Fornasetti wallpaper (1) and a giant Anglepoise lamp. Below: the jukebox bought for a previous home



RACHAEL SMITH FOR THE GUARDIAN (3)

the recommendation of friends, she chose Martyn Clarke, who has completed several similar residential projects, and was also open to new ideas.

“It was a great collaboration,” Rentoul says, “because although Martyn has his own vision, he knew I was interested, and he was very willing for me to have input. He guided us through the process and oversaw the whole thing. I came into my own when we started on the interiors and finishes.”

Clarke is similarly effusive: “She has been a really good client who had quite a few quirky suggestions, and I just ran with it all.”

The house, in a corner of Queen’s Park, had been carved up into three flats, but Rentoul had no problem envisaging its potential and pounced as soon as it came on to the market, completing the sale before her husband had even seen it. There was major work to be done throughout, from increasing the height of the loft (to create a guest suite for frequently visiting grandparents) to knocking together the two reception rooms into one generous living space. This room is five feet higher than the extended kitchen, so it was a challenge for Clarke to link the

two. As well as steps from the hall, he came up with a glass-balconied opening to the kitchen, which can be cleverly closed off by a concealed door when cooking smells or piano noise need to be contained.

The place had lost a lot of its grandiose Victorian features during its time as flats, but Clarke and Rentoul turned this into a positive, making the house a better match for its streamlined new extension. Other touches, too, help unify the two spaces: warm wooden parquet floors in the living room are matched by oak surfaces in the kitchen and dining areas, while cheerful bursts of red, purple and turquoise - used against greys and whites - abound throughout the revamped home.

Likewise, vintage pieces are mixed with contemporary ones in all the rooms, for instance a modern Jeremy Cole light with the heirloom furniture in the living room, and reclaimed industrial lighting over the slick kitchen units. “I enjoy vintage objects,” Rentoul says. “They’re intrinsically more interesting, because they have a past and their own story to tell.” Unsurprisingly, Oxfam vintage homeware is a favourite hunting ground.



House rules

Favourite piece of furniture? The kitchen table, because I designed and assembled it myself and it’s where we get together with family and friends.

Favourite home scent?

Sleepy child.

Biggest extravagance?

The Quooker Fusion boiling water tap in the kitchen. It took me ages to track down one with a streamlined design.

Dream home?

If not here, somewhere rugged and coastal.

Design heroes?

Barnaba Fornasetti; his Balaclava chair is top of my wish list.

Bold Fornasetti wallpapers (from cole-and-son.com) add interest in unexpected places such as the master bathroom and study - “There’s something witty about Fornasetti that appeals to me,” Rentoul says - but the real scene-stealer is the map wall in the kitchen. They’d originally planned to have a plain glass splashback, but then Rentoul had the idea of enlivening the vast area with a design from Printed Space. The resulting 1891 map of London includes the spot where the house stands - at the time fields - and Rentoul says the family now find it “endlessly interesting; the fonts, the beauty of the cartography. People come and just gaze at it.”

Unsurprisingly, given their new living space, socialising is a big part of family life: “We love having people over for weekend lunches,” Rentoul says, “but we’re lazy cooks and rely on the Queen’s Park farmers’ market, so we can enjoy the company and not get stressed by cooking.

“From a design point of view, I thought very hard about pulling the house together - when we sit here with family and friends, I feel like it’s really paid off.” ●