

A BIT ABOUT US

OUR NAMES: Tracey and Amiya Kagalwala, both 32, and our son Rio, one
OUR JOBS: I'm a Research Nurse in a London hospital and Amiya is a Senior Consultant [same place?]
OUR HOME: A Victorian three-bedroom cottage in northwest London



Three into one does go – this cottage was once three small dwellings

Our home was a team effort

With a little help from their friends, Tracey and Amiya Kagalwala completely transformed a Victorian cottage in northwest London, just in time for the arrival of baby Rio

THREE YEARS AGO, Amiya and Tracey Kagalwala decided to sell their two-bedroom flat in northwest London and rent a property while they searched for a house in the same vicinity, but with better access to transport. 'We wanted to make the commute to work a bit easier, and be closer to the Jubilee underground line, and near the M1 and A1,' explains Amiya.

'We rented a small cottage for several months before we noticed the cottage four doors away was for sale. We weren't looking for a renovation project but we fell in love with it. It had a stable door, lots of original sash windows, and the whole place was flooded with light.'

The property was built around 1850, originally as three workers cottages. These were later knocked through from three to two,

then eventually into just one property. The interior hadn't been touched for years, but the Kagalwalas could see its potential. Although they only had four months before their tenancy expired, the couple decided to take the plunge. Then, just a few weeks after buying the property, they discovered they were expecting a baby, so the pressure was really on.

The couple enlisted the help of their friend Jason [builder? DIY-er?], and the trio spent three weeks gutting the house whenever they weren't at work. 'Our first task was to demolish the large brick fireplace that was in an awkward spot in the middle of the living room,' explains Amiya. 'The fireplace divided the space and made the room look dark.'

The Kagalwalas called in an experienced team of builders who removed over three tonnes of brickwork. They also made sure the



Soft duck-egg-blue furniture combined with walls in Pebble and ceiling in Linen paint by Zoffany makes the living area feel calm and relaxed. To maximise the sense of space and avoid drawing attention to the low ceiling, the couple installed recessed lighting throughout the ground floor



Two steps separate the open-plan dining area from the living room. Voiles at the window allow plenty of light to flood in, while a retro-style dining table and eclectic mix of chairs add to the informal atmosphere

'I can remember standing amid the rubble and crumbling walls, and just feeling incredibly tearful'



Modern materials such as stainless steel and frosted glass are offset by white gloss units in the kitchen. The units, worktop, splashback and appliances all came from Kitchen Central



A built-in bookcase with cupboard provides useful storage, while the Pembridge Duck Egg two-seater sofa by Laura Ashley offers comfy seating

original chimney stack was supported and restructured the adjoining walls, floor and ceiling. 'As we live in a conservation area, we had to keep the chimney on the roof, so we needed to stabilise the chimney stack with a support framework,' explains Amiya.

Thousands of bricks later, the house was full of rubble and dust, and there was a gaping hole right through the middle of the house from top to bottom. 'I remember standing amid the rubble and crumbling walls and just feeling incredibly tearful,' recalls Tracey.

The couple's tenancy expired a month before the renovation work was due to be completed, so they moved in with Amiya's parents, who live nearby. 'Every evening and

weekend after work, Amiya helped with the building work - he even had a go at plastering after going on a crash course,' says Tracey. 'Gradually the walls, flooring and ceiling went up, the walls were freshly plastered, and at last we could see our home coming together.' During the final months of the project, Amiya hired an extra team of building subcontractors in a final push to get the kitchen, bathroom and living room fireplace installed.

The couple made some crucial changes to the cottage's layout, as the galley-style kitchen to the front of the house didn't offer enough space for wall units. 'There were four large windows, and the stable door to consider,' explains Amiya. 'It seemed more practical to

move the kitchen to the rear of the house, where the XXXXXXXXX had been previously.'

In doing so, the Kagalwalas have created an L-shaped open-plan living, dining and kitchen space, which means they can easily prepare meals and talk to their guests at the same time. 'We didn't just want the kitchen to look good - it had to work for us and be functional. We worked closely with the kitchen designers looking for ways to maximise the space,' says Tracey. 'The plans included raising the walnut units off the floor, adding a 10cm-thick solid wood worktop and a stainless-steel splashback. We also opted for extra-wide appliances including the oven and American-style fridge-freezer. Using long rectangular

BEHIND THE SCENES

TELL US YOUR FIRST THOUGHTS ABOUT THE COTTAGE...

'When we first viewed it, nobody had lived here for a while, and it was in a state of disrepair,' says XXXXXX. 'However, it's on one of the prettiest roads in the area, and we were drawn to its original features such as the sash windows and stable door leading to the courtyard. We had a really romantic vision of doing the place up.'



ANY INDECISIONS?

'We didn't know what to do with the pine staircase, which had just an old-fashioned handrail on one side. We wanted to close in the stairs for safety reasons as we had a baby on the way, so our carpenter put in new balustrades and a rail where there wasn't one. He also boxed in the dead space under the stairs to create a cabinet for our TV. Painting the banisters to match the walls made the living space feel larger, and we're thrilled with the result.'

WHAT'S NEXT ON THE AGENDA?

'As our needs as a family are changing rapidly, we would like to transform the former kitchen - now a utility room - into a separate dining room. It would be lovely to sit in there with the stable door open and look out on to the courtyard.'

The fireplace from Amazing Grates is complemented by a large mirror, which also helps to make the space feel bigger and brighter



The couple had the main bedroom's rotten windows restored by The Classic Window Company, and painted the walls in soothing Duck Egg Blue by Zoffany. With a French-style mahogany bed by And So To Bed and simple framed floral print, the room looks elegant and sophisticated



‘We hosted a painting party for 28 friends – they were brilliant and made sure everything was absolutely perfect’

stainless-steel handles accentuates the feeling of space, too.’ By combining modern aspects with the more traditional features of the house, the couple have created a warm and family-oriented space full of character. ‘We wanted to achieve balance with modern materials in a traditional home,’ adds Tracey.

This mix of styles was equally successful in the bathroom, where the couple combined a traditional roll-top bath and Victorian-style fittings in keeping with the character of the house with a modern shower enclosure.

At last the time came when the Kagalwalas could start thinking about colour schemes and how they would furnish their home. ‘We chose the colours and shades carefully to

help maximise the feeling of space and make the cottage look comfortable and inviting,’ says Amiya. When the paint choices had been finalised, the couple called in their friends to help them get the painting done in double-quick time.

‘We hosted a painting party with 28 members of my martial-arts class,’ recalls Amiya. ‘With so many people to organise, Tracey took on the role of supervisor – her job was to make sure the right paint went on the right walls and that all the paint trays were constantly topped up.’ The couple made mountains of sandwiches and provided dozens of bags of crisps and hundreds of cans of soft drinks to fuel their friends over

The colourful border and lemon drapes give a warm glow to Rio’s nursery. The furniture is from Mamas & Papas and Mothercare





The couple mixed styles, going for a modern shower with a traditional suite

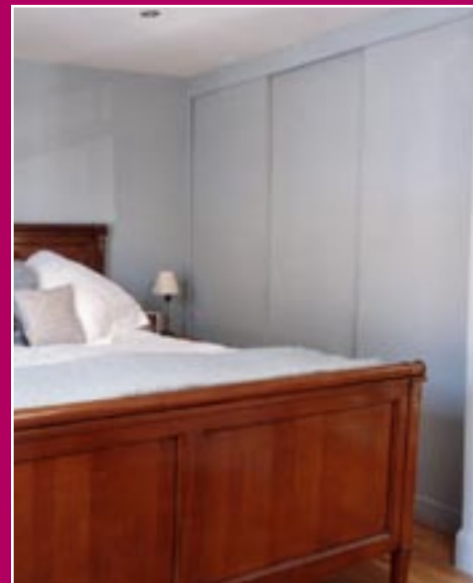
A period-style suite from Bathstore.com gives the bathroom character. The couple painted the walls in Chamois from Zoffany and added warmth with a few peach-coloured and wood accessories

the course of one weekend. 'Everyone was brilliant and really took the time and trouble to make sure everything was absolutely perfect. Thanks to my friends, the house was finally ready,' says Amiya.

The Kagalwalas moved into their cottage in late August and put the finishing touches to the rooms, finishing with just a couple of weeks to spare before baby Rio arrived. Now the family can't wait to have their second Christmas in the cottage. 'Our neighbours are so friendly and everyone in the road gets into the spirit by displaying festive wreaths on their door and decorating their homes,' says XXXXXXX. 'You can even hear the church bells ring at the bottom of the road on Christmas morning!'



IDEAS TO STEAL



Work out what you can do yourself

Decide whether it's more important to save money by doing work yourself or to keep the project on track by calling in professionals. 'There were jobs we undertook that a professional would have done in half the time,' admits Tracey. If attempting to save money pushes your schedules out, you may end up paying more in the long run. Project-managing a renovation is a big task, and employing a project manager – as Tracey and Amiya did – can save you time and money.

Make small spaces appear larger

The less fussy your decor is in terms of pattern and colour, the more spacious your interior will appear. Anything that breaks up the flow of a surface draws more attention to it and makes the area seem busy or cluttered. For this reason, the Kagalwalas painted the wardrobe doors in the main bedroom the same colour as the walls – choosing curtains that match the walls would have the same effect. In the kitchen and bathroom, tiling has been kept to a minimum to maximise the feeling of space.

Do your research

- Read a guide to restoring a home like *Restored To Glory* by Sally Bevan and Charlie Luxton (£18.99, BBC Books). It has chapters on finance and project management as well as an in-depth look at building materials.
- Join The Listed Property Owners Club (www.lpoc.co.uk), which offers advice to owners of these buildings on legal and maintenance matters. It can also advise about grants and VAT.
- Visit www.periodproperty.co.uk, a useful resource for anyone with an interest in period properties. You can buy materials on-line, obtain details of specialists, read articles by experts on renovating or ask for advice.

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