

Starting over

A couple who put their extension plans on hold for a decade expanded their brief to a much bolder statement – and it was all worth the wait

WORDS JANE CRITTENDEN | PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES FRENCH | STYLING MARISHA TAYLOR



DINING AREA

The couple love to entertain and this substantial table fits the bill for large gatherings. Try reclaimed elm extending dining table, Horizon & Stone. Oak & More's Keswick grey velvet chairs are similar. Golden Tree chandelier, Nyra London



Clare and Dan Chester walked into this Victorian house back in 2008 and were blown away by the high ceilings, spacious rooms and period details – but not the dark kitchen at the back. Straightaway, they went looking for an architect and builder to discuss extending and spoke to Life Size Architecture and Woodmans Construction. 'A utility room blocked the light coming into the kitchen,' says Dan. 'We were going to replace it with a glazed oak conservatory and extend to the side, but when Clare became pregnant, we pressed pause on the project.'

In the meantime, the couple painted everywhere white and laid new carpets. Fast forward to the pandemic when Clare and Dan – along with daughters, Lauren, now 16, and Georgie, 13 – had begun to notice how tired the property had become. They considered what they wanted from the kitchen and living areas and got back in touch with the architect and builder to discuss a much bigger entertaining space.

'We love hosting,' says Clare. 'I'd been looking at house projects in magazines and loved the idea of an L-shaped glazed extension, obviously different from the Victorian architecture and we loved Life Size Architecture's design.'

The couple were still keen for a side extension to house a utility-boot room and second kitchen. There was also talk of building an indoor-outdoor kitchen on the garage footprint, but Clare had strong reasons to convert the building instead. 'Wisteria winds up and over the roof and has been there for



KITCHEN

'I love the modern take on Shaker units, the block of colour on the island and the gold handles,' says Clare. Island in Studio Green, Farrow & Ball. Keira bar stools, Danetti. Kitchen design, Wrights Joinery. Extension, Life Size Architecture. Build, Woodmans Construction

HOME TRUTHS

THE PROPERTY

A detached, Victorian, double-fronted house, built in 1882

ROOMS Sitting room, snug, kitchen-diner/living area, boot room/utility room, cloakroom, five bedrooms, four bathrooms

LOCATION
East Sussex



SITTING ROOM

'Double pocket doors were an idea we'd seen and liked in American houses,' says Clare. 'They allow an open feel but they can also be closed off when we need them to be.' Norfolk sofa in Pumice velvet, Swoon, is similar. Walls in Slaked Lime (top) and Slaked Lime Mid (below), Little Greene. Mirror, Louise Bradley

'IT WAS IMPORTANT WE RETAIN THE ORIGINAL PERIOD FEATURES AND TRANSITION SMOOTHLY TO THE MODERN EXTENSION'



thirty-odd years and I couldn't bear for it to be hacked off,' she says. 'Woodmans Construction found a way to keep the building and now it's a games room for the girls.'

Before the build started, Dan made an impulsive decision to use another contractor to replace the roof, which seemed to go well until he popped back three months later. 'The build project was in full swing by then and nobody had needed to go upstairs at that point,' he recalls. 'I went to collect something from Georgie's bedroom and discovered the roof had collapsed – in fact all the upstairs rooms were a mess. My mistake meant we had to replaster, replace all the original period features and have the whole roof done again.'

When it came to the interiors, after the busy years of bringing up children, Clare and Dan found themselves leaning towards calm, neutral tones. 'I was inspired by the interiors @hemptonhouse because her home is a similar era with high ceilings and big spaces,' says Clare. 'This was how I chose the wall colour, which I love for its warmth, and we've used throughout in variations of the mid and light tones.'

When the renovations were finished, Clare and Dan brought the girls to have a look one morning before school. 'They were delighted,' says Clare. 'We're all delighted. Dan and I are so glad we waited to do the project because the girls really appreciate the changes, too. We've hosted Christmas and New Year and summer barbecues – we're living in an amazing upgrade on a house we already loved.' 🍷



MAIN BEDROOM
 'The curtain fabric is a plain grey because with high ceilings I didn't want bold colour or pattern to dominate,' says Clare. Curtains, made by Louise @relovestuff. 5 Light satin nickel chandelier, Lighting Styles. Rhea Rose velvet linen blend cushion, Inside Story, is similar

HALLWAY
 Glazed doors lead to the kitchen. 'I liked the idea of opening the front door and seeing all the way through to the garden,' says Dan. Grande 8 lantern, Tiffany Lighting Direct. ITC Chablis in Stone carpet, Harmony Carpets. V4 White Smoked oak floor, The Wood Gallery

MAIN EN SUITE
 Knocking through to an adjoining bathroom and going back to the original high ceiling created a large space with room for a bath and walk-in shower. Moritz free-standing stone bath, Lusso. Bathroom layout, Life Size Architecture. Calacatta marble tiles, Doga Stone



'PLACING THE BATH CENTRAL IN THE ROOM MADE WAY FOR A LUXURIOUS WALK-IN SHOWER BEHIND IT'