

Peace at last

It's hard to believe that Emma Dahlman's stunning and serene home was once a group of run-down bedsits – a smart renovation and aesthetic changed all that

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LIVING AREA

This is in the extension. 'The concrete looks stone-like alongside the wood and greenery outside,' says Emma.

Extension design, Bindloss Dawes.
CH25 chair, Skandium

'I love using textural materials that age beautifully and don't look worn but simply lived in'

HOME TRUTHS

THE PROPERTY

Detached Victorian house

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

LOCATION East London

DINING AREA
'The tapestry below the roof window perfectly catches the daylight,' says Emma. Wall hanging, Cappelen Dimyr. CH36 chairs and CH327 table, Nest

KITCHEN
Sawn oak cupboards tie in with the exposed oak ceiling, while quartz worktops match the raw concrete. Kitchen, Reform; design by Norm Architects. Swivel bar stools, Hay at Made in Design

Emma Dahlman and her husband, Nick Illston, bought a run-down property in London that had been divided into bedsits. They intended to turn the building back into a house and sell on, however things changed once they got started.

'We began clearing the overgrown garden and became emotionally invested really quickly,' says Emma, an interior designer who runs Still Life Story. 'We loved the outdoor space, the double-fronted exterior and large rooms. Then when we saw the architect's drawings for the contemporary rear extension, we thought: yes, we really want to stay here.'

The couple, who have a teenage son and daughter, hadn't taken on a house project of this scale before but grabbed the opportunity during the second lockdown when they weren't working. Emma, previously a visual

merchandiser, had the interior design expertise; Nick, with a background in media, was keen to work alongside a builder and learn new skills.

Emma and Nick converted the loft to create a bedroom suite for themselves. They gutted the house, turning two kitchens on the first floor into bathrooms for the four bedrooms. However, the outrigger building at the back on the ground floor blocked the view and access to the wide garden, and the rear facade was subsiding too. The couple put together a design brief for an extension with key materials of concrete, oak and greenery.

'We wanted the design to be juxtaposed to the Victorian house with an element of surprise,' says Emma. 'We were inspired by tropical brutalism design and Nordic contemporary architecture. The





MAIN BEDROOM
‘I wanted a simple serene space, no clutter, and the leather headboard is a look I saw in a hotel,’ says Emma. Headboard, Ilva. Dalby oak bedside table, Jysk. Svejk 13 wall lamps, Nordic Nest



OFFICE
‘The vintage desk has a brutalist look that appealed to me,’ says Emma. Similar desks are available at 1stDibs. Wall in Portland Stone, Little Greene. Bosco Green leather swivel chair, Vipp

work of architect studio Bindloss Dawes resonated after we saw their projects online and when we met George Dawes we clicked.’

George designed a distinct cruciform concrete structure at the heart of the 40sq m extension, creating the essential structural support for the house as well as a bold interior aesthetic.

‘It’s a grand old house and the extension needed to be on the same scale,’ he explains. ‘With raw concrete columns, a smooth polished concrete floor and an exposed planed oak ceiling, the structure became the guiding principle.’

Emma, from Sweden, naturally leans into a Nordic palette. ‘I’m inspired by nature and the concrete looks stone-like alongside natural wood and leafy green plants,’ she says. ‘I prioritised texture over colour and

chose a sawn oak kitchen and smooth worktops, and all the wood furniture is oiled rather than varnished.’

Furniture is a mix of 1960s to 1980s and Nordic designs, with visits back to Sweden an opportunity to fill the car with affordable high-street homeware brands and vintage pieces. A muted colour palette highlights elegant period details in the restored property as well as architectural lines in the new extension. Continuity in door handles, light switches and taps also draw the two parts together.

‘Unvarnished taps and stained copper handles look lovelier as they patina. I love the textural elements, they feel like home,’ says Emma. ‘The house continues to evolve the longer we’re here and fill rooms with things we love. We’re really happy living here.’ stilllifefory.com; bindlossdawes.com



MAIN EN SUITE
Lime paint gives the walls and ceiling a textured finish and the oak vanity is Emma’s design, made by Nick. Limewash paint, Bauwerk. Kwarto oak vanity is similar, Tikamoon. Blanco Pond mirror, Ferm Living