



I've created a home to last'

Nicola Kotkis has used a timeless neutral palette in her extended north London home that's perfect for flexible family living

Words JANE CRITTENDEN Styling MARISHA TAYLOR Photographer JAMES FRENCH

Kitchen With a matt white Glotech kitchen already installed, Nicola updated the look with Loaf's Cowbell pendants, wooden bar stools from Eastburn Country Furniture and a striped antique cupboard she found at Kempton Market. 'Bringing in rustic wood furniture as a contrast to the contemporary white kitchen really appealed to me,' she says

Dining area >

A pair of Crittall-style mirrors from Laura Ashley create a window-like effect in the room. 'I needed big pieces to fill this wall,' says Nicola, 'and I love the symmetry with the glass-fronted antique dressers on either side, where I display my lovely glassware and vases.'



Step inside...

Meet the owners

Interior designer Nicola Kotkis lives here with her husband Ilan, a solicitor, and children Livia, 8, Gideon and Ezra, both 5

House details

A five-bedroom 1930s semi, extended at the rear and into the loft, in Mill Hill, north London

Facts & figures

The couple bought the property for £1m in 2018; it's currently valued at £1.2m



Jumping at the chance to buy an already extended property without the upheaval of any major building work, Nicola Kotkis and husband Ilan knew straight away this house was ideal for their family of five. A step-up from their previous four-bed developer home, it was the six-metre rear extension and converted loft that caught Nicola's eye; plus, the garage to the side had been changed into an office and utility room. 'I was super excited,' she recalls. 'I really didn't want to take

on a renovation, and with a good layout already in place, it meant we could invest our time and money on making it look pretty and functional for us.'

From the first moment Nicola walked in, she had firm ideas of how she wanted her new home to operate. 'I really liked the flexibility in the space,' she says. 'The downstairs office is where I work with my business partner, Lisa, and is also the craft room for the kids. Our living room doubles as a playroom and we built a big

cupboard to hide the toys. I turned one of the bedrooms into Ilan's office and our twins share the loft bedroom. We're lucky to have a guest bedroom as well – or the boys can choose to have a room each later on.'

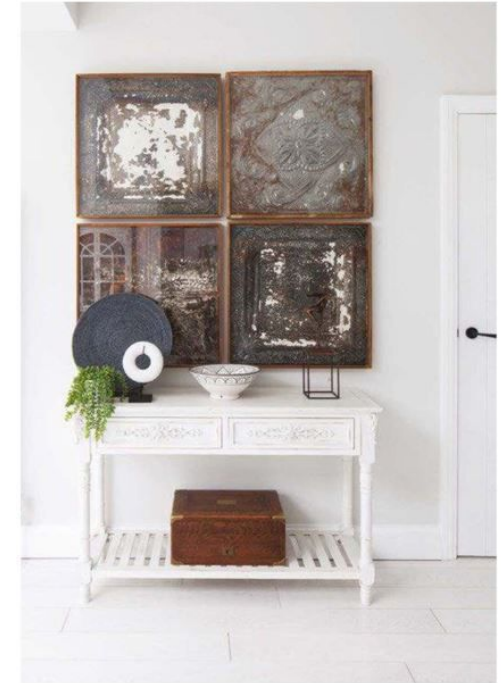
The large extension has enough combined space for entertaining, cooking and relaxing – and can also be opened up to the front living room by sliding back the double doors. However, there was plenty of work to do to bring the house >



'I avoid neutrals looking flat by adding texture with a mix of fabrics'



Snug Stylish sliding barn doors between the front living room and rear snug create a flexible space for when the couple are entertaining, with the same flooring and colour palette throughout to unify the zones. Nicola has used tactile, tonal greys, including linen chairs from Homesense and a large rug from West Elm



▲ *Design details* Nicola framed four pressed-steel ceiling panels, from an antiques warehouse in South Africa, to make a one-off wall display above the white console table. 'It's nice to have pieces you know you won't see in someone else's house,' she says

up to scratch. 'We had to use some imagination,' explains Nicola. 'Downstairs wasn't too bad and, fortunately, the white kitchen was in my style, as I couldn't have justified ripping out units that were still fairly new. Upstairs, however, was a different story.'

All the bedrooms looked tired so between them, Nicola and Lisa put together mood boards for each of the rooms in the same way they do for clients. Nicola has always been drawn to a classic, neutral palette: 'It's the flip side of my job - many of the projects we work on are so much more colourful than my own home,' she says. 'For me, neutrals are calming, clean and won't date, plus they adapt easily in the different living spaces.'

Earthy tones and natural materials with splashes of brighter shades remind Nicola and husband Ian of their native South Africa. Returning to visit family regularly, Nicola always brings something back for the house: a colourful wire-bead rhino head and framed ▶



▲ *Metallic accents* A gold chair topped with a faux-fur throw, both from Graham & Green, and an embossed metal planter add a contemporary edge to the more rustic wicker and wooden accessories in the living room

woven baskets are just some of her finds. 'At work I like to build a design idea from something personal our clients love, and I've done the same in my home,' she explains. 'I always go to the markets when I'm back in South Africa. Local people are very creative and sell repurposed homewares and things they've made using beadwork or indigenous fabrics. It's lovely to support their work and have pieces in our house that you wouldn't see everywhere else – they remind us of home and make great conversation pieces.'

'The couple got to work on their project as soon as they moved in, focusing on the upstairs first, and replacing the carpets with a soft washed wood laminate flooring for durability. As this is a family home, a lot of my decisions were led by practicality, so everything has to work for the children, too,' says Nicola. 'The laminate planks can take lots of wear and tear! ▶



▼ *Living room* Botanical green cushions and a blue rug from Homesense infuse colour into the neutral space, together with an unusual wall display made up of a repurposed piece of old door from South Africa, which Nicola has teamed with framed African straw pot holders

Bedroom Farrow & Ball's Ammonite sets the tone in the master bedroom, to which Nicola has added dusky pink accessories, like a raspberry cushion and pink throw from John Lewis & Partners, for depth. Olson glass cloche wall lights from Heal's provide the finishing touch above bedside tables sourced in India



▲ *Bathroom.* A simple warm taupe scheme has been easy to live with while the rest of the house took priority. Nicola has used plants to soften the large format tiles, adding an embossed stool she bought from Portobello Road Market in Notting Hill

Nicola and Ian had planned to update the bathrooms in due course, but an unexpected leak in the master en suite meant they needed to tackle the rooms sooner than expected. 'I had to choose everything in a bit of a rush,' recalls Nicola. 'But fortunately, I had good contacts with suppliers through work, who were able to turn things around quite quickly.'

As downstairs already had white wood-effect flooring throughout, which provided a blank canvas in the extension alongside the white kitchen, Nicola added contrast with wood, bringing a dining table and two dressers from her previous home and buying new chairs and bar stools. She was savvy with her shopping, scouring antique fairs like Kempton Market, and finding a company in Yorkshire that sold the bar stools she liked. 'It's always important to shop around to find unusual pieces,' she says. 'I didn't want my house to look like a show home!'

Small changes have made all the difference. As well as new door handles, Nicola swapped the chrome pendants above the kitchen ►

EASY PROJECT
With the low ceiling, painting the whole wall of the twins' loft bedroom in navy would have looked too dark and oppressive, so Nicola used it on just the lower half. Visit dulux.com for a guide on how to paint a two-tone wall in six easy steps



▲ *Twins' bedroom.* Nicola has dressed Gideon and Ezra's loft bedroom with chequered bedlinen from The White Company, and used a grey locker (try Wayfair for similar) for storing toys

Guest bedroom

Nicola took the pinks and greens in the Graham & Green framed prints and added cushions from Fenwick and an Amara throw in the same colourway to add texture and depth



island for bubble glass designs, and put in LED lights to improve the ambience of the rooms. And meticulous planning meant the transformation of the couple's house was completed in less than six months.

'Decorating throughout has made the whole house feel so fresh and new,' says Nicola. 'It's lovely having the best of both worlds – the shared downstairs space as well as separate rooms for specific activities. We know it's a house that will last us a very long time.'

'The beauty of a neutral scheme is that a small pop of colour can lift a room, and is easily changed'

Livia's bedroom

Nicola picked out a pink hue in this pretty Archive Anthology Hummingbird wallpaper from Cole & Son, and had a local paint shop colour-match it. 'I saw the wallpaper in a shop years before I had the children,' recalls Nicola. 'And I thought if I have a girl one day, this will be the wallpaper I use in her room!' The multi-drawer bedside table from Maisons du Monde and birdcage lampshade from Lampandlight complement the scheme perfectly



Good choice

Luxury touch



Industrial curved top window mirror £150 Cox & Cox



Tall raised gold planter £55 Amara



Moritz gold metal planter on stand £84 Artisanti



Malory mirror £360 Laura Ashley



Nicola's

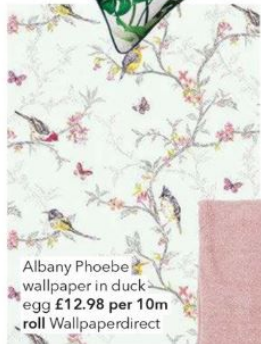
STYLE STEAL



Tropik tropical cushion cover £12 Cushoo



Monstera pattern cushion £24.95 Junique



Albany Phoebe wallpaper in duck egg £12.98 per 10m roll Wallpaperdirect



Tori duck egg wallpaper £60 per 10m roll Graham & Brown



Pink chenille throw £14 George Home



Relaxed country Florence throw in pink £25 John Lewis & Partners



Finlay double bed with storage in Persian grey £549 Made.com



Daisy double upholstered divan bed in Whisper rich velvet £975 Button & Sprung

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