

| IDEAS HOME |

ART OF Africa

SMALL
SPACE
SPECIAL

A WARM SCHEME INFUSED WITH TACTILE TEXTURES SHOWCASES SARAH AND FRANK ALEM'S CURATION OF ART AND FURNISHINGS THAT CELEBRATE THEIR AFRICAN HERITAGES



Living room

'I looked for furniture with an African feel and the dark-wood stool caught my eye,' says Sarah. 'As did the chunky coffee table in an earthy mottled brown.'

BUY THE KEY PIECES

Gear coffee table, £550, Norr11 at Nunido. Try Oreus mango wood side table, £350; Omega washed-linen cushion, £15, both La Redoute. Try Unicef UK Shop for similar African masks

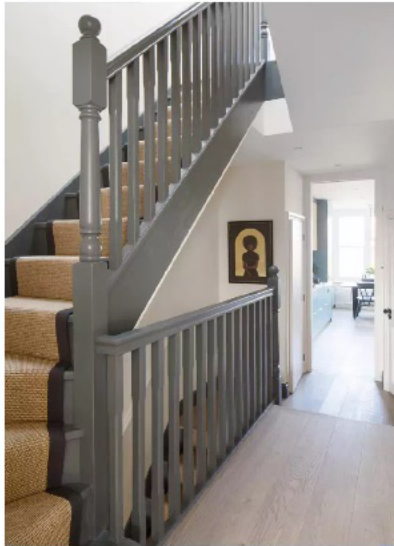


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'My decorating mood boards were **INSPIRED** by the colours of the **LANDSCAPE** we saw on safari in **KENYA**. And I'm always drawn to African **HANDICRAFTS**; they're beautiful and personal

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SARAH ALEM,
HOMEOWNER



HOME NOTES

WHO LIVES HERE?

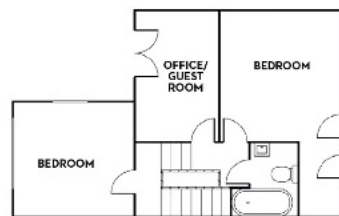
Sarah Alem, a doctor, lives here with her husband Frank, a marketing consultant, and their children, Ann, 16, and Abou, 13.

THE PROPERTY

A four-bedroom maisonette on the first and second floors of a Victorian terraced house in west London.

THE LAYOUT

The front door leads upstairs to the maisonette with a kitchen-diner at the back and a shower room. Up a step is the main bedroom and the living room that faces the street. More stairs lead to the top-floor loft conversion which has two bedrooms, an office/guest room and a bathroom.



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

Sixteen years after moving into their maisonette on the top floor of a Victorian house in London, Sarah Alem and her husband Frank decided to gut the tired and cramped interior to make better use of the space. And, as the project progressed, the couple began to revive their passion for African art and furnishings within a complementary colour scheme.

WHAT FIRST DREW YOU TO THE PROPERTY?

'We moved from our one-bedroom flat in Brixton when I was pregnant with Ann, who is now 16, as I wanted to live nearer my mum in west London. A school friend had told me about a two-bedroom flat that was for sale on her street. It fitted our budget and we liked the community feel of the area. Being on the first floor of a converted Victorian house, there was potential to convert the loft, which we did soon after Abou was born a few years later. With this conversion, we gained two extra bedrooms and a shower room, which was ideal for Ann and the au pair who we had living in with us at the time.'

WHEN DID YOU MAKE FURTHER CHANGES?

'The flat had become cluttered with our stuff and I had this idea of walking into a beautifully styled kitchen with a sociable dining table looking out onto the back garden. We also craved a bigger living room with comfortable seating. Unfortunately, for our original loft conversion we'd only been allowed to fit a small dormer. But when we discovered that a neighbour had received planning permission to extend their loft over the flat roof of the kitchen below, everything fell into place. We decided to make this new space Ann's bedroom, re-built the dormer and re-worked the layout of the original loft extension to fit in an office/guest room, create a bigger bedroom for Abou and add a bathroom. Our builder started work during the third lockdown. We moved into an Airbnb on our street thinking that it would take about six to eight months but, with the inevitable delays, it took a year.'

WHAT'S MADE THE PROJECT WORTHWHILE?

'I didn't want to go through all the effort and investment and not love the interiors so I asked my friend, Kay, who has a fantastic eye for design to help put my collection of thoughts into a coherent vision. Frank is Kenyan-English and my parents are from Ethiopia so our colour schemes have a warm, earthy African feel to reflect our heritage. The fun part was sourcing artwork and furnishings to represent who we are and where we come from. Each room feels like a designed space that's just for us – I love it all and have no regrets.'

“Our home has a **HIGH-DESIGN** look where everything **NEW** has a place and **PURPOSE**”

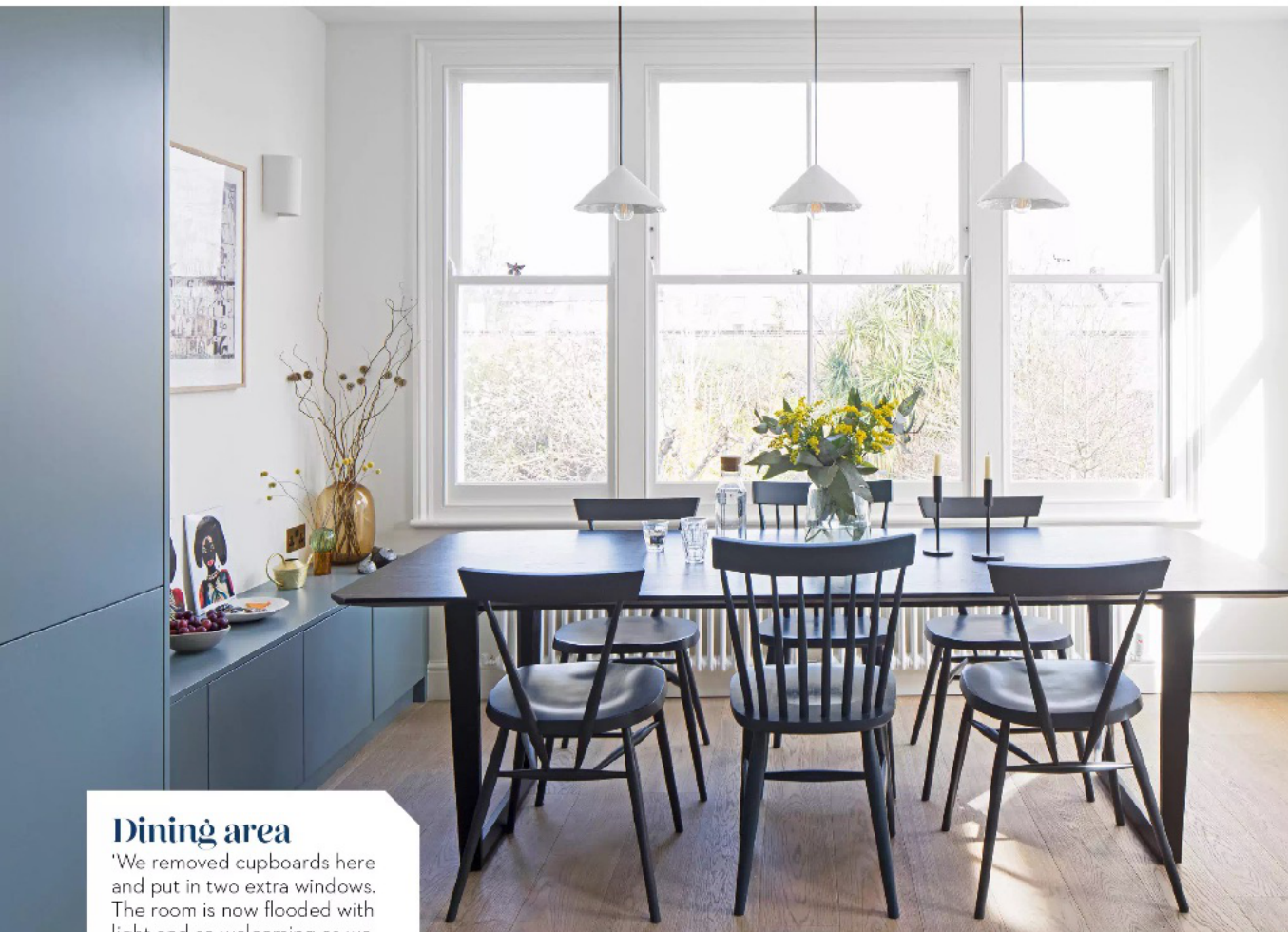


Living room

'Bespoke storage was high on my agenda,' says Sarah. 'The deep blue-grey of our units creates a lovely backdrop to the golden-brown sofa.'

BUY THE KEY PIECES

Units in Down Pipe estate eggshell, £77 for 2.5ltr, Farrow & Ball. Douglas three-seater sofa £2,899, British Design Shop. Try Ingrid cotton/jute in Sandstone, £29.99m, Ada & Ina Linen Fabrics.



Dining area

'We removed cupboards here and put in two extra windows. The room is now flooded with light and so welcoming as we come up the stairs,' says Sarah.

BUY THE KEY PIECES

Verge table in black walnut, from £1,340, Camerich. L Ercolani stacking chair in Black, £299, Heal's, is similar. Afromuses artwork tea towels by Chris Ofili, £50 set of two, House of Voltaire

“I'm drawn to a **CLEAN,** contemporary **LOOK** with warmth and **SIMPLICITY**”



For similar flooring, try Cashmere engineered European plank oak, £84.95sq m, Ted Todd



Try AM.PM Ivy chairs in Black, £260 for two, La Redoute



COHESIVE LOOK
Fluted oak panels work beautifully with the earthy mid-toned blue

Kitchen

'I loved the idea of oak doors and chose a fluted style to add texture and interest,' says Sarah. 'And the brass hardware details really elevate the look.'

BUY THE KEY PIECES

Cabinetry in De Nimes estate eggshell, £74 for 2.5ltr, Farrow & Ball. Milano oak panels, price on request, Surface Studio. Mercury brass handle, £9.95, Plank Hardware. Try Eternal quartz, £576sq m, Gemini Worktops

“I stepped out of my **COMFORT** zone and **EMBRACED** warm and **RELAXED** earth tones and a mix of **TEXTURES**”

SEAMLESS DESIGN

Bespoke joinery that fits around the bed maximises space in a modest room. Here, a niche shelf and wall lighting resolves the need for bedside tables

Main bedroom

'The pairing of the rust-brown velvet for the headboard and the pale-pink paintwork resonates with the colours of African landscapes,' says Sarah. 'I used the leftover brown velvet for the cushions in the living room, to link the spaces.'

BUY THE KEY PIECES

Walls in Desert Rose pure flat emulsion, £56.50 for 2.5ltr, Paint & Paper Library. Try Vintage velvet in Umber, £20.95sq m, Just Fabrics



Main bedroom

'We removed the chimney breast so we could put our bed in the alcove between the wardrobes,' says Sarah. 'The bed has plenty of storage beneath it, perfect for seasonal clothes and bed linen.'

BUY THE KEY PIECES

Mirage bed, from £1,730, Furl. Try Mudcloth cushion covers, £62, Mackenzie Bryant. Copenhagen wall light, £255, Holloways of Ludlow

Main bedroom

'The slimline chest of drawers was designed to fit the space by Forest Trade in Bulgaria; it looks beautiful and gives us all the storage we need,' says Sarah. 'I love to display our treasures on the top.'

BUY THE KEY PIECES

Drawers in London Clay estate eggshell, £74 for 2.5ltr, Farrow & Ball. Try Fine Edge mirror, £299, Heal's. Try Zaya basket, £125, Kane Home



FOCUS ON...

BESPOKE STORAGE

Follow Sarah and Frank's lead and choose made-to-measure cupboards for a streamlined, organised home

SKILLED EXPERTS

For a high-quality finish source a reputable cabinet maker or a carpenter who specialises in furniture making. Your builder is likely to have good contacts, or ask around for recommendations.

MAKING PLANS

Write a list of what you need to store in your furniture. This will help you select the right combination of drawers, cupboards and shelves, as well as internal fittings, such

as hanging rails for clothes or pull-out racks in the kitchen.

FITTED DESIGN

A streamlined floor-to-ceiling cupboard can resolve an awkward corner, maximise floor space and make a small room appear bigger.

MIX AND MATCH

Going bespoke means you can choose from a variety of woods and varnishes, smooth or profiled doors and any paint colour you want.

Ann's bedroom

'We gained an extra bedroom, with doors out to a balcony, by building over the kitchen,' says Sarah. 'Ann chose a decorating scheme of soft pinks and greens that will suit her for many years.'

BUY THE KEY PIECES

Walls in Dimity estate emulsion, £54.50 for 2.5ltr, Farrow & Ball. Try Washed linen in Avocado, £28m, The Cloth Shop

Ann's bedroom

'There was only one uninterrupted wall here for storage so I searched Pinterest for ideas and designed a bank of cupboards,' says Sarah. 'The shelf over Ann's bed is perfect for artwork and other treasures.'

BUY THE KEY PIECES

Try Beddy-Byes bed in Cucumber Sandwich clever velvet, £2,035, Loaf. Aureole wall sconce, from £99, Spark & Bell



The shower room has a luxurious feel. Luna basin in Sage Green, price on request, Kast

FEATURE JANE CRITTENDEN PHOTOGRAPHS JAMES FRENCH STYLING MARISHA TAYLOR PLANS RICHARD HOOKWAY



FUTURE PROOF
Choose furniture that won't date and will grow with your kids

Abou's bedroom

'We tucked Abou's bed into the corner so the reworked space felt more cosy,' says Sarah. 'He chose the green and grey colour scheme for himself.'

BUY THE KEY PIECES

Wardrobe in Mizzle; drawers in Beverly, both estate eggshell, £74 for 2.5ltr, Farrow & Ball. Khala wooden wall light, from £120, Spark & Bell

STYLE MUST-HAVES

INSPIRED BY SARAH & FRANK'S HOME

ARTISAN TEXTILES

Faleme African indigo cushion, £59, Lola & Maw



SUNBURST STYLE

Marelli Natural wall mirror, £89, Cuckooland

Style SAVER

TONAL TEXTURE
Juni handwoven rug, £149, Cult Furniture



SCULPTED WOOD

Figura acacia side table, £189, Swoon Editions

