

# 'Knocking down walls made this house flow'

Nicole and Lester Leviton created big, open spaces connected with a cohesive palette of greys and white – with a few surprises thrown in...

## Supersize sofa

'I fell in love with this sofa after sitting on it at my interior designer friend's house,' says Nicole. 'The wall painted in Farrow & Ball's Off Black warms the room and the yellow gives it a bit of life. I have my eye on a neon light for the dark wall and an industrial-style drinks trolley. They'll finish the room off.'

**BUY THE KEY PIECES** Hay Mags sofa, £3,885 (for a similar combination); Hay Yellow ottoman, £495, both Clippings

## Love NICOLE'S STYLE?

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## Stylist's Note

'Having one, big corner sofa instead of several smaller ones gives a contemporary, less cluttered look'

**Nicky Phillips,**  
Decorating Editor



## Welcome to my home



Nicole Leviton lives here with her husband, Lester, and their kids, Lili, 15, and Louie, 12. Nicole is a stay-at-home mum and Lester runs a property company.

### THE PROPERTY

A four-bedroom Fifties detached house in Bushey, Hertfordshire.

**THE VALUE** Bought for £965,000 in September 2015; now worth £1,500,000.

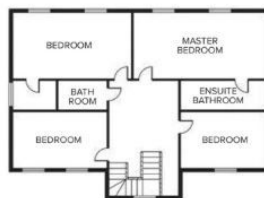
**“It’s taken two years to pull this house together, but it was worth the wait!”**



### Take a quick tour...



GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

Nicole and Lester played the long game to buy their house, after earmarking just three roads where they wanted to live, in a conservation area. The couple, who were born and bred there, liked the wide, detached houses and leapt into action when, after years of waiting, one came up for sale. ‘Our existing home was further out and I was fed up with getting in the car to go everywhere,’ says Nicole. ‘This house is near a bus stop and local shops.’

They dismissed the Seventies decor, tiny kitchen and cluttered floorplan, and visualised open spaces. They didn’t rush in: ‘We had to live there for a while, to get an understanding of the space,’ says Nicole. Being in a conservation area meant navigating a rigorous planning procedure to get permission for a double-storey rear extension. ‘Our goal was to create more downstairs space and have a big kitchen-living space at the back. Upstairs, we wanted four double bedrooms – two with en suites – so my sister and her family, who live abroad, could stay with us comfortably.’ However, permission for a loft conversion was refused. ‘We were prepared to compromise as the extension was more important.’

The extension was built with a 9m steel beam running across it, to give the family an open-plan space with no pillars obstructing it, and a contemporary concrete floor was poured throughout the entire ground floor. When the build was finished, Lester had a change of heart about the layout. ‘The architect’s drawings felt different when we stood in the physical space,’ says Nicole. ‘We ended up knocking down nearly all the internal walls and simplifying the layout to create a flow that worked better for us.’

The work took nine months – three months longer than anticipated – then Nicole got stuck into the interiors. ‘I like a modern look, but I’m not set on one style,’ she says. ‘We have touches of Scandi and industrial, and I’m obsessed with plants, so I have lots of greenery. The rooms are big and needed big furniture, and I liked the idea of decoration that added colour, pattern or texture. An interior designer friend, Nicola Harvey, was a great help. The house works so well for the whole family now. We’ve created all the space we needed and aren’t on top of each other anymore. Lester and I absolutely love coming home and can’t imagine living anywhere else.’

### Statement wall

‘The hallway was dark and cramped before. Now I love walking through the door,’ says Nicole. ‘The green tones came from the console and chair, then I found the wallpaper. It has a distressed finish with a 3D look.’

**BUY THE KEY PIECES** Sampson Shagreen console, £1,795, Andrew Martin. Seattle armchair, £655, Graham and Green. Safari wallpaper by Kiki Slaughter, £129 a roll, Feathr. Cushion, £39, West Elm



### Stylist’s Note

‘Pattern can be hard on the eye, but a faux surface effect like this creates a versatile, blurred backdrop’

**Michela Colling,**  
Style Editor



**Stylist's Note**

'Nicole's transparent acrylic furniture lets light flow, preserving this space's airy feel'

Michela Colling,  
Style Editor

**“We wanted the whole back of the house to be glass, opening out to the garden. The sliding doors separate off the TV den”**

**Polished plaster wall**

'This wall looked so bare, but this has an amazing texture and colour.' The feature wall zones this area as Nicole's home office, with its modular String shelving system.

**BUY THE KEY PIECES** Microcement polished plaster, £120sq m, Fabulous Finishes UK. String shelving system, from £44 per component, Utility Design

**Professional design**

'I'm a trained chef and wanted a robust kitchen, with a clean and modern look. Stainless-steel surfaces and the concrete floor are both hygienic, easy-to-clean choices.'

**BUY THE KEY PIECES** Bespoke Häcker Systemat/ART kitchen in Lava Grey, Neil Lerner. Stainless-steel worktops, £500sq m, Cavendish Equipment



'We entertain a lot, so a massive island unit was important to us,' says Nicole

**“I like to buy good-quality furniture that lasts. I've had the Kartell dining chairs for years and still love them”**







*“The ladder shelves aren’t conventional bedside tables, but they’re the right proportion for this big room”*

### Stylist’s Note

‘Plain white walls and streamlined, large-format floor tiles make small bathrooms feel more spacious’

Nicky Phillips,  
Decorating Editor



### Touchable textures

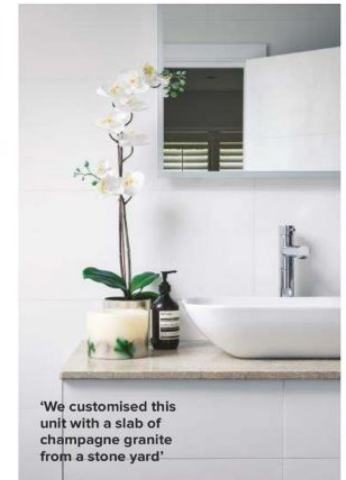
‘Building a double-storey extension has increased the size of our bedroom and given it a nice open feel,’ says Nicole. She’s made it feel cosier with knitted textures and reclaimed-wood furniture.

**BUY THE KEY PIECES** Industrial-style ladder shelf with two drawers, £390, Rockett St George. Alphabet cushion, £20, Marks & Spencer. Geometric cushion, £18, HomeSense

### Calm monochrome

White and grey with flashes of green foliage keeps Nicole’s en suite serene. ‘A freestanding bath was a must – it fits below the sloping roof and I can see the TV in the bedroom while I’m soaking! It’s a real treat.’

**BUY THE KEY PIECES** Harrogate bath, £1,158, Claygate. The Kadirli Denim Blue hammam towel is similar, £19, Urbanara



‘We customised this unit with a slab of champagne granite from a stone yard’

### Gallery corner

‘We have a big landing because the house is wide, so I wanted to do something with the corner here,’ says Nicole. ‘Picture ledges mean I can change the photos around easily’

**BUY THE KEY PIECES** For a similar armchair, try the Seattle, £625, Graham and Green. Ingabritta Pale Pink throw, £19, Ikea







Mock-croc-effect wallpaper gives the en suite a decadent look, with pops of yellow for a colour lift

### Creative space

An Op Art design adds colour and energy in the home office. 'I love the pinks in the geometric wallpaper,' says Nicole. 'Kept to one wall it looks like a huge piece of art. This is the first time we've had a study – the kids use it to do their homework.'

**BUY THE KEY PIECES** Cole and Son's Geometrics II Prism in 105/9040, £100 a roll, Designer Wallpapers. Micke desk, £60, Ikea is similar



### Rough-luxe mix

A smart, tailored bed was the starting point for the look in Louie's room. 'The latest addition is the distressed iron desk,' says Nicole. 'We have plans to decorate one wall in a bold colour or polished plaster.'

**BUY THE KEY PIECES** Baxter Industrial desk in Iron, £395, Graham and Green



### WHAT I'VE LEARNED

*“We had to lay the polished concrete floor twice because after about a year cracks began to appear. It took a while to sort the problem out. I'd use a recommended company next time and check the quality of their work first”*

FEATURE JANE CRITTENDEN, VANESSA RICHMOND, STYLING MARISHA TAYLOR, PHOTOGRAPHS JAMES FRENCH, PLANS AGENCY SERVICE



## Make it work for you

### NICOLE'S CHOICE: CONCRETE FLOORING

Fallen hard for Nicole's smooth-as-ice concrete flooring? Find out if it ticks every box with our need-to-know guide

**Hard wearing, easy to clean and dust-mite resistant, it's little wonder polished concrete flooring is so popular.**

**Q What is polished concrete?**  
Flooring made from concrete, which has been sealed to create a non-porous surface. It is finished with diamond-polishing tools to a grit level of 800, 1500 or 3000 – the higher the grit, the shinier the floor. Costs vary from £80-£450sq m, depending if it's levelled by machine or by hand, and any extra work for avoiding cracks.

**Q How is it installed?**  
Most polished concrete floors are poured in a single 10cm-thick layer. The next day expansion cuts are sawn into the floor, encouraging shrinkage cracks to form. These are then filled with a colour-matched sealant, before the floor is cleaned, polished and sealed.

**Q Does it take long?**  
It depends on the size and temperature of the room, plus the installation methods used,

but allow seven to 10 days for a 10cm-thick floor. Reseal about once a year to keep it waterproof.

**Q Will it crack?**  
There is always the chance that it will crack. Using shrink-reducing additives, anti-crack reinforcing and the expansion-cut installation method, will all help minimise the risk. Sudden temperature changes are the main cause of cracks so it's important to introduce heating, particularly underfloor, slowly.

**Q Can you retro fit it?**  
It's far easier to install in a new-build or extension, where it can go down before the doors and skirting boards are fitted. A modern micro-concrete floor, that provides the same look in a thinner 5-7mm layer, might prove easier.

*“Choose a specialist installer with a quality track record – the finished floor should offer good depth of tone and lustre, with a dense hard-wearing finish”*

**JONATHAN REID, DIRECTOR, GREYMATTER CONCRETE**



### BEST FOR...

**EXPERT ADVICE**  
GreyMatter Concrete consults and advises on all things concrete, helping to ensure a really high quality finish.

**COLOUR CHOICE**  
Steyson's 40 years' experience has made it the go-to for interior designers and architects. Coloured concrete, including colour-matching, is a speciality.

**ECO FRIENDLY**  
Lazenby makes concrete using high proportions of recycled materials and sources materials from local suppliers to reduce its carbon footprint.

### IDEAL HOME LOVES... CONCRETE-LOOK FLOORS



#### FOR WALLS OR FLOORS

This robust porcelain tile comes in muted industrial colours.  
**Tekno Bone** porcelain tiles, £34.94sq m, Topps Tiles



#### SKIM THE SURFACE

Can be applied in a much thinner layer and is less likely to crack.  
**MicroCrete in Light Grey**, from £120sq m, The Resin Floor Co



#### WARM UNDERFOOT

A luxury slip- and water-resistant vinyl with a 15-year warranty.  
**Tadao Ando concrete vinyl tiles**, £42.95sq m, Harvey Maria