

# We made a gloomy semi light and bright

Joanne and Michael's timeless style and layered neutrals have transformed dismal rooms into a light-filled family home

Joanne Hepburn has always lived in Victorian properties until she viewed this extended 1930s house and saw the fantastic back garden. 'I'll be honest, I wasn't a fan of the architectural style at first, but I loved the extension, which opened onto a big garden,' she says. 'We'd been living in a terraced house with a small backyard and these qualities were exactly what we were looking for in our next home.'

The property had been rented out for seven years and, although the extension was fairly new, the rest of the house remained stuck in the 1980s, with wash basins in bedrooms, chintzy wallpaper and heavy pelmet curtains.

'A plus point was the lovely big hallway, but I really disliked the red, patterned,

**'I like classic pieces with a lasting look and warm neutrals in beiges and off-whites.'**

pub-style stair carpet and the heavy wood panelling,' adds Joanne. 'The rooms looked dark and gloomy and there was too much wood in the extension – my instinct was to make everywhere light and bright.' Luckily, no major building work needed doing as the extended house was big enough. But a survey confirmed the couple would have to update the electrics and heating, which meant plastering and decorating all of the rooms, too. Rather than moving out temporarily, the family decided to stay in the house while the work went on around them. 'We shut the door on the extension and kept away

► The Floyd corner sofa from Barker and Stonehouse is anchored by a IKEA rug. The mirrors, also IKEA, reflect the light and greenery from the garden. Joanne also added an IKEA floor lamp, a coffee table from Wayfair, and textured cushions from Fenwick. 'I created an art gallery look with photos and mounts made to size by a local photography shop'



*Good idea!*  
A pair of affordable mirrors reflect light as an alternative to a more expensive, large mirror.

► Painted wood panelling has brightened the previously dark hallway, where Farrow & Ball's Elephant's Breath ties in with the living room decoration



## COME ON IN...



**WE ARE** Joanne Hepburn (@semi\_in\_suburbia), 42, a stay-at-home mum, my husband, Michael, 43, director of a town planning consultancy, our two children, Annabelle, nine, and Will, six, and Sadie, our cockapoo.

**OUR HOME IS** a four-bedroom, 1930s semi in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

**MY BEST BARGAIN** Is our ex-display bed from John Lewis, which cost a third of the full price.

**SHOPS I LOVE** Are Homesense for storage baskets, IKEA for picture frames and rugs, and Wayfair for affordable alternatives to high-end designs.

**TO RELAX** I bake with the children or do gardening – I also love a declutter so everything has its place.



Feature Jane Crittenden Styling Marisha Taylor Photos James French

**‘Going for an off-white on the kitchen cupboards is a much better contrast with the wood floor and has made the room look brighter.’**

from the mess during the day,’ says Joanne. ‘I underestimated the amount of decorating in the hallway, though, as they had to put up a tower scaffold. It was there for weeks and each time we came home we had to crawl underneath it to get through to the back.’

Painting the wood panelling in the hallway white was one of the biggest transformations. ‘It was a daunting prospect, but I was adamant it was the right thing to do,’ she says. ‘The hall looks light and no longer feels claustrophobic and the white looks great contrasted with the original parquet flooring.’

Once the decorators had finished painting the whole house, Joanne began arranging their furniture. Having been previously used

to Victorian terraced houses with narrow rooms, the sofa and dining table looked small in the large extension. ‘This was a completely new way of living for us,’ she says. ‘The walls were big and bare and so I started thinking about how I could divide up the space and looked for inspiration on Instagram. I searched #kitchenextensions, #1930s and #openplan for ideas.’

Soon, Joanne had replaced their three-seater in the living area with a large corner sofa, which now frames and fills the space, facing the TV and the garden. The dining table and chairs were out of proportion until she created a zoned area for them with a large rug, and did the same in the living space, too.

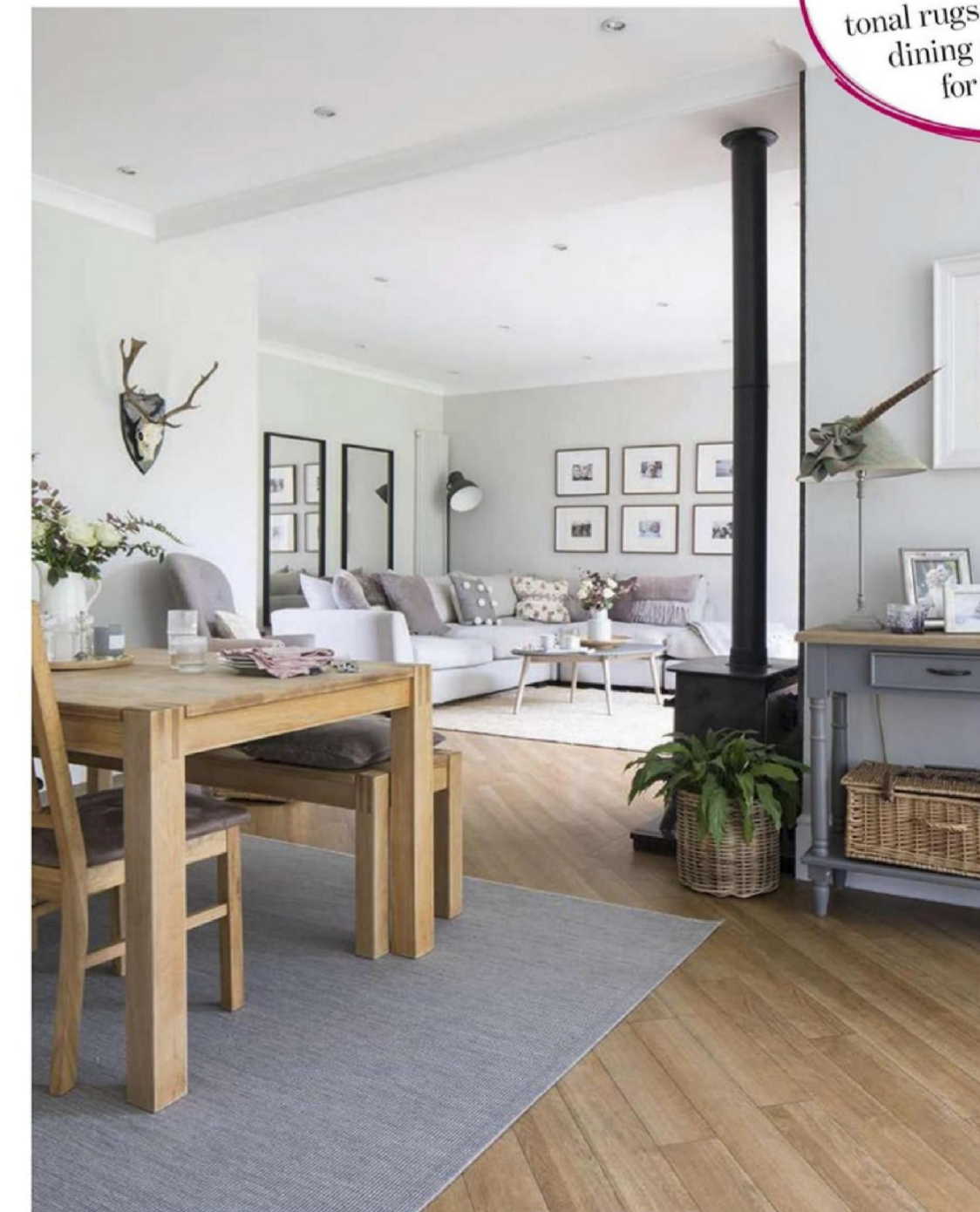
▼ The framed kitchen cupboards appealed to Joanne’s taste for classic, long-lasting styles. They’re painted in Johnstone’s acrylic paint, colour-matched to Farrow & Ball’s Shaded White and Fired Earth’s Antimony



‘I love the blue tones of the island as they bring a little lift of colour to the neutral cupboards,’ says Joanne. ‘The worktops are polished black granite.’ She found the stools for a bargain at Dunelm and the blind was from Blinds 2go



**Good idea!**  
In open-plan spaces, use tonal rugs to define different dining and living areas for a cosier feel.



▲ Artworks by Laura Amiss, found on Etsy, are displayed in IKEA’s Ribba oak-effect frames. ‘I chose wood frames to tie in with the floor and furniture,’ says Joanne. She’s had the dining table set since she was in her early 20s, and she found the antlers at Jesmond Antiques and the grey rug on Wayfair

◀ The whole extension is decorated in Crown’s Sunday School shade to tie the kitchen, dining and seating areas together. The handy console table is from Wayfair

Upstairs, bespoke wardrobes were made for the main bedroom alcoves and Joanne bought a new bed. Despite purchasing so many new pieces, she was careful to keep her budget in mind. ‘I invested in big-ticket items, but I only ever bought things in the sale or ex-display,’ she says. ‘In fact, before I bought anything new, I looked for a discount code or for the same thing second-hand on Gumtree or eBay. Our bedside table is from IKEA but bought on eBay.’

Joanne took style inspiration from Neptune, loving their timeless designs and neutral palette, but also turned to Wayfair to source similar products at an affordable

price. 'I like classic pieces with a lasting look and warm neutrals in beiges and off-whites,' she says. 'I tried to think of the house as one big space. I like the colours to flow so there is a similar neutral tone throughout.'

Another big change was improving the wood-heavy, open-plan extension.

Joanne decorated all the walls in a warm putty tone and, understandably, couldn't justify taking up the wood floor or ripping out the oak kitchen cupboards, so decided to update them herself instead. 'They were beautifully made and I was nervous about painting them,' she admits. 'It took four different



▲ Blush pink tiles, from CDT Tiles, laid in a zigzag pattern draw the eye and bring a splash of colour to Joanne's neutral palette. The mirror is from Bathstore and the space-saving all-in-one vanity is from Durham Kitchens and Bathrooms

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◀ Bunting adds a simple, fun decorative update to a blank wall. Joanne sourced it from Next, along with the curtains and duvet cover



Soft lilac walls combine with a charity shop chair Joanne painted in Farrow & Ball's Calamine. The upcycled desk was another of Joanne's many charity shop finds. The star fairy lights are from The White Company and the rabbit pillow came from Matalan



*Good idea!*  
Wall stickers add interest to a large wall in a kid's bedroom and can easily be changed.

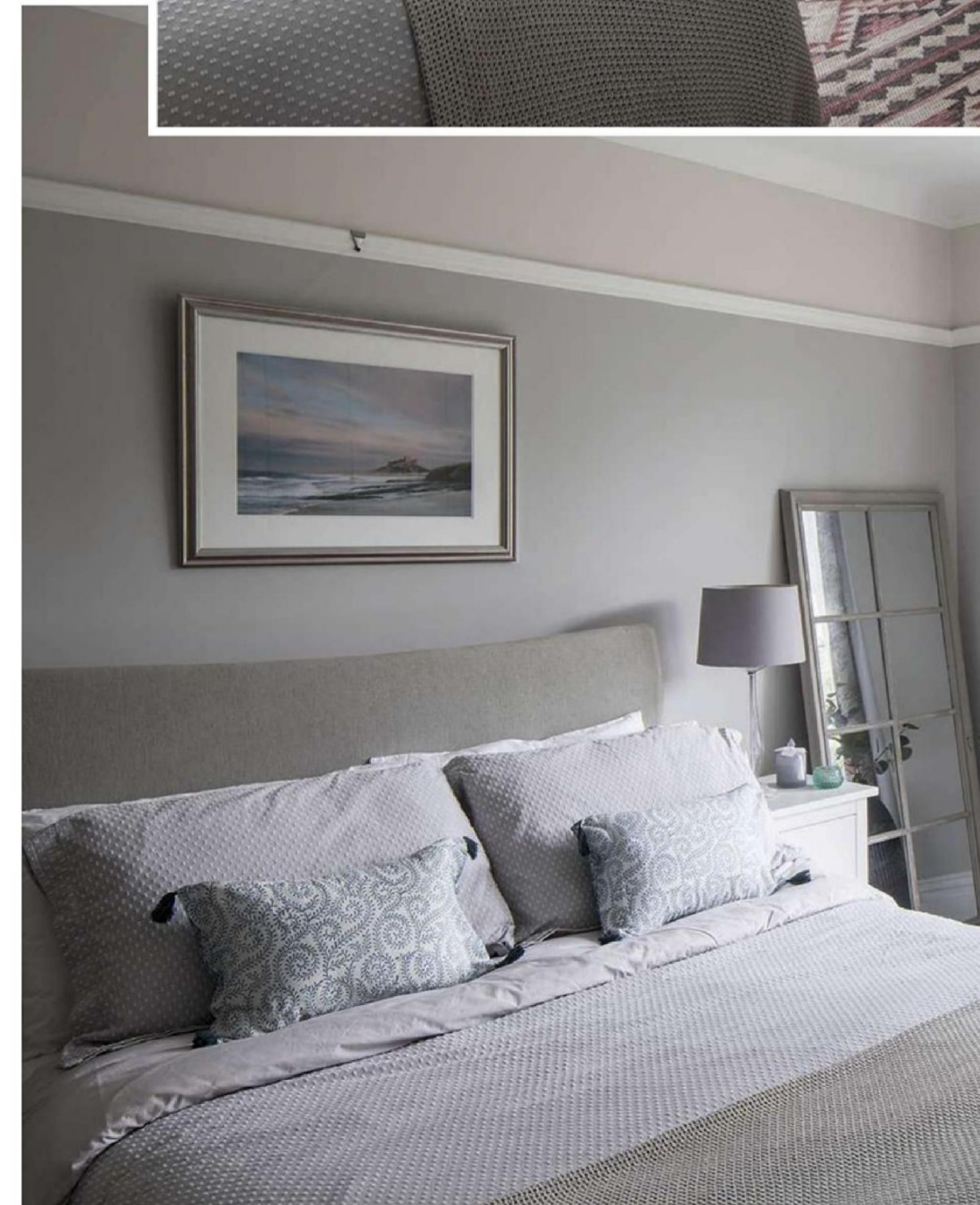


◀ 'The bespoke wardrobes were a game-changer. I chose a panelled door to tie in with the original wood panelling in the hallway,' says Joanne. The rug is from Homesense and a similar fish ornament can be found at Oliver Bonas

paint colours until I was absolutely sure and I'm so pleased with the results now. Going for an off-white is a much better contrast with the wood floor and has made the room look brighter.'

With a tonal and co-ordinated neutral scheme running throughout the house, all the rooms have shaken off their dark past. Joanne has added pretty finishing touches with seasonal cushions, baskets, plants and fresh flowers to make it feel homely. She isn't quite finished with the redecoration yet, though.

'We still have a bathroom to do, but I am really happy with the progress we've made so far. Despite my initial misgivings about living in a 1930s house, I've really enjoyed doing the interiors here. The open-plan space makes us feel much more connected as a family than in our previous home.' [VH](#)



▼ 'I like the warmth in Farrow & Ball's Cornforth White, and above the picture rail is Dulux's Nutmeg White, leftover from decorating the guest bedroom,' says Joanne. The cosy waffle bedding is from Marks & Spencer with cushions from La Redoute. The Next lamp sits on an IKEA bedside table, and the light-boosting mirror is from Rutherfords of Morpeth



IDEAS TO STEAL



Like Joanne, you can create zones in an open-plan room with a corner sofa  
**Baltimore corner sofa in Dove Grey**, £899, Furniture Choice

Capture Joanne's soft pink bathroom style with these crackle glazed tiles  
**Craquelure Rose tiles**, £34.95 per sq m, Walls and Floors



Creamy beige blended with dusky pink add warmth to a neutral décor  
**Cushion cover with tassels**, £19.99, H&M Home



A round mirror looks decorative and this frame picks up on the wood in Joanne's scheme  
**Stockholm mirror in ash veneer**, £75, IKEA

Baskets add texture to soften rooms and make great storage solutions  
**Colour-block round basket**, £14, Matalan



An upholstered bar stool in pale grey will blend with a blue island  
**Falcon bar stool**, £79.99, Atlantic Shopping

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