

Country-style reno

'I dialled up the charm for a fresh, timeless feel'

Lauren Gilbey fell in love with sage green, and now it's the heart of her classically styled home, which she's upgraded with a clever, space-boosting extension

Lauren Gilbey has always been creative, having studied textiles at A-level, and more recently sewing for her friend's boutique swimwear business. However, after decorating her previous home and renovating this house, she's found her true passion. 'I've loved interiors since I was young and helped my mum decorate,' she says. 'We'd go off to the shop and choose the paint and do the work together. Although I didn't pursue a creative career – I worked in childcare for a long time – I'm now studying an interior design course part-time.'

Lauren and her boyfriend, Charlie, decided to move after the government made temporary changes to the stamp duty law in 2021. It meant that they wouldn't have to

Lauren's interior style evolved after she painted her front door in a subtle sage green. It's now a colour that runs through the house in paint shades and furnishings



pay the fee if they bought a property that was under £500,000. 'I loved our previous home, but the timing was a great opportunity to take a step up the property ladder,' Lauren explains. 'Our goal was to find a house that had a driveway, a downstairs loo, and an open-plan kitchen-diner.'

MAXIMISING SPACE

By chance, the couple viewed this 1950s house on their first day of looking. They liked the upstairs layout, but were unsure about the boxy rooms downstairs. 'We didn't rule the house out, but at this point Charlie and I hadn't decided if we wanted to renovate, in

'We were originally going to put this beautiful chandelier in our bedroom, but decided to install it downstairs instead, so everyone can enjoy it. The glam style makes a lovely contrast and satisfies my need for a bit of sparkle,' says Lauren



DINING ROOM

Removing two thick supporting walls gave the couple additional space they weren't expecting. A herringbone floor in warm, light tones had been on Lauren's wishlist for a while: 'The budget compromise was laminate instead of the real thing, but it looks really good'

OUR MUST HAVES

For a similar table try the **Rustic farmhouse six-seater table**, £370, Taylor Grey Home. **Kitchen bench**, £180, mh furnishings on Etsy. For a similar paint colour try **matt eggshell emulsion paint in Sage**, £30 per 2.5L, Dunelm. **Paris 8-light Antique Brass crystal chandelier**, £369, Pagazzi Lighting

Lauren bought the radiator cover from Facebook Marketplace and painted it in Dulux's Pure Brilliant White eggshell. 'The shelf acts like a console table, where I can arrange my plants,' she says



COME ON IN...

WE ARE Lauren Gilbey (@the_cubbyhole), 31. I run my own social media business, sew for The Dressing Room Brentwood, and am studying interior design. I live here with my boyfriend, Charlie Law, 31, a recruitment consultant.

OUR HOME IS a three-bedroom, 1950s house in Billericay, Essex. We bought the house in April 2021.

MY BEST IDEA Picking sage green as our main colour has made our home feel calm, cohesive and welcoming.

MY TOP TIP Dulux's Summer Linen is a lovely warm white with a hint of beige that looks light and bright on walls. I recommend this paint to everyone. I also love collating ideas on Pinterest – I then refine to actual products I can buy.

GROUND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



◀ **Boxing off the underside of the staircase has turned dead space into a fabulous pantry. 'We had the cupboard custom-made by a local carpenter to fit around the stairs, and the doors were matched to the design of our kitchen,' says Lauren**

RUSTIC VIBES

Frame the hob and oven with cabinets to create a 'range' effect and bring a timeless country feel to your kitchen

case we took on something we couldn't afford to finish,' says Lauren. 'We viewed another 20 houses, but concluded a project was the only way to get what we wanted. We had a good feeling about this house and got really excited about moving in.'

The couple wasted no time making plans for their new home. While waiting to complete, they went back to the house three times to work out the best way to extend. A large brick garage in the garden put Lauren off doing a rear extension. 'We didn't want to eat up all of our outdoor space,' she explains. 'It made sense to investigate going out to the side instead - this was a wasted area because it wasn't big enough to park the car.'

Lauren Googled similar houses with side extensions to get an idea of the size and layout. With a lot of measuring and her creative eye, she drew a plan that maximised all 22.51 square metres of space. 'As well as creating the kitchen-diner across the back, I could see there was space at the bottom of the stairs for a door into a downstairs cloakroom,' she says. 'Then it occurred to me it didn't need to be so long and narrow. We put a shower in here, and a utility cupboard accessed from the kitchen on the other side.'

A SAGE IDEA

Within three months of the couple moving in, they had architect drawings, planning



◀ **Lauren drew the kitchen layout herself and shopped around for the best deals. The quartz worktop and splashback came from a local company: 'They gave us amazing customer service and recommended affordable choices as they understood we were on a budget'**

▼ **A Belfast sink adds to the country feel of the kitchen. 'Natural wood shelving on the blank wall is a great way to draw the eye upwards and do some styling,' adds Lauren**



'Our home feels grown-up and homely and I've really enjoyed the creative process, as it's like my moodboards have come to life'

KITCHEN

'I wanted a traditional kitchen with a two-tone look, as white wall cupboards look lovely and bright with a deeper shade below,' says Lauren. 'I hovered between greige and green, but I didn't want to fall back to grey again. I'm so happy; I love the green'

OUR MUST HAVES
 Infinity Shaker Forest units in Thyme and Polar White, £8,765 (inc appliances), Wren Kitchens. **Cup handles in brass**, £8.99 for 10, yetaha-uk on Amazon. For a similar tap try the **Apex brushed brass kitchen mixer**, £43.60, Sanctuary Bathrooms





FOCAL POINT

Fill a small fireplace void with logs and add a faux mantel and mirror overhead, to instantly add character to a simple chimney breast



permission and a builder lined up. Ten weeks later, the extension was built and ready for them to decorate and fit the new kitchen.

Lauren had already prepared moodboards for every room. 'I'd gone glam in my previous home, with lots of grey, silver and mirrored surfaces, but I was ready for a complete contrast,' she says. 'I was drawn to a country look with a warmer, traditional, homely feel.'

Sage green became a central theme after painting the original blue front door as soon as they moved in. 'I nearly went with pale grey,' she says. 'But I pushed myself out of my comfort zone and loved the green I painted the door in so much, I went on to choose a sage kitchen – and the colour just carried on from there.'

A Wren kitchen hit the spot because Lauren was able to see the cupboards in the showroom. 'They offer three price ranges and interest-free finance, which helped our budget,' she says. Lauren sold all her furniture and, as an avid bargain hunter, went looking

LIVING ROOM

Lauren and Charlie took out the old gas fire and added a wood mantel beam. 'With my Facebook Marketplace mirror and a £100 brand-new Next chair from Choice, creating this corner wasn't expensive but it looks really effective,' says Lauren

OUR MUST HAVES Oak mantel beam, 4 x 8in, from £41, Funky Chunky Furniture. For a similar chair try the Sherlock highback armchair in Tweedy Check Burford Natural, £499, Next. For a similar mirror try the Ivory arch mirror, £69.99, The Range. Velvet cushion cover in Dusty Pink, £12, La Redoute

► 'The chimney breast isn't central, so to trick the eye I designed shelves in the alcove and wall storage on the other side to tie everything in,' says Lauren. 'The whole wall feels like one focal point now'



◀ 'We tried out the sofa in the shop to check it was comfortable, and chose pale grey as it will fit into any neutral scheme,' Lauren says. 'The plain wall behind was crying out for some details and picture panelling was the answer – it took us an afternoon to do'

CLOAKROOM

'I wanted a traditional style in neutrals, but I didn't want the finish to look flat and boring,' says Lauren. 'A patterned tile, detail in the wall panelling, and warm brass fittings give the room depth and interest'

OUR MUST HAVES Mr Jones Ash patterned tiles, £22.95 per sq m, Walls and Floors. Walls painted in Dulux Pure Brilliant White emulsion, £25 per 10L, B&Q. Trustmi brushed gold mixer tap, £48.99, yjrooms-uk on Amazon. For a similar vanity try the Baxenden vanity with basin, £299.97, Better Bathrooms ▶



BEDROOM

The grand bed, with its built-in TV, nods to Lauren's need for a bit of luxury in the house. Light is reflected back into the room with a large mirror: 'I've picked up some bargain mirrors on Facebook Marketplace,' she says. 'They add interest to a plain wall and make a room come alive'

OUR MUST HAVES

For a similar bed try the **Marilyn bed**, from £999, The Luxury Bed Company. For a similar throw try the **Chenille plain throw in Sage**, £19.50, Marks and Spencer



WONDER WALL

Bring interest to a neutral bedroom with wall panelling, leaving a gap between the panelling and ceiling to add height to the room

▲ Lauren used self-priming Frenchic paint to upcycle her bedside tables, bringing them up to date and in keeping with her room scheme

for timeless pieces on Facebook Marketplace. She found three mirrors, a dining table and chairs, and the living room coffee table. She also upcycled a second-hand mirror in the hallway and her bedside tables. 'It's true that one person's trash is another's treasure!' she says. 'Prices on Facebook Marketplace are good, but I only go looking for specific things, otherwise it's not a bargain if I'm spending when I don't need to.'

MONEY WELL SPENT

Now, the couple aren't too far from finishing their home – they're working on the garden and other bedrooms. 'Some people thought we'd be spending a lot of money on our extension and not gaining much space, as the inside width is only 1.2m,' says Lauren. 'But this is our success story because we got the three things we wanted. Our home feels grown-up and homely and I've really enjoyed the creative process, as it's like my moodboards have come to life. I can't wait to finish my interior design course and see where it takes me next.' 📺



◀ Lauren stacked the neutrals as they go up the wall, creating interest without overpowering the room. 'I love how the cream bed stands out against the crisp white panelling and the warmth in the beige wall above,' she says

▼ 'I picked a vanity with a wooden top and space underneath for a basket,' says Lauren. 'I was inspired to mix a chrome tap with brass handles after seeing interior designer, Shea McGee, do it on *Dream Home Makeover* – I'm really pleased with the resulting look'

'We viewed another 20 houses, but concluded a project was the only way to get what we wanted. We had a good feeling about this house'



◀ 'This was the last room to be finished, so we'd had plenty of practice with the wall panelling,' says Lauren. 'The floor tiles have a nice mix of greens, and an aged appearance that works well with the rustic finish of the white and sage wall tiles'

BATHROOM

The look and layout was planned around the free-standing bath, which sits against the wall of sage green herringbone tiles. 'A rolltop was too big, so we went for a sleeker style without feet,' Lauren explains

OUR MUST HAVES

Lisbon free-standing double ended bath, £479.97, Better Bathrooms. **Eton Green rustic metro tiles**, £25.95 per sq m, Walls and Floors. **Ash wood ladder**, £42, Dunelm