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# LABOUR OF LOVE

The making of this young couple's spectacular nesting place was a family affair to remember

WORDS AND PHOTOS: **REPORTAGE**



## Hallway

"I fell in love with Jennifer Aniston's character's apartment in 'The Breakup' and the idea of a navy colour in the hall," says Barbara. "Inspiration can come from anywhere, so I keep my eyes open."

The floor tiles are Real Marfil marble-effect porcelain from Nationwide Tiles, walls are painted in Dulux Oxford Blue, with Colortrend Almost White above the dado rail





**HOMEOWNERS TIP**  
 "Bring a feature wallpaper to the paint shop to match the colour for adjacent painted walls to a shade on the paper. This really brings a room together."



**Get the look**  
 STEAL BARBARA'S STYLE



**online extra**  
 For more ideas to steal see  
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1. Bobble lamp, €62, lime coloured votive, €10, lime bulbous vase, €15.50 and mug, €11.50, all Ben De Lisi at Debenhams, [www.debenhams.com](http://www.debenhams.com)
2. Teacup and saucer, €8.95, Marks and Spencer, [www.marksandspencer.com](http://www.marksandspencer.com)
3. Brightly coloured flasks are not just for kids but will cheer adults up too on cold winter mornings, €5.99 each, IKEA, [www.ikea.ie](http://www.ikea.ie)
4. Barbara makes statements throughout her house with the introduction of patterned wallpaper in unexpected places like the accent wall in the bathroom. Rosabella wallpaper by Suzy Hoodless from Osborne & Little, €62 per roll, [www.collettewardinteriors.ie](http://www.collettewardinteriors.ie), 0402 36585
5. Orange Swirl vase, €26, Next, [www.nextdirectory.ie](http://www.nextdirectory.ie)
6. Bursts of citrus orange boost the sitting room's subtle cream decor
7. The sleek design of this breakfast stool, €318, Bontempi Casa at [www.areaz.com](http://www.areaz.com), perfectly complement a modern kitchen
8. Flower print, €66, Next



The kitchen was re-sprayed by Robert Mooney Custom-Built Furniture, where the range

cooker was also sourced. The Marmoleum flooring, colour 'Concrete', was supplied by Forbo Ireland



# THE GREAT RECYCLE

Don't remove it when you can improve it was the design mantra for the owners of this chic retro kitchen and dining room.

WORDS AND PHOTOS: **REPORTAGE**

## The project

**The project:** Revamping a solid maple kitchen and a dining room with classic 1970s retro furniture, which is let down by dark, dated finishes and colours and a mix of woods.

**The key challenge:** Preserving good furniture and fittings that were acquired over the years and tying everything together to achieve a coherent, stylish update.

**The budget:** €6,000 for the kitchen and €3,000 for the dining room.

**How long it took:** Four weeks

**O**n paper, the original kitchen was something of a trooper. At 15 years old, this was a well-used, good quality solid maple kitchen with black granite worktops and some nice features, such as an attractive wicker basket pantry unit. Unfortunately, kitchens tend to show their age just as much as we do. **The timber had yellowed noticeably, giving it an unattractive finish, and the blue flooring and splash back tiles appeared dark and dated, as did the timber tongue and groove ceiling.**

The dining room, meanwhile, had a stylish glass-topped table teamed with good quality 1970s



## Sitting room

"There has to be one child-free area in the house for visitors and this is it," says Barbara. The sitting room has not been changed from its original 1950s layout and remains to this day the 'good room' of the house. "If people call unexpectedly, there is no need to run about tidying up toys."

The sitting room floor is laquered walnut from Hardwood Floors. The feature wall is Arizona by Suzy Hoodless for Osborne & Little. The fireplace is from Ballymount Fireplaces; the leather suite was already Barbara's own. The dark wood sideboard is from Woodies DIY, the small curved coffee table is from Habitat. The chrome and orange enamel table lamp is from O'Driscoll Design. The plaid throw and cushion are from Avoca Handweavers, and the framed wallpaper sample is Harlequin 75706

## Fact file

**Owners:** Barbara O'Connor, a primary school teacher, with her husband and their son Paddy (6).

**Type of property:** A three-bedroom semi, built in 1951.

**Location:** Dublin

**Lived here since:** 2008

**What they did:** Extended to the rear and converted the garage, adding an extra floor, comprising a study, a guest bathroom and a dining area downstairs, as well as a bedroom with an ensuite bathroom and a nursery upstairs.







dining chairs (originally bought at Arnotts) and a sideboard made of beech and glass. Yet the original pine floor boards had yellowed and dated and the curtains were dark. Large, 1970s-era windows, as everyone knows, difficult to dress.

Catherine Crowe from Optimise Design supplied the solution: a re-spray and refinish for the kitchen, and a fabric makeover for the dining room would make all the difference in the world.

**Out with the old: the dark blue splashback tiles, and tongue and groove ceiling (which had begun to crack and show gaps) were all removed.** A palette of lighter colours were enlisted to brighten up the room and the kitchen was professionally re-sprayed. The blue Marmoleum floor was changed to a lighter colour, and a new splashback was added with off-white metro style tiles. The quality black granite worktop was retained, but its new setting has given it an entirely fresh appeal. The wicker basket unit was given a sealed timber finish as it matched the beech kitchen table and chairs.

Replacing the dated pine floor in the dining room with beech solved the clash between the yellowing pine and the white beech hue of the sideboard and table frame. **The chairs were reupholstered, which completely changed their look. Using the same fabric in a full-length curtain pulled the entire scheme together.** Using a neutral paint colour for the walls linking the two rooms made for a seamless flow between them, achieving a subtle open plan feel without budging an inch of concrete. «





Ground Floor

First Floor

The phrase 'third time lucky' may be a well-worn cliché, but in the case of Barbara O'Connor, it rings true. The home of she and her husband's dreams, a sturdy 50-year-old semi-D in Dublin's, was the third house the couple bid on within the same leafy cul de sac they had their hearts set on.

**Their eventual purchase, as it turned out, was a definite symptom of nesting: Barbara was already expecting their son Paddy by the time the sale went through.**

"We were delighted to finally get the house of our dreams, so we quickly sold our modern apartment. I came home from the maternity ward to my Mum's home, bless her. We were lucky to have my parents there for us, because the house really did need a lot of work," says Barbara.

The house was indeed in need of considerable updating and an extension, but they loved the area, which was close to work, school and the city, and they enjoyed the friendly atmosphere of the road. Besides, even the most daunting of renovations must seem possible with a successful architect in the family. **Barbara's sister Denise is director of Optimise Design, so the couple were set for a fabulous renovation.**

"Although we hadn't any experience in doing up houses, we wanted a 'doer-upper' rather than a finished house. I had lots of ideas and got Denise to do the real work, so there I was with a brand



## Top three design tips

**Respray to re-use:** Never dump a good quality timber kitchen, but update it. A decent professional re-spray job of a solid timber kitchen starts at €2,000, while dated worktops can be cheaply replaced. If an existing stone worktop no longer suits your new kitchen scheme, consider re-using it elsewhere, for example as a free-standing shelf or as a vanity unit in the bathroom.

**Reupholster:** Update any chair or sofa with a new loose cover or reupholster it to your own taste. This changes the look of a whole room quite simply, and allows you to get endless wear from a good quality piece of furniture.

**Don't throw out the baby with the bathwater!** If it works, don't ditch it. The homeowner loved the quality and convenience of the Marmoleum kitchen floor, which is ideal for kitchens and bathrooms as it is warm, hardwearing, waterproof and easy to clean. She resisted the idea of any other floor finish, but as the colour was dated, she had a new Marmoleum floor laid in a lighter colour. We think it looks great.



The curtain fabric and fabric reupholstery of the dining chairs by Optimise Design. Hardwood floor in lacquered beech from the

Hardwood Floor Company. Wall colour is Colortrend 0852. The colourful storage boxes, above, are from IKEA



## Kitchen/Dining

Barbara wanted a big open plan space from which to observe baby Paddy in the den.

Barbara's kitchen is a high-gloss finish in off-white from Kitchenworld in Deansgrange, with a leather-finish 'Pale Emperador' granite worktop from M. Ros Stone. Floor tiles are 'Real Marfil' marble effect porcelain from Nationwide Tiles, Sandyford Industrial Estate. Wall paint is 30YY51/098 from Dulux



## At home with

**Best advice?** No matter how good the advice, if it doesn't suit you and your family it just won't work. You have to suit yourself

**Favourite Item?** The wallpaper in the guest toilet, which was actually a mistake. The wrong colour arrived, but I love it

**What's your look?** Colourful contemporary

**Lessons learned?** Everything was a learning curve for us, but the most valuable lesson was that you have to work with people you can completely trust

**Best thing about where you live?** Our neighbours



new baby, a brand new husband and a brand new house. I couldn't wait to get started," says Barbara.

Built in the early 1950s, the house had a poky kitchen and the sole access to the garden was via a utility corridor, which oddly also led to a toilet/shower room and the coal shed. A sitting room was located at the front with a dining room to the rear, and upstairs were two double bedrooms, a box room and a separate bathroom and shower.

"The kitchen is the most important room in the house as far as I am concerned," says Barbara.

"That's where most people really live, and I wanted a big bright open plan space with a den for Paddy where he would be visible from the kitchen, but in his own play area. I saw that idea in a magazine and thought it was a great solution for families with small children. I also

specified a downstairs toilet, which was quite difficult to fit in. It had to be a reasonable size - my husband is a rugby player and no shrimp! We thought at one stage we would have to extend to the front to fit it in, but that was too expensive."

Planning and building took six months and went without any major hitch. "There were no meltdowns, no panic, and our builder Jimmy McCreesh was competent and reliable," says Barbara.





## Den

Barbara has incorporated an open-plan den into the kitchen/dining room layout so she can keep an eye on Paddy while cooking dinner or chatting to friends in the most social area of the house.

The den sofa is the Indivi from Bo Concept; the coffee table is part of a set of three nesting tables from Habitat. The feature wall wallpaper is Jewel of Spring by Suzi Hoodless for Osborne & Little, available from Optimise Design. The fireplace is from Ballymount Fireplaces. The low-level storage on either side is the Smadal range from IKEA. The red sofa cushions come from Next; the material on the footstool, blue cushions and stretched over the canvas is by Harlequin, and was upholstered by stylist Penny Crawford Collins. The walnut floor is from Hardwood Floors





## Master bedroom

Calming colours of silver and heather are ideal for a relaxed bedroom; the wall of storage units from IKEA are a clever anti-clutter solution.

The bedroom is clutter free thanks to a wall of storage from IKEA; the wallpaper is Kalinda by Suzy Hoodless for Osborne & Little. The basin and storage unit in the ensuite are by Rocca, from Optimise Design. The tiles are Jura Limestone from Nationwide Tiles



"Denise was fantastic. She managed to fit everything in as if by magic, so the house seems larger on the inside than it looks from the outside. **Most garage conversions on our road yield two double bedrooms and two tiny box rooms, but Denise managed to get us three double bedrooms, one with an ensuite bathroom, and a single bedroom. And I got my understairs guest bathroom too.**"

With the structural work done, Barbara set about

putting her own stamp on her new home.

"I didn't want to go too girly, since it is a family home," says Barbara. "Denise was able to show me all that was available and advise me, and I got inspiration from all sorts of places. The navy colour I used in the hall was inspired by the apartment in the film 'The Breakup'.

**I used wallpaper for instant colour and I like the fact it can easily change the whole look and style of a house without too much bother."**





The house has a surprisingly deep reach in terms of potential. Although it has been extended and the garage has been converted, the attic is another possible future development.

"It is a very big attic and the head height is generous. We could add more space up there, and quite a few homes on our road have already done it successfully. I'd also like to work on the garden, which is large but very plain right now," says Barbara.

For now, the couple is happy in the new version of their half-a-century old semi, and enjoying the neighbourhood. "Last year we had a street barbecue and everybody on the street turned out, from the youngest at five months old to the oldest at 92, and everyone had a wonderful time.

**The house is perfect for us as a family and I really feel I have put our stamp on it now. There doesn't seem to be any reason to ever want to move anywhere else."** <<



## Guest bathroom

"This was a small and difficult space, so I made the most of it with a lovely wallpaper. Denise ordered a different colour than the one I had chosen, but when it arrived, it looked fabulous. It was a mistake that worked out in our favour and I wouldn't change it now."

The colourful wallpaper is Rosabella by Suzy Hoodless for Osborne & Little. The basin is by Twyford, available at Optimise Design, and the tiles are Real Marfil marble-effect porcelain from Nationwide Tiles

## Three ideas to steal

By Denise O'Connor of Optimise Design

1 Don't be afraid to use bold prints. Consider using a bright floral wallpaper in alcoves on either side of a fireplace or as a backdrop to the bed for a simple way to create real impact.

2 When planning your bathroom, look for places to build in storage cupboards. The space behind cantilevered toilets and basins is an ideal spot for a recessed cabinet. Add mirrors to create a luxurious and practical feature.

3 Don't expect to achieve a finished look straight away. Everything moves so fast nowadays we've all become impatient. The most important thing to remember is take your time and don't rush into anything. Houses should be allowed to evolve.