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HOME GROWN

Inspirational decor – and a passion for plants – helped Dawn Smith create her idea of domestic bliss

FEATURE FAITH ECKERSALL PHOTOGRAPHY NICK CARTER

When Dawn Smith first viewed her future home, there was little to hint at the stylish place it would become. 'The kitchen was a small box with a quarry stone floor, hardly any windows and the ceiling and walls were clad in orange pine,' she recalls. 'In the rest of the house, there were brown swirly carpets, while the woodchip wallpaper had a flowery border – it seemed to have the lot.'

The main thing that sold the Surrey property to Dawn when she first walked in was what she describes as a good vibe – the feel of a happy home. 'The place belonged to a family for 30 years and the lady of the house was lovely,' she says. Then there was the carefully tended garden, which Dawn – a specialist in floral arrangements – felt she could adapt to create her dream outdoor space.

She also loved the house's location in a quiet cul-de-sac close to good schools and with lots of ▶



DINING ROOM

A firm believer in recycling, Dawn treated a basic pine console table to make it look like hardwood then added new handles.

Upholstered chairs, price on request. Coach House (01737 830900).

Balinese figures, 599 each, RTfact (01372 470580, rtfactflowers.co.uk)



- **THE OWNER** Dawn Smith, co-founder of an interiors company, and her daughters Charley and Lily, plus Harvey the Tibetan terrier
- **HER HOME** Detached 1920s house
- **LOCATION** Surrey
- **ROOMS** Hall, sitting room, dining room, kitchen, study, cloakroom, four bedrooms, bathroom
- **PURCHASED** 1994
- **PREVIOUS PROPERTY** 'Prior to this, I lived in an Arts and Crafts house, also in Surrey,' says Dawn.

HOME TRUTHS



KITCHEN

The island is perfectly placed to take in views of the garden while preparing a meal.

Cabinetry, Magnet (01325 744094, magnet.co.uk); the company's Cubista teak, from £3,737, is similar



DESIGN ADVICE 'FLOWERS AND PLANTS COMPLEMENT AN INTERIOR SCHEME, ESPECIALLY IF YOU USE THEM TO ENHANCE THE EXISTING COLOURS'





shops and amenities nearby – it was the ideal environment for her daughters Charley and Lily.

Once the family moved in, Dawn implemented her changes bit by bit because of her limited budget. 'The first thing I did was to take out all the old flooring, and strip the picture and dado rails from the walls,' she says. 'After they were replastered, the walls remained bare for quite some time.'

Dawn started at the top of the house and worked her way down. Over the course of the next few years, the four bedrooms were redecorated and the bathrooms updated. Then Dawn turned her attention to remodelling the ground floor. By removing a partition wall between the sitting and dining rooms, she created an open-plan living zone stretching from the front of the property to its rear.

Four years ago, she gained permission to add an extension to one side of the house. A stand-alone

garage was demolished in favour of an integrated design alongside a storage area. Meanwhile, Dawn enlarged the kitchen to include a cosy family room with direct access to the garden, and she even found space to include a study. Outside, Dawn added an expanse of decking and cut back the trees and hedges to improve the light.

A designer since the age of 18 – she worked in children's, ladies' and bridal clothing before moving into interiors – Dawn has firm ideas on colour and style. As a result, her home is a seamless blend of tranquil tones, comfortable furniture and unusual accessories, carefully arranged to bring a sense of harmony to the schemes. 'The pieces you use and the palette you choose can make or break a room,' she says. 'It's really important to display things at different heights – if everything's on the same level, your eye just skims around and doesn't really take ▶

HALL

Dawn's silk flower arrangements add a welcoming touch.

Faux orchids, £248, RTfact (01372 470580, rtfactflowers.co.uk)

SITTING ROOM

'I adore my Buddha,' says Dawn. 'It's the focal point of the room.'

Buddha head, £186, RTfact. Glass-topped dark teak coffee table, from £495, Lombok (0870 240 7380, lombok.co.uk). Heal's (0870 024 0780, heals.co.uk) stocks a near-identical Tripod floor lamp, £180 (without shade)




OFFICE
The streamlined cupboards are perfect for stowing away any clutter.

For bespoke cabinetry, try Neville Johnson (0161 873 8333, nevillejohnson.co.uk), Frankie rug, from £200, Laura Ashley (0871 230 2301, lauraashley.com)



in what's there.' Dawn has certainly deployed this theory to great effect, principally using items from her shop. 'I won't stock anything that I can't put into my home,' she says. 'I'm forever rearranging my artefacts and accessories and moving them around.'

Most of her furniture was bought for this house but Dawn revamped existing pieces, too – dyeing the leather sofa in the extension from tan to dark brown, and reusing leftover wood from her kitchen units to make additional storage. 'I like mixing old and new, and I don't think you always have to use top-end designs to achieve a beautiful look,' she says.

Dawn is also a great believer in using fresh and artificial flowers in her decor, pointing out that they can help reference other accessories, such as cushions, and bring in seasonal tones. 'It's always the finishing touches that seal it,' she says. 

BATHROOM

With three females in the house, lots of storage space is essential.

Karl rectangular wash bowl, £179, Bathstore (0800 023 2323, bathstore.com)

MASTER BEDROOM

The luxurious quilt is my best-ever buy,' says Dawn. 'It never needs ironing!'

The Shimmer in Ivory, £68, John Lewis (08456 049049, johnlewis.com) is a similar bedspread. For an alternative sleigh bed, try And So To Bed's (0808 144 4343, andsotobed.co.uk) Cézanne, from £4,125

