

On TV I teach the ... but in my own

Interiors expert Julia Kendall gave herself free rein to turn a real house of horrors into a fabulous – yet practical – home

By Eve McGowan

Julia Kendall is used to giving suburban semis a swift facelift for ITV's 60 Minute Makeover programme, but when it came to her own home there was no question of a quick fix. In fact, the project lasted four years.

On screen, interior designer Julia's style is dictated by a strict budget and the participants' more conservative tastes – while striking results make great television, there's no time to knock down walls and make lasting changes. In her own home, however, she is not afraid to push the boat out with cutting-edge materials and the latest in designer wallpaper.

When Julia bought her five-bedroom house in well-heeled Henley-on-Thames with fiance Andrew Hughes-Hallett in October 2002, it was in dire need of a makeover.

'It was in such a state of disrepair that local children used to think it was haunted. We immediately threw a Halloween party and it was so grisly and cobwebby that we didn't need any decorations,' she laughs.

Almost four years and £150,000 later, they have transformed the house they bought for £725,000 into a stunning contemporary pad for themselves and Julia's two daughters from her first marriage, Madeleine, 15, and Sophie, 12. It has been valued at £1.1 million, although they don't intend selling.

Despite its derelict state, Julia, 38, and Andrew, 43, were convinced the three-storey Victorian house, just minutes from the river, had potential, but even they were surprised by the extent of the work needed.

'Every square inch of plaster had to come off the walls; we replumbed, rewired, repointed and reinstalled central heating,' says Julia.

The couple also knocked down walls to create a larger entrance hall, opening up the living space downstairs and allowing more light on the



Julia's tips for top design

- Before buying anything for the interior, always check on eBay first: 'You never know what you might find.'
- Use holidays as inspiration: 'Make a mental note or take photos of colours that work well together; Middle Eastern countries in particular use colours very differently to us.'
- When employing builders, get at least three quotes and go with personal recommendations: 'Always check out some of the work they've done too.'

first-floor landing and the staircase. They built an extension at the back of the house to enlarge the dining area, and another at the side which provides a utility/laundry room.

'I love the proportions of Victorian homes with their high ceilings but I wanted to change the layout and make it much more open plan because the way we live is so different now,' says Julia. 'I didn't want to

be cut off from the rest of the family when I'm preparing supper,' she adds, gesturing to the kitchen which is now bordered by an open-plan living area on one side and a dining area on the other.

Julia, who spent three years designing kitchens for John Lewis of Hungerford, designed this £20,000 kitchen herself and employed bespoke joiners Martin Leighfield to

build it for her (his website is www.martinleighfield.co.uk).

Although it has Corian work-surfaces and a proper chef's tap, she retained the original Aga. 'I'm typically Taurean, I love cooking,' she says. 'I was frightened of the Aga at first but now I think there's nothing better, especially to lean against in the winter – the cats love it too.'

The pair have also installed innovative lighting, including downlighters and uplighters in the living area. 'It looks really fabulous at night because your eye is drawn to different features,' says Julia.

Julia and Andrew did a lot of the work themselves but hired two teams of builders for the structural work.

And because the house is on a corner plot overlooking the main road, they installed shutters throughout at a cost of £5,500, 'otherwise you feel like you're in a goldfish bowl'.

Andrew re-recorded, sanded and

'60-minute makeover' home it took four years



LIGHT MUSIC: Julia Kendall with fiance Andrew Hughes-Hallett, and their music room. Far left: The house that local children once thought was haunted



DESIGNER COOKING: Julia herself was responsible for the £20,000 kitchen. Left: The light and airy dining area, and below, one of the stylish bedrooms



repainted the house's 48 sash windows and both of them stripped back and revarnished the wooden staircase. Revamping homes from scratch is Julia's job as part of the interior design business she launched six years ago.

This year she teamed up with a local architect to set up Kendall Tap architecture, an interiors and architectural consultancy service (www.ktararchitecture.com).

In the industry now for 20 years, she started with a Saturday job at an interior design company in her home town of Pinner when she was just 14, worked there full time after leaving school and stayed until she was 21.

Recent projects she has worked on include a £1.5 million refurbishment of an American couple's riverside property in Goring, Oxfordshire,

which she and an architect turned from a traditional stone house into a contemporary open-plan property.

Another project involved working alongside a developer on a new school and stayed until she was 21.

Celebrity clients include Ulrika Jonsson, for whom she has designed

interiors in Berkshire and Sweden. 'Ulrika has an incredibly good eye,' says Julia. 'She knows exactly what she wants, so it's just a question of helping her put it all together.'

Before buying this property with Andrew, Julia lived in a three-bedroom Victorian house down the road. 'It was about half the size of this one,' she says.

OTHER HENLEY HAVENS ...

RUPERT CLOSE, £595,000
Three-bedroom, two-bathroom house near station. Traditional-style kitchen. Garage. Agent: Ballard's, 01491 411055.

FRIDAY STREET, £650,000
Three-bedroom 15th Century cottage with garden. Original exposed beams. Agent: Knight Frank, 01491 844903.

WESTERN ROAD, £675,000
Detached four-bedroom, two-reception room period house with off-street parking. Agent: Peers & Hilton, 01491 411066.

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COVER PICTURE: DAVID POOLE

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The couple, who plan to marry next March, met on holiday in Egypt in 2001 and Andrew immediately moved out of his two-bedroom Barnes apartment to live with Julia on their return. Andrew has two sons, Frederick, 15, and Charles, 13, who live with his ex-wife in Perth, Australia, and come to visit for a month at a time during school holidays.

'An enormous and very kitsch gold mirror in one of the guest bedrooms and an Arco lamp in the living room are also treasures found on eBay.'

She adds: 'I also get lots of ideas from the show – that's how I heard about Bali Furniture (www.bali-furniture.co.uk) who made the chaise longue in the living room. 'The problem is that I am confronted with so many beautiful things every day it's really difficult to choose.'

Julia's striking peacock blue sofas are from the Designers Guild (www.designersguild.com) and set her back about £7,000.

'I think it's worth spending money on things such as sofas. Designers Guild is an absolute inspiration,' she says. 'It uses such magical colours and textures.'

The lime green wallpaper and matching armchair in the master bedroom were also from there.

'Green is my favourite colour this year, but I drive Andrew mad because I keep changing my mind,' she says.