

SIMPLE & STYLISH

Samantha and Duncan Johnson's period home may be modest, but that hasn't stopped them from dressing it in a stunning manner

FEATURE CATRIONA SUMMERHILL + PHOTOGRAPHY ALEXANDER JAMES



HOME TRUTHS

THE OWNERS Samantha Johnson, who is an interior designer, her husband Duncan, a graphic designer, and their children Kitty and Ruby, plus Daisy the Jack Russell and Poppy Cat the cat
THEIR HOME Victorian semi, built in 1903
LOCATION Berkshire
ROOMS Hall, sitting room, dining room, kitchen, utility room, two bedrooms, bathroom, shower room, garden office
PURCHASED 2006
PREVIOUS PROPERTY 'Before moving here, we had a flat in a nearby town,' says Samantha.



AS SEEN IN
25 BEAUTIFUL
HOMES

1 & 2 SITTING ROOM

'We've had our Balzac sofa for a long time,' says Samantha, 'but I recently had it re-covered in a soft mohair that feels wonderfully luxurious.' Balzac three-seater sofa, £4,800, Matthew Hilton at SCP, upholstered in Plateau, £160 per m, Sahco. Mimi mirror, £1,300, Knowles & Christou. Funky loop table, £309, Funky Lifestyles. Home

armchair, £2,500, covered in Etamine Fantaisie, £185 per m, both Zimmer + Rohde

up in Botanical Trellis; pelmet in Stripe and Dash, both £41 per m, Vanessa Arbuthnott

3 KITCHEN

The cabinetry was made to Samantha's design. Bespoke kitchen, Samantha Johnson Interior Design, painted in Savage Ground eggshell, £48.50 for 2.5 litres, Farrow & Ball. Blinds made

4 DINING ROOM

This space is also used as a music room and a study area for Kitty and Ruby. Arne Jacobsen Series 7 chairs, £120 each, Blue Sun Tree. Bespoke table, FiftyFifty Furniture



Anyone who believes that children, pets and an impeccable home can't exist under the same roof should visit Samantha Johnson's Berkshire semi. Behind the façade of this compact house lies a smart, streamlined interior that marries comfortable family living with practicality.

For many, this can be a tricky balance to achieve, but it came easily to Samantha. 'Once I became a mother, I wanted to spend more time at home,' she says. 'I'd always loved anything

to do with interiors, so it was then I decided to train as a designer.' Although Samantha makes starting her business sound remarkably straightforward, things weren't quite so simple with the

refurbishment of the semi. Along with her husband Duncan, she took almost four years to realise her vision. 'Spending so much time with clients had a knock-on effect when it came to updating our own house,' Samantha admits. 'We did eventually replace the central heating, have the place rewired, put in a new kitchen and bathroom, and sort out the garden, but it was a work in progress for quite a while.'

The couple also thought about extending their two-bedroom property to give the family more space. 'We applied for planning permission to add a double-height extension to the back of the building, but unfortunately it was rejected. So we've really had to concentrate on making the most of what we have,' says Samantha.

To that end, furniture has been kept to a minimum and, where possible, it has a dual purpose, such as the Loop occasional table in ►





DESIGN ADVICE 'I really do stand by William Morris's famous saying, "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful"'



1 BATHROOM
Reflective pale-blue flooring was chosen to echo the colour of the wallpaper. Polar Glass Arctic floor tiles, £80 per sq m, Amtico. Flora & Fauna wallpaper, £41 per m, Vanessa Arbuthnott

2 MASTER BEDROOM
Samantha's love of birds shines through in this beautiful scheme. Hummingbirds wallpaper in Aqua, £95 per roll, Cole & Son at John Lewis. La Volière two-tier pendant light, £575, The Conran Shop. Bolster cushion made up in Secret Romance in Wisteria, £190 per m, Beacon Hill at Robert Allen

3 & 4 KITTY AND RUBY'S BEDROOM
The white-painted bunk beds are ideal for the children while they are young. Sleigh bunk, £629 (unpainted), Bump. Letter bags, £12 each, Alphabet Bags. Cuckoo wall clock, £190, The Conran Shop



the sitting room, which is both slimline and storage friendly. This disciplined approach ensures that every scheme combines good looks and relaxed living. There is no jarring of styles, only a welcoming blend of collected finds and beautiful patterns that radiate warmth and character. 'I love craft and artisan pieces,' remarks Samantha. 'They bring an immediate interest and sense of worth to a room.'

Alongside Samantha's appreciation of the handmade lies her passion for wallpaper. Pattern is her forte and it appears on almost every wall of the house, including the bathroom. 'I don't really like boutique-style suites, which have a rather clinical feel. I will always err on the side of comfort and visual interest,' says Samantha.

This layering of bold decorative touches also extends to the couple's bedroom, where jewel-coloured wallpaper with hummingbird motifs is matched by a striking pendant light resembling

an ornamental birdcage. 'Anything I add to a room must be beautiful, it must have character and be able to stand alone,' explains Samantha. This may be a simple formula but it has produced some striking results.

As the couple's daughters, Kitty and Ruby, grow up you might expect the Johnsons' plans to include moving house but, as yet, there is no hint of a For Sale sign going up outside the semi. Instead, more space-saving ideas, such as installing built-in bunk beds in the girls' bedroom are next on the list. There are also thoughts of adding a downstairs shower and a garden room at the back of the kitchen where the children can do their homework undisturbed.

'With good planning and a healthy dose of respect, most small spaces can embrace the ups and downs of family life,' says Samantha. 'I like to think there are no hard and fast rules. If all the elements in your home make you happy, it will always feel right.' 25