

THE MISSING LINK

Reuniting a basement with the ground-floor flat above it should have been a simple task, but it required genius, creativity and hard work to pull it off

Words **Gillian Welsh** Photography **Neale Smith**





The X-Men comic-strip wall in the family room, which has an LED lighting system [top left and right]; leather padded doors of the family room and the master bedroom [above and right]; the view of the staircase looking down [below left]; BoConcept sofa and a Twiggy standard light by Foscarini [below]



Transforming an interior is always a challenge; but conjoining two flats is a major undertaking. This did not deter Francis Galashan and Sarah Monk – an ambitious couple with a bold vision. After nine months of living in the ground floor of a converted Georgian townhouse near Edinburgh’s Calton Hill, they purchased the downstairs property: a poky three-roomed front basement with an internal kitchen and bathroom. The couple, not long back from working in the States, set out to unite both flats and create a comfortable family home for themselves and their three children.

Looking at this spacious, airy apartment today, you would never guess it had ever been bedevilled by a higgledy-piggledy layout or dark congested areas. “The whole conversion was very disjointed,” says Francis. “It was ropey in many ways.”

The biggest sticking point was that the house just wasn’t functioning properly or fulfilling the needs of the family, who already had access to two rooms in the back basement but via only a narrow stair at the rear of the property. “It was like a different world,” reflects Sarah.

Edinburgh-based architects Groves-Raines took up the brief to reconfigure the flats into a single two-storey house, with three public rooms, four bedrooms and a large kitchen-dining area. The key to the whole scheme was to join the floors with a new staircase positioned at the heart of the home. Design-conscious – and a physicist to boot – Francis pushed the boundaries of the construction. Curved glass balustrades and a recessed handrail give it the wow factor; and the conventional spiral stair plan has been twisted – when viewed from above, ▶

“TO GET THEM ALL WORKED UP, WE KEPT VERY QUIET ABOUT THE DECOR IN THE FAMILY ROOM. SHORT OF GETTING BANKSY IN, WE DECIDED ON THIS”



each tread tapers into the next, giving the appearance of a continuous timber surface. Inevitably, with a job as complex as this, some logistical hiccups arose along the way: with long cantilevered treads, tapering edges and no inner stringer support, the stair seemed a mission impossible for some engineers, and prototypes had to be made in the early stages of construction to test whether it could actually work. In the end, the challenges were overcome and the result is an innovative masterpiece.

Pivotal, too, in connecting the space was the kitchen. Now

opened up to its original size, it is a bridge linking the sitting room at the front, the study at the back, and the stairs and hall in the middle. "It's all one area," says Sarah.

Despite the differences in tastes, the furniture doesn't jar. Sarah leans towards faded glory – "vintage and combination colours that go together through different textures" – whereas Francis has a predilection for "clean lines". Nowhere is this more obvious than here, the meeting point, which formed the starting point in the interior design process.

The Glasgow-based design company Rehab Interiors was



The beautiful made-to-measure pocket doors [above]; Eames dining chairs and a Zeppelin pendant light by Flos [above left]; the island worktop is made from one piece of manufactured steel [right] and contrasts with the traditional units. The hand-made French-style dresser sits comfortably with three white space-age Konstantin Gircic Miura stools [right]

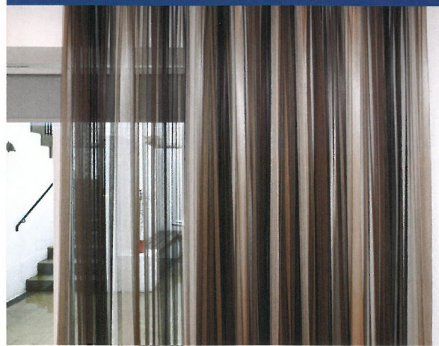




SIGNATURE STYLE

Sarah Shabby chic, although I'm a bit concerned about this – American shabby chic I don't like at all, but I do like British shabby chic: faded velvet. I'm a bit of a hippy
Francis I'm a bit more B&B Italia-ish. Architectural. I enjoy clean lines, minimalist things. I'm more of a design person

Storage in the jaw-dropping walk-in wardrobe has mustard sateen leather inserts and pulls from Andrew Muirhead. The Bohemian rug is from Arte Espina, the moss-green stool from Viaduct and the Manana Light is by Design House Stockholm from Dallas & Dallas; the upholstery on the bedhead is by Designers Guild and the curtain fabric (below) is by Osborne & Little



involved in all the interior details, working in conjunction with Kelly Chan, the project architect, and Laurence McIntosh, the Edinburgh-based company responsible for the manufacture of the bespoke cabinetry designed by Rehab's co-owners, Lee Sowerbutts and Anna Murray.

"Sarah and Francis had clear ideas of what they liked and disliked, which was a huge help to us," explains Lee. "What they wanted from the kitchen was a hand-built product with traditional detailing but without it looking like it came straight from a shop."

A lot of time was spent pondering period fixtures, eliminating those that didn't work with the contemporary oak units and the Wolf glass-fronted stainless-steel fridge-freezer and island. "The position of every plug socket and every handle on every door has to be thought about in a project as big as this," says Lee.

Apart from subtle colour changes to the island (Farrow & Ball's Setting Plaster), the walls are painted in Farrow & Ball's Elephant's Breath. This tranquil shade continues throughout the whole ground floor, on corning, ceilings and doors, ▶





Bespoke cupboards in the children's rooms are in contemporary lime, duck-egg blue and red; the master en-suite with a patchwork of encaustic Moroccan tiles from Dar Interiors (right); the window seat of Millie's bedroom in a collection of fabrics from Designers Guild. The seat is Endurance by Harlequin (below)



unifying the front and back of the property. "Because this house has so many beautiful features we didn't want to highlight one in particular. We envisaged one colour." At this stage in the process the house was a building site, stripped back to its bare bones. "With no lighting, rooms under construction and the house being north-facing, it took a bit of convincing!" adds Lee.

Polished concrete and an impressive piece of manufactured steel on the island add a shiny modern layer. Lime green and grey Eames chairs sit around a sturdy oak table by Philipp Mainzer, and a window seat upholstered in Osborne & Little's Lorca velvet make it an inviting space – and a cool one for the kids to bring their friends to.

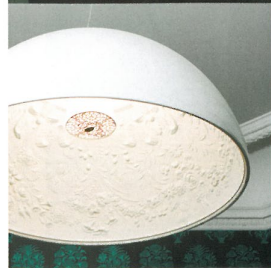
Millie, Cosmo and Felix all had input into the colours and decoration of their rooms. Practicalities were thought about early on, much of the focus centring around clothes and shoes and how quickly they could be tidied up. Concealed storage and integrated desks give the bedrooms a streamlined look and hide all sorts of



BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Lee "The children's bedrooms. There was a huge amount of detailing in the cabinetry"

FAVOURITE ROOM? "VERY SELFISHLY, MY STUDY," SAYS FRANCIS. "THE ORIGINAL BRIEF WAS A GENTLEMAN'S CLUB ON ACID"



In the study [this page]: walls accented by Amarsagar by Osborne & Little; Skygarden pendant light by Marcel Wanders; a James wingback chair by HB and upholstery by Bute Fabrics; the sitting room [right] has a Caboche wall light by Foscarini, a bespoke Arris glass table by Mark and a Heritage Savonnerie rug



stuff. The longevity of colours was the main concern, primary colours having a shorter shelf life than paler shades. Duck egg, natural oak and lime were chosen for the wardrobe panels and red for the upper bed cupboard. "There was a huge amount of detailing involved in the cabinetry," says Lee. "It was the last piece of the jigsaw. We had nine months to do the whole job, and were trying to get the kids' rooms finished by Christmas, which wasn't a problem for us, but for the manufacturers."

With little in the way of ornaments, the house retains a sense

of calm even when the kids return from boarding school. "We didn't have that much sentimental stuff when we lived abroad. You just weed out anything you don't love," says Francis.

Sarah agrees: "The living room is about key pieces. We're not knick-knacky."

A lot of effort went into choosing furniture for this vast room. A mix of seating delineates different zones: a grey wool Facett chair by Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec for watching television; Russell Pinch velvet seats at the window as a ▶



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HOMES & INTERIORS

"THE ORGANISATION THAT GOES INTO THE STRUCTURAL ALTERATIONS TO CREATE THIS AND TO CONNECT THE BASEMENT IS INCREDIBLE. THERE WAS A HUGE AMOUNT OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT"

The HV1 Vola tap (above) designed in 1968 by Arne Jacobsen; modern touches in the mini-cludgie off the hallway (right); Peony wallpaper by Fornasetti for Cole & Son and an Aston Matthews Frico washbasin

social-cum-reading area; a leather B&B Italia sofa – illuminated by a giant Anglepoise floor light – for kicking back and reading the papers.

It was Lee's idea to mirror the unit in the kitchen which houses the stainless-steel fridge freezer. "The idea is to give the illusion of a free-standing cube, as if the partition wall isn't really there," he explains, "so one side's in the kitchen, and the other in the sitting room." The TV is concealed next to it, flanked by the doors that lead into the kitchen.

For Francis, one of the most enjoyable parts of the refurbishment was seeing the kids' reaction when shown the family room for the first time. "They were blown away," he beams. "We'd kept very quiet about it, to get them all worked up." His son, a graffiti fan, was the inspiration behind the X-men comic-strip frieze on the main wall. "Short of getting Banksy in and doing something, we decided on this!" As for the LED system, well, the term "state-of-the-art" scarcely does it justice! ■

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