



Words **Fiona Armstrong** Photographs **Neil Hanna**

Upstairs downstairs

A 'topsy-turvy' house was turned around with a little help from **Liz Bowman's** hormones and fresh design solutions

LIZ BOWMAN blames her hormones for a decision to buy a “topsy-turvy” house in Edinburgh three years ago. Pregnant with second daughter Paige, she decided the family should move. “So we did, then I wondered what on earth I’d been thinking,” she laughs.

Her biggest gripe centred on the layout of the semi-detached 1900s property, which had a large drawing room upstairs, a bedroom downstairs and a small, impractical galley kitchen.

The plan was to create a more conventional layout (bedrooms upstairs with living spaces below) as well as enlarging the dark, north-facing kitchen and improving the connection between house and garden. Building work started in May 2007 and the family continued living in the house while it went on. “Two small children and lots of cables made for chaos,” says Liz, “but you forget all that when the job is done.”

Today a large kitchen/dining area, created by a new extension opening to the garden at the back of the house, is at the core of Bowman family life. Liz praises the man who helped turn this topsy-turvy home into a finely-choreographed set of rooms.

Dundee-based architect Andrew Black had worked on a previous project with the Bowmans. “He has great ideas and is so easy to work with,” confirms Liz, while builder Dave Lee also worked hard to meet their exacting standards.

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Andrew was immediately struck by the lack of interaction between the house and garden. He got to know the site and ascertained his clients’ needs before putting pencil to paper.

Liz knew what she didn’t want. “The whole contemporary white gloss thing just isn’t me,” she says. “And besides, it didn’t feel right for the house.”

Building materials for the single-storey extension were key to ensuring a subtle cohesion between old and new. Timber (here stained grey), stone sourced from a quarry to complement that of the original house, and lead to the roof are all in keeping with the site.

And, when the old galley kitchen came down, its stonework was retained and reused in the section of the extension that holds the new kitchen. Exposing this stonework internally also acknowledges the building’s past.

North facing, the back of the house isn’t ideally placed for natural light. “But north-facing elevations don’t have to focus north,” says Andrew, “it’s about using the sun’s path – we allowed the building to face east to get the morning light and north west for evening light.”

The use of glass (meticulously engineered windows and doors supplied by I-D-Systems) was always going to be vital to the connection between inside and out. Large glazed doors face eastward and fold open to the garden, a cupola was positioned above the kitchen units, and a glazed section cut into the back wall, again providing visual access to the garden.

As too many doors can detract from seating space,



Previous page: the extension blends the old and the new perfectly. Clockwise from top: the master suite; outside; subtle colours are used throughout; a shower room

Andrew suggested the expanse of sliding folding windows to the north and east that create the desired interaction with the garden, while also accommodating window seats. “It’s a great place to sit and read or listen to music,” says Liz.

The couple avoided having a television in this space, and instead treated themselves to a built-in Sonos music system.

Floor levels were also carefully considered as a means of integrating inside and out. The dining area’s oak floor sits lower than the adjoining tiled kitchen floor, allowing the former a seamless meeting, via the glazed doors, with the garden paving.

To comply with building regulations, a step down into the kitchen had to be set back within its entrance, a wide corridor that held a small sitting room in the original house. Andrew utilised this space effectively, creating a “hidden” wall with handleless doors, which hides a compact office, utility area and storage.

As Andrew explains, the layout works to create an approach to the garden in stages. “There are glimpses of the garden from the hidden utility area, then the steps into the kitchen and down into the dining room reinforce the smooth link with the garden.”

Liz enjoyed choosing interior finishes and opted for fitted painted timber units and a granite work surface from the Newcastle Kitchen Company. “We didn’t want a twee kitchen but it had to have elements of tradition to fit with the house,” she says.

A central island allows for sociable cooking, and the work surface blends granite with solid oak. Liz cooked on a stainless steel range in her last home but opted for an Aga here. “It brings a real tradition and warmth to the space,” she says, “but if the building had been south-facing it would have been a no-go as the space could have become far too hot.”

Liz bought the framed antique map – showing this area of Edinburgh a year after the house was built – as a gift for her partner.

A downstairs toilet remains unaltered, while the bay-windowed room to the front (previously the couple’s bedroom) is now an elegant sitting room. A fireplace from the original upstairs drawing room has been transferred to this space creating a focal point. Eyes are also drawn to a distinctive pendant light Liz picked up in Cotterells.

Most recently, the couple sanded the sitting room floor and the proportions of this space make a cosy contrast to the open space at the back of the house.

A beautiful original cupola throws light down the



staircase, which was carpeted red with walls of navy blue before the couple lightened it up.

Paige and Frankie each have a bright, girlish room, while the couple’s bedroom (furnished with French country-style furniture from Feather & Black) occupies the space previously devoted to the drawing room. Andrew reinterpreted this space and saw the potential to create a spacious en suite and dressing area.

Above, left to right: the calm sitting room; the family bathroom; one of the girls’ bedrooms; view to the kitchen

A new internal wall with a large aperture now opens off the bedroom into a wide corridor (the dressing area) lined to one side with cupboards from Ikea, and a stylish shower room is tucked comfortably into the top of corridor.

The couple also ripped out the family bathroom, reinstating the tongue and groove panelling and installing a reproduction Victorian bath.

The project took seven months, longer than the 16

weeks the couple anticipated, largely down to delivery delays. Most recently the garden has been re-landscaped as the construction work left it looking like a building site.

Liz is delighted that they have realised the potential in their home. She doesn’t plan to move again anytime soon, but then there’s no accounting for hormones.

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