

# Inside story

## Starting over

How do you come together in a new home when you're 60-something newly-weds with your own possessions and senses of style? Olivia Lidbury finds out. Photography by Chris Snook

WHEN YOU ENTER your seventh decade, the assumption is that moving house might involve finding a place with few stairs and lots of tranquil open space. But not for Jane Bailey and Chris Stooke. Divorcée Jane, 62, and widower Chris, 63, who were married in 2018, chose to live in the heart of a lively south London suburb, and weren't deterred by an extensive renovation project that would take over eight months.

Jane, who has adult twins, had moved into Chris's large family home in Dulwich, and the couple were planning to look for a new place of their own when serendipity called. A Victorian-era, semi-detached house nearby, close to the high street and train station, presented itself before going on the open market. Within 10 minutes of viewing it, Chris, who works part-time as the director of an insurance company, simply said, 'Yep, let's buy it.'

The house was in a state of disrepair, having been the subject of makeshift alterations and patch-up jobs over previous years. 'You'd open a cupboard door and find a shower there,' recalls Jane. The plan was to refurb it at a leisurely pace, but Chris's house immediately attracted a buyer on the proviso that it be vacated within six weeks, so they were faced with the daunting task of clearing out a house that had been his family home for 17 years. 'We employed a professional declutterer because it was such a massive and emotionally challenging task,' says

Jane. Certain pieces were claimed by Chris's four adult children; others were packed off to the family holiday home in Suffolk or donated to charity.

Renovations on such a scale were completely new territory for Jane, but she knew she wanted industrial-style Crittall doors on the rear kitchen extension – which she and Chris have particularly appreciated during lockdown. 'They created a seamless divide with the garden, which we really enjoyed over the weeks of glo-



rious sunshine,' she says. 'Plus, they are so easy to open. I would urge anyone considering sliding or bifold doors to think again.'

Another good choice was the sleek, wood-clad studio at the bottom of the garden, from Ecospace (ecospacestudios.com). 'That was the best thing we did,' says Chris. 'It massively

helped me with working from home and is a lovely space as well.' Jane also uses the studio for her new hobby, painting, which she has kept up via Zoom classes during quarantine.

When it came to the decor, Jane enlisted the help of interior designer Beth Dadswell of Imperfect Interiors (imperfectinteriors.co.uk). 'I felt that perhaps I should have been able to do it myself,' says Jane, 'but

I'm so glad we hired Beth, because I'm not good at all the small details.'

The couple had similar tastes when it came to furniture – Chris's collection of Scandinavian design pieces, such as the Hans Wegner wishbone dining chairs and Eero Saarinen Tulip dining table, came with them when they moved (coincidentally, Jane had had reproductions of these pieces in her



### Clockwise from far left

The floor tiles in the entrance hall are from London Mosaic (londonmosaic.com), laid in a pattern designed by Beth Dadswell;

the Bomma pendant light is by Tollgard (tollgard.com). The couple hired local architect Stephen Turvil (stephenturvilarchitects.com), who suggested the

large skylight in the kitchen, which ties in with the Crittall doors; the white shelving is by Hexagon Furniture (hexagonfurniture.co.uk). Jane

and Chris in the kitchen; the units are from Roundhouse (roundhousedesign.com), and are painted in Farrow & Ball's De Nimes (farrow-ball.com)





previous home). But when it came to colour, there were initially some reservations.

‘I was a little worried that everything might look too black and white,’ says Chris of the monochromatic tiled hallway and modern black finishings peppered through the house on light switches, plug sockets and door handles – suggested by Beth to echo the Crittall frames.

While his previous home was painted entirely off-white, Jane’s had a bolder decorative style, so she was the advocate for a stronger palette. Chris vetoed the dark blue she suggested for the sitting room – and her fondness for carpet in favour of his preferred wooden floors – but she convinced him to go for the green patterned Farrow & Ball wallpaper that she had enjoyed in her previous bedroom. ‘I worked hard for that!’ she laughs.

There is another patterned wallpaper, a floral print by Abigail Borg, in the downstairs loo, and splashes of colour else-



NB CREDIT TO BE INCLUDED IN CAPTIONS: ARCHITECT STEPHEN TURVIL (STEPHENTURVILARCHITECTS.COM)

HOW TO  
COMPROMISE  
ON STYLE

*Do your research*  
If you have your heart set on a certain look, make up a mood board using a tool such as Pinterest, ensuring you include some things you know your partner will like.

*Seek out new shades*  
Your partner doesn’t like a particular colour? Find examples of it used in different spaces, and varying shades; it might change their mind.

*Pick your battles*  
Should you have completely different tastes in terms of colour or pattern, fight for the thing you really love, but let something else go.

*Don’t dismiss your partner’s concerns*  
If they really don’t like something that you love, find out why, and see if you can work a way around it.

**From far left**  
The mustard-coloured sofa in the living room came from The Conran Shop (theconranshop.co.uk) and the side table is by Pinch (pinchdesign.com). The bedroom wallpaper is Helleborus by Farrow & Ball (as before). The dressing table in Jane’s room is by Ercol (johnlewis.com)



where come in the kitchen cabinets (painted in Farrow & Ball’s De Nimes) and a mustard-yellow sofa in the sitting room.

There are three bedrooms over the top two floors; Jane and Chris’s has a walk-in wardrobe and en-suite, and Jane also has a small dressing room with a desk and alcove shelves: ‘A little space that’s mine,’ she says.

Although parts of the project were stressful, the couple acknowledge the luxury of being able to attack the house in one go, and the fact that they were able to move in a couple of months before the lockdown started and enjoy spending time in their new home. ‘We’ve had many lovely evenings which have started with a game of cards, a drink and my latest playlist,’ says Chris.

‘Spending so much time in the house has meant that it is now truly home,’ agrees Jane – made even more so by the newest addition to the household: miniature schnauzer puppy Stanley.

GET THE LOOK...



**LOWENNA CEILING LIGHT**  
£130, Habitat (habitat.co.uk)



**HANSEN DINING CHAIR**  
£125, Sweetpea & Willow (sweetpeaandwillow.com)



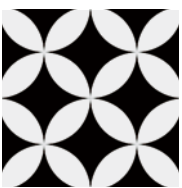
**HENDRICKS ACCENT ARMCHAIR**  
£399, John Lewis & Partners (johnlewis.com)



**DULWICH SOFA**  
from £1,695, Rose & Grey (roseandgrey.co.uk)



**OAK MAGAZINE SIDE TABLE**  
£175, Cox & Cox (coxandcox.co.uk)



**RETROMIX CIRCLE MEDIUM WHITE TILES**  
£46.99 per square metre, The London Tile Co (londontile.co.uk)