

Unique skills to add character and charm

A former unloved Edinburgh student flat is transformed into a chic city pad, discovers **Kirsty McLuckie**

Lots of couples see each home purchase as a project and a way to move up the property ladder by adding value through their own hard work. But Stuart Holligan and Asta Young-Smith make for an impressive team in terms of the skills they can bring to a makeover.

Stuart is a project manager for a large joinery firm, while Asta works as a kitchen designer for Development Direct. It stands to reason then that in their 13 years together they have taken on a series of properties needing work and given them each a makeover before moving on.

Having previously renovated flats in Edinburgh's Perth Street and Broughton Place while living in them, their latest completed home is a second-floor flat at 64/3 Broughton Street on the edge of the New Town.

Stuart says: "Like our previous homes, it was a flat in a traditional block which had been let out to students and not only needed upgrading but a new configuration to make the most of it."

"It is a fairly standard layout, a sitting room and bedroom at the front and two big bedrooms in the middle of the flat which were really wasted space."

"You either have to use these for storage, or maybe a study area as they have no windows. Instead, the couple decided to take down walls so that one box room - which must have been sizeable - became the kitchen, now open plan to the sitting room, while the other formed an ensuite to the master bedroom."

There is still plenty of storage - the flat also has its own cellar at lower ground floor level - but three bedrooms, two bathrooms and the big living space gives the accommodation more balance. Stuart says: "When a property has been unloved for some time, it is also missing character, so in our renovations that is what we try to put back."

"While some features cannot be replaced, I can use my skills to add a different feel to each room through panelling or built-in cupboards."

The bespoke joinery is indeed a highlight, from the restored or custom-made shutters at each window, the floor-to-ceiling panelling gracing the guest bedroom, the bespoke dresser in the sitting room and the beautiful fitted wardrobes in the master bedroom.

The kitchen and bathrooms are of a more contemporary styling under Asta's expert eye. The kitchen has granite Silestone

work surfaces, built-in appliances and chic high gloss storage units, while the breakfast bar area forms a divide to the sitting room.

Here there is a beautiful original marble fireplace and intricate cornice work. The whole space is lit by two large front windows.

It is this juxtaposition of the modern and the traditional that the couple strive to create. Asta has a real eye for decor while Stuart says he is more the logistical solutions end of the arrangement.

A good example of how they work together to create interest and character is the bench which serves the breakfast bar, which was made by Stuart from the studs that came out of the wall taken down between the kitchen and sitting room, which adds an industrial air.

Asta and Stuart continued to work at their day jobs through much of the 15-month renovation.

Stuart says: "Having completed three projects we are quite used to living like that. All our valuable possessions tend to be kept in a corner somewhere under polythene sheets."

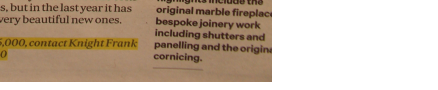
For their next project, Stuart wants to employ another skill. He says: "I actually started my career as a landscape gardener so I'd like to buy somewhere with some outside space to see what we can do."

The flat at Broughton Street has had a remarkable transformation from a rather dingy, woodchipped student flat to a chic city home.

Over the years it may have lost some of its original features, but in the last year it has acquired some very beautiful new ones.

Offers over £425,000, contact Knight Frank on 0131 222 9600

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KEYS TO KNOW

64/3 Broughton Street is a fully refurbished second floor New Town flat.

It has a drawing room, adjoining kitchen, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, utility room and a cellar at basement level.

Immaculately presented, highlights include the original marble fireplace, bespoke joinery work including shutters and panelling and the original cornice.



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Kirsty McLuckie on last minute home staging

From the plethora of home makeover programmes there can be few people who aren't aware that when you are selling your home it helps to declutter. From removing family toys and games and vacuuming away pet hairs, we know that the best way to sell our properties comes when it is de-personalised. Some of us might even go as far as trying the old trick of baking bread or leaving off the impress viewers.

But a recent experiment by insurance firm Aviva shows just how much seemingly wasteful clutter in a sale can blow viewers' eyes.

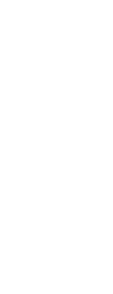
This can be something as simple as having your bedroom floor cluttered with shoes, taking photos from the wrong angle or leaving the ironing board out. These small errors added up to a 20 per cent lower perceived value when Aviva showed a test property to prospective buyers and tenants.

The test property was a one-bedroom flat with a shared garden that was shown to 1,000 members of the public. One half of the sample saw the property in its "before" state and the other half saw it after a "mini-makeover".

What is interesting is that the makeover totalled an hour's effort for a photographer and his assistant. Despite these changes costing nothing and taking little effort, they boosted the property's value in viewers' eyes by 11 per cent.

Those who saw the "before" version of the property estimated it at £600 per month to rent, while those viewing the "after" version put it at £752 per month - a difference of 13.7 per cent.

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