



NEAR PERFECTION

For Matt and Claire Podesta, revamping the run-down property just yards from their old house took a leap of imagination – but the result was stunning

FEATURE RACHEL LEEDHAM PHOTOGRAPHY DARREN CHUNG



the owner, who'd built the house in 1976, was a heavy smoker and every interior surface was covered in a sticky film of tobacco.'

Undeterred by the house's appearance, Matt and Claire put in a successful bid, then turned their attention to making the place habitable. The week before the couple moved in, with their third child, Freddie, due just three weeks later, Matt rented a skip and he and two friends stripped every wall and floor. 'I hired an industrial spray gun and bought about 40 gallons of cream paint,' he says. 'I expected it to take a couple of days to spray the whole house, but in fact it took a morning – it was like setting off a bomb in each room.' Turning the property into a characterful



KITCHEN
 Matt designed this characterful mix of painted and oak cupboards.
 Bespoke Podesta (01494 677770, podesta.uk.com) cabinetry painted in **Hardwick White** eggshell, £43.50 for 2.5 litres, Farrow & Ball (01202 876141, farrow-ball.com)

HALL
 This spacious entrance hall was one of the few aspects

of the house that made a good impression on the couple.
 Solid Cottage Oak floorboards, £67.32 per sq m, Broadleaf (01269 851910, broadleafftimber.com)

SITTING ROOM
 Big comfy sofas help make this a cosy family space.
 Similar large sofa, the Rosie, from £999, Sofa Workshop (0844 249 9161, sofaworkshop.com)

home, however, was an altogether longer process with Matt juggling his own furniture business and the needs of the family alongside the renovation. It was about two years before the main works started, but living in the house prior to making any changes proved to be invaluable. The couple had originally planned to extend the property, but when Matt knocked down the partition wall between the kitchen and dining room as an interim measure, they realised this created a wonderful space. 'What we needed was to transform the ugly façade,' says Matt.

So a veranda was added to one side of the property, balanced with a car port on the opposite part of the house. Flat-roofed ▶






dormers were replaced with gabled ones, their shape echoing a new gabled porch. Each window was swapped for handmade, double-glazed panelled designs and the concrete roof tiles were replaced with clay versions. Then two sets of French windows were added: one to access the garden from the kitchen, and the other to reach the veranda from the sitting room. 'These improvements fell within permitted development, which meant I could do the drawings myself, avoiding architects' fees,' says Matt.

Keeping an eye on the budget was vital throughout, which is why the family lived on site, bar a stint at Matt's parents' home when the roof was removed. 'We had concrete in our cornflakes,

workmen were turning up at 7.30am and we were constantly playing parking polo with the builder,' says Matt. 'I always advise my clients to rent somewhere else for the duration, but the truth is that we had to be extremely careful with cash flow.'

Every detail was carefully planned by the couple, from the moulded oak architraves to the sturdy windows with thick frames and mullions. 'At first the builders didn't really share our vision,' Matt recalls. 'But when the scaffolding was removed and the house was revealed in all its glory, you could tell they were proud. They were all taking photographs of the place with their mobile phones. It was definitely a moment to savour.' 

LANDING
Matt updated the staircase by adding new banisters and newel caps.

Erin wallpaper, £34 for a 10-metre roll, Laura Ashley (0871 230 2301, lauraashley.com)

MASTER BEDROOM
Another bold floral print brings this scheme alive.

Inari Azalea wallpaper (W204/08), £41.50 for a 10-metre roll, Romo (01623 756699, romo.com)



BATHROOM
The couple had to live with a peach suite for two years before they installed these new fittings.

Arc WC, £297; Superdeep bath, from £179, both Victoria Plumb (0844 804 4848, victoriaplumb.com)