



**SITTING ROOM**

The armchair in the window provided the inspiration for the colour scheme in this stylish space.

Armchair upholstered in Carnival linen, £119m, Christopher Farr Cloth. Triomphe side tables, £525 each, Oka. Samson table lamps, £250 each, Pooky

# HERE TO STAY

Alex and Will Keith thought their first real home together would be strictly short term – it proved to be anything but

FEATURE SALLY SMITH | PHOTOGRAPHY RACHAEL SMITH



**REPLANNED**

**HOME TRUTHS**

**THE PROPERTY**

19th-century Victorian terrace  
**LOCATION** South London  
**ROOMS** Sitting room, kitchen-diner, cloakroom, five bedrooms, two bathrooms

**PURCHASED** 2004

**PREVIOUS PROPERTY**

"We lived in my two-bedroom flat in Fulham for a few months before we moved in," says Alex.



**SITTING ROOM**

A practical office space has been incorporated at the back of the room. Walls painted in Stiffkey Blue estate emulsion, £45 for 2.5L, Farrow & Ball

**BATHROOM**

Geometric tiles on the wall, bath panel and floor give this compact room its wow factor. Artic-21-hex concrete tiles, £58.87sq m, Best Tile. Try the grey seagrass basket, from £24, Bloomingville at Amara

**ISLA'S BEDROOM**

The bespoke velvet headboard injects a vibrant splash of colour. For similar fabric try Naples velvet in Jaffa Orange, £17.95m, The-millshop-online. Brunswick wallpaper, £37.50m, Tektura Wallcoverings. For metal stars like these, from £13 each, try eBay

**MAIN BEDROOM**

Simple, fuss-free decor gives this space an effortlessly stylish appeal. Beauvais bedside table in Dove Grey, £295, Oka. Try the Bistro oak dining chair, £155, Graham and Green

**BATHROOM**

The rich tone and grain of the vanity lend depth and warmth. Bespoke American black walnut vanity, around £1,140, Otta Design. Worktop in White Minerva marble, £649, Minerva. Mosaic stick tiles, £3.90 a sheet, Mosafil





#### LANDING

'I wanted to incorporate family heirlooms here – these watercolours were painted by my great-great-uncle,' says Alex. Walls painted in Skimming Stone; handrails painted in Railings, both estate emulsion, £45 for 2.5L, Farrow & Ball



#### TANA'S BEDROOM

Alex designed the wardrobes with a fun zigzag front. Bespoke wardrobe, from £1,344, Otta Design. Alex/Linmon table, £70, Ikea, is similar

When Alex and Will Keith moved into their first home together after three months of marriage, they did not think they would be staying long. 'I knew I wanted to live in this part of southwest London, I just wasn't sure about this particular house,' says Alex. 'I was hoping to find more of a renovation project, but there weren't many properties on the market at the time.'

Will, a banker, was keen to buy the home as it was convenient for his daily commute to work, and his enthusiasm convinced Alex that this was indeed the right property for them. 'It's a great area,' she says. 'We had friends and good schools nearby, and there were plenty of green spaces where we could walk our dog, Tikka. We were also ready to start a family.'

A year later, Alex had the couple's first daughter, Isla, now 12, soon followed by Tana, 11, and Clover, eight. Now a family of five, the Keiths wanted more space

downstairs, so they built a side-return extension to create a kitchen-diner. 'We also knocked through to the sitting room,' says Alex. 'As a result, the sun comes streaming right through the house now.'

Alex had a clear vision of how to make the most of the space, having set up an interior design business, Otta Design, with friend Alison Johnson. 'I knew that I wanted to paint the sitting room a strong blue colour and keep some of the original Victorian features,' she says. She decided to retain the fireplace in the formal part of the sitting room, but remove the chimney breast at the back, to give her more design options for a practical office space.

The plan worked so well downstairs that it made sense to take out the original chimney breasts in Isla and Tana's bedrooms upstairs, opening up some much-needed floor space. 'It's amazing what a difference it made to how I could lay out the rooms,' says Alex. 'It was also important to me that the decor in the

girls' rooms reflected their individual personalities, so I played around with mixing bright colours, fabrics and textures.'

The final piece of the jigsaw was to make space for an additional bedroom. 'In 2007, we built the loft as our bedroom, but planning regulations prohibited us from building an extra room at the back of the house,' says Alex. However, last year, the couple finally gained permission to add the fifth bedroom they had planned. 'It's worked out perfectly,' she says. 'We've made the double bedroom at the front of the property a stylish playroom for the girls, so they can hang out with their friends.'

This meticulous preparation and design talent has paid off, as Alex has created a family home that will last the Keiths a lifetime. 'I'm surprised we're still here, but it's been worth all the expense and mess,' she says. 'Having built our ideal home, we're not moving for a long time. I want to relax and watch my daughters grow up while enjoying the results of our hard work.' 🏡

**INSPIRATION** 'I travelled around Africa in my late twenties. The culture and colourful way of life inspired my passion for using geometric patterns and bold designs'

### KITCHEN

A patterned blind and striking orange bar stools lift the sleek, contemporary design. Roman blind in Lindi Zig Zag hopsack linen, £300, Bernard Thorp. Originals bar stools, £240 each, Ercol. Sofie Refer Mega Bulb pendant lights, £143 each, &Tradition

