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# SEVENTH HEAVEN

*Anne Donovan fell in love with this Victorian villa in Oxford, her seventh family home, which she transformed into a welcoming and light-filled contemporary space*

WORDS FAITH BRADBURY | PHOTOGRAPHS DARREN CHURCH



## GARDEN ROOM

*Inside this clever structure at the end of the garden are a living room, bedroom, guest accommodation, study and gym (where Anne does yoga).*

**Varier Peel chair and stool** £1,330. Back in Action. 020 7930 8309. backinaction.co.uk. **Similar lamp**. VLE19. £538.65. Porta Romana. 020 7352 0440. portaromains.co.uk.



#### BACK GARDEN

*Decking and raised beds were chosen instead of a play area because, says Anne, "Our close is one of those streets where all the children run play outside." The garden room was given planning consent because its salubrious and pebble roof is easy on the eye for the neighbours.*

**Stainless-steel table with chairs and integral barbecue.** £5,500.  
Designed by Andrew Herring, 01865 391996, herringhomes.co.uk  
Made by Toby Slayton, 01865 400753, thmg.co.uk

**ENTRANCE HALL**

*Anne decided to run the carpet across the hall floor from the stairs to accentuate the visual flow of the house from the moment you walk through the door.*

**George console table** M107, £2,562; **Hope crossover stool** M16, £160; both English Looking Glasses, 020 7351 4433, [englishlooking.com](http://englishlooking.com). **Carpet**, Sisool Tric in Grey MB00, £68.75sq m, Crucial Trading, 01562 743747, [crucial-trading.com](http://crucial-trading.com).



#### KITCHEN

*Glossing white surfaces, a pebble-coloured Aga and soft grey cupboards help attract light into the basement kitchen, making it feel as if it is on ground level rather than eight feet below.*

**Bespoke kitchen.** Built up at Kitchen Architecture, 01865 426990, kitchenarchitecture.co.uk. **Limestone floor.** 885sq m, Kirkstone, 01539 433296, kirkstone.com. **Lancaster kitchen downlight** in nickel, £1,000, Vaughan, 020 7349 4600, vaughandesigns.com.

*On warm, sunny days Anne opens up the doors on either side of the basement kitchen to encourage a welcome breeze to blow through the room*



Since giving up her career as a PA 20 years ago, Anne Donovan has not only retrained and become an interior designer but, in the course of following her husband Paul's career moves, she has, to date, renovated and decorated her family home seven times in as many different locations.

At the moment, however, Anne has a dilemma on her hands. There is something about the couple's latest home, a four-storey, semi-detached Victorian villa nestled deep within central Oxford, that is making Anne think twice about succumbing to the pressure of moving again.

She has longed to live in Oxford ever since visiting the city five years ago. At that time, she and Paul discovered one of Oxford's most

elegant roads, one that, around 1860, had been given to the university for housing for its dons. So when, in June 2004, the Donovans were sent details of a house for sale on that very road, Anne flew across from Dublin, where Paul's job had taken them, to see it immediately. "A lady had lived in it for fifty-six years," says Anne. "She then rented out all the rooms to students, so each room had a gas and electricity meter and was very, very poor, cold and shabby."

Although the actual structure of the house was secure, there was a major sticking point in that the roof needed replacing. Anne and Paul put in what they thought was a ludicrous offer – £400,000 below the asking price – and, to their astonishment, it was accepted. "Then we thought, Oh, gosh, what have we done?" Anne says.

Builder Andrew Herring had a contemporary vision for the property and persuaded the more traditional Anne that this could be a stunning home. Anne hired Andrew after seeing a fabulous Arts and Crafts-style



## LIVING ROOM

*Cushions in a spectrum of brown and burnt orange tones bring out the warmth of the walnut coffee table.*

**Hudson sofa**, £2,750; **Berkeley chair**, £1,675; both Kingcome Sofas, 020 7244 7747, kingcomesofas.co.uk. **Sofa and chair** in Lomond in Natural F2817-06, Colefax and Fowler, £58m, 020 7244 7427, colefax.com. **Curtains** in Prolific Silver, £102m, Beacon Hill, 01494 474741, beaconhilldesign.com. **Similar side server table**, JSJL Brown Interiors, 01432 851991, brownantiques.com.

## DINING ROOM

*A neutral backdrop allows Anne to decorate this space in a variety of ways, depending on both the time of year and the occasion.*

**Similar dining table and chairs.** ISJJ. Brown Interiors, 0432 851991, brownantiques.com. **Chairs covered in Duplex in Fogshell L6762-01.** E82m, Larsen, 020 7318 6000, larsenfabrics.com. **Artwork.** Mosaic by Rachael Nee, £1800, Cube Gallery, 007 377 1470, cube-gallery.co.uk.





**BATHROOM**

*Andrew Herring planned each room according to the way the light moves. So, the sun rises in Anne's bedroom and sets through the bathroom windows - perfect for relaxing at the end of a busy day.*

**Lonsdale bath** in Dawn Metal, £7,000, Water Monopoly, 020 7624 2630, watermonopoly.com. **Blind** in Silk Stripe in Mocca/Bronze, £25m. Prêt à Vivre, 08 45 130 5161, pretavivre.com - **made by** Blind Fashion, 01924 844610, blindfashion.com. **Painting** by the late Michael Scott, Contemporary Fine Art Gallery Eton, 01753 854315, cfag.co.uk



## MAIN BEDROOM

*Anne is delighted to have a whole floor to herself. "It was my idea to make it into a suite of rooms," Andrew says. "Doors can be opened right out so the floor becomes one big room."*

**Old family chair in** Two Components in Nero, E122.60m, Beacon Hill, D1494 474741, beaconhilldesign.com **Bespoke walnut wardrobe** C&G Joinery, 01235 763233, cgjoinery.co.uk

*"When everything has settled down in the economy, it would be lovely to find a bolt hole in Ireland and build something from scratch that is very personal"*

home he had built. "Andrew was looking for a town house project he could work on in a contemporary style and this presented him with a challenge, as he couldn't alter the exterior," explains Anne. His ideas for the basement, formerly the garage and a self-contained flat, were initially a bit much for Anne. "Andrew saw it as one big white space," she recalls of the kitchen and living area but now she realises how right he was. "It's the hub of the house," she says. "We probably spend most of our time here."

Obtaining planning permission for the project took a year, after which Anne happily launched herself into the renovation. "I was the site manager. If we needed things, I would go and get them. It was a cold, dirty and very hard job," she says. As part of the basement conversion, Andrew also advised digging out ground between the front of the house and the road to create the front terrace. Today, this small area is some eight feet below road level and is a secret, sheltered haven where the family likes to relax. "We take our coffee out there in the morning,"

says Anne. The terrace at the back of the house sees its fair share of people, as does a single-storey building at the foot of the back garden that incorporates a gym, an office and accommodation for guests.

Anne's greatest indulgence, however, is her commandeering of the entire first floor for herself, leaving the top floor for the children's bedrooms and a guest room. "I have a bedroom, bathroom, dressing room and separate wet room. It's absolutely gorgeous," she says.

But with her dream house complete, where to now? "If the opportunity arose, I'd like to work on a property with Andrew." For her family, she says, "When everything has settled down in the economy, it would be lovely to find a bolt hole in Ireland, a special place, and buy a piece of land and build something from scratch that is very personal." ■



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