

A bright, airy living room with a large bay window. The window is dressed with dark wood blinds and has a view of a lush green garden. In the foreground, a yellow patterned sofa is partially visible. A white armchair with a blue jacket and a patterned pillow sits near the window. A white ottoman with a stack of books is in the center. A small orange side table is next to the ottoman. The room has a light-colored carpet and a white ceiling with crown molding.

Centre of attention

Carefully considered furnishings and inspired accessories form the focal points of the light and airy schemes that are at play in this graceful Edwardian home

Words & styling **Rachel Watson** Photos **Johnny Bouchier**



The need for increased space to accommodate a growing family was the motivation behind Rebecca and Tim Wilson's decision to buy their Edwardian home in north London eight years ago. Although the property was in fairly good decorative order, the layout of the rooms needed a lot of alteration. "We knew it wasn't going to be a quick fix," explains Rebecca, "but the size of the house fitted the bill and there was plenty of scope for improvement."

With her busy schedule and two young children, Rebecca decided to hire an interior designer to work through the

project with her. A friend recommended Brenda Gibson from Complete Interior Co, and the two women swiftly set up a meeting to discuss how Rebecca's vision could be turned into a reality.

It was decided that the gloomy, cramped kitchen would be a good place to start. "The kitchen lacked a window and so was extremely dark," recalls Rebecca. To open up the space, Brenda suggested knocking down the partition wall between the kitchen and dining area, then installing a large window and skylight to allow light to stream into the newly created room. The modern kitchen now features Shaker-style units ▶

ABOVE: the seascape above the sofa in Rebecca's north London home provided the inspiration for the decorating scheme of walnut flooring with taupe and milk shades on the walls

LEFT: the white fabric on the smaller sofa is a lightweight weave from Romo (tel 01623 756699, www.romofabrics.com) that has been strengthened and made fire-retardant

RIGHT: a pale, understated scheme in the hallway allows the colourful stained glass panels to take centre stage. The ornate mirror frame has been given a wash of white paint to blend in with the antique hall table



BELOW: interior designer Brenda Gibson arranges a bold display of tulips on the dining table

BELOW CENTRE: the baskets in the Shaker-style kitchen provide plenty of additional storage space

BOTTOM: the newly created kitchen is light and spacious

RIGHT: Rebecca designed the stained glass door panels herself and used them as an ingenious way to draw the room scheme together



“Edwardian houses are famous for having very little storage”

◀ by Andrew Macintosh (tel 020 8995 8333, www.andrewmacintoshfurniture.co.uk), chosen for their simple design and enhanced by a subtle duck-egg blue wash. The old flooring was replaced with large, cream flagstones from European Heritage (tel 020 7381 6063, www.europeanheritage.co.uk), which also supplied the elegant glass tiles that form a striking splashback behind the gas range cooker.

The focal point of the room is a magnificent cobalt chandelier above the table in the dining area, which Rebecca selected from Kevin McCloud's lighting range and sourced through Brenda's company. She was instantly drawn to the striking colour and bespoke design. “I wanted something that would add a real ‘wow’ factor,” she explains. “The light was originally electric but I had it converted into a candle chandelier, as I'm not fond of candle-flame bulbs.” The wonderfully rustic, distressed wood dining table and chunky chairs came from Tobias and the Angel (tel 020 8878 8902).

While the new kitchen units provided ample storage for utensils, Rebecca still required a home for her cookery books

and kitchen linens. Brenda pointed out that a dresser would restrict traffic around the table and instead suggested they fit two tall, slender units made to Brenda's design. Finally, a vibrant acrylic painting by Sue Campion from a local gallery was chosen for the focal wall. “At first, I wasn't sure the painting would suit the space,” recalls Rebecca, “but, once we'd hung it, I knew it was right. I love the way it brings a splash of bright colour to the area.”

In contrast to the clever manipulation of colour in the kitchen, the hallway scheme is deliberately monotone, allowing the Art Nouveau-style stained glass door and window panels to be seen to best effect. Ivory-painted walls form a neutral canvas for a whitewashed French Rococo mirror and antique hall table.

“I thought the whitewashed effect was a good complement to the stained glass and, although the mirror is quite ornate, the hall is relatively free of ornamentation so the effect is not overly fussy.”

Brenda designed a modern-style dresser for the space at the far end of the hallway. Incorporating a built-in wine rack, the unit also offers ample storage for ▶



The dining area is dominated by a vibrant painting and a striking cobalt blue chandelier



LEFT: a sky blue wash over soft white emulsion gives the bedroom a breezy, seaside feel. The plantation shutters add to the effect and are an ideal solution to Rebecca's dislike of fussy window treatments

BELOW LEFT: the en suite shower and dressing room was created from the fourth bedroom adjacent to the master bedroom

BOTTOM: crisp white linen with blue detailing and accessories complement the bedroom perfectly

"I prefer tranquil, peaceful spaces that are ordered and comfortable"

◀ CDs and books. "Edwardian houses are famous for having very little storage," explains Rebecca.

As the painting in the dining area or the stained glass in the hallway clearly demonstrate, the use of a key accessory or furnishing as the pivotal point in a room scheme is central to Brenda's decorating ethos. In the living room, this manifests itself in the way a glorious seascape provides the crucial link between furnishings and colour scheme. "The painting complements the walnut floorboards and taupe and mink shades on the walls, which Brenda had mixed especially," says Rebecca. "Above all though, I love it because it reminds me of my favourite beach in Devon."

Brenda persuaded Rebecca to choose classic-style furniture, such as the clean-lined sofa, to lend the scheme a timeless appeal. Choosing upholstery proved more difficult, however. "I had seen a swatch of this lovely white woven material but it just wasn't heavy enough for a sofa," recalls Rebecca. "We searched endlessly for an alternative but nothing was as good so, in the end, Brenda had the fabric strengthened and fire-retarded."

With the ground floor of the house completed, Rebecca and Brenda turned their attention to the upstairs area. In the master bedroom, the fireplace had

to be stripped of years of paint and retiled. Rebecca then painted the walls a soft white, over which she washed a pale blue, giving the space a breezy, seaside feel. The shape of the window dictated the choice of plantation shutters, in line with Rebecca's dislike of fussy window dressings. "I prefer tranquil, peaceful spaces that are ordered and comfortable," she explains. It is this inclination that prompted her to convert the adjacent bedroom into a shower and dressing room, "so there is no need for a bulky wardrobe or chest of drawers."

Although Rebecca contributed a good deal to the redesign of her elegant home, she admits that she couldn't have done it without Brenda. "Having someone knowledgeable with whom to talk through ideas and possibilities was an enormous luxury. What's more, Brenda took charge of sorting out all the problems – sourcing the products, liaising with manufacturers and site managing the work. It made the whole process amazingly stress-free."

Contact Brenda Gibson at Complete Interior Co (tel 020 8878 2282, www.completeinterior.co.uk). The British Interior Design Association (BIDA) offers a comprehensive database of UK-based interior designers. For details, call 020 7349 0800 or visit www.bida.org. □





▲ Painted wood base table, with white oak top, from £1,450, New England Lifestyle (☒ tel 0870 872 6292, www.newenglandlifestyle.com).

► Willow baskets, £19.99 for a set of three, Next (☒ tel 0845 600 7000, www.next.co.uk).



▲ Sorrel (left) and Sushi Makeover Cupboard paint, satin finish, both £10.99 for 750ml, Crown (tel 0870 240 1127, www.crownpaint.co.uk).

insider secrets



Stained-glass window, price on application, Peter Baker Art Glass Company (tel 01626 891383).

CREATE THE LOOK

Centre of attention

The Wilsons' style is typified by soft, neutral colours and carefully chosen furnishings. By Sarah Griffin



Suede cushions, £24.95 each, The Cotswold Company (☒ tel 0870 550 2233, www.Cotswoldco.com).

► Ceramic vases from £16.25, BoConcept (tel 0845 605 0565, www.boconcept.com).

▼ Mode modular footstool, £265, John Lewis (☒ tel 0845 604 9049, www.johnlewis.com).

