



Interior inspiration

Finalising the interior design of your new home might seem an overwhelming task. With a wealth of experience in self-build and renovation projects behind her, bespoke furniture specialist Barbara Genda provides an industry insight to help with those tricky furniture, storage and aesthetic quandaries.

By the time it comes to the finishing touches of a project, perhaps money and energy levels are starting to run low, but the aesthetic finishing touches are often what visitors to your new home will remember the most. Clever storage and furniture solutions that are integrated into the design of a new home make an impressive difference to the finished appearance. The thing I love most about starting a new project is discovering how fitted furniture can improve everyday aspects of our lives. People often think in terms of their practical need to have a piece of furniture, but you need to look at the solution or need to be filled or resolved.



The starting point of any design scheme is entirely individual and specific to the person living in it. The most important thing to consider is how you live. Think about your family lifestyle and age range, as well as your hobbies and working arrangements.

If you are unsure what style you may like, peruse available media and be inspired by other projects. Piece together ideas and collate a scrapbook with appealing looks, schemes and solutions. I have a passion for visiting old listed properties and museums and am always taking snaps of solutions that I find interesting. Pay special attention to the textures and materials you find all around you, as they make all the difference when it comes to furniture design.

I love the modern classical approach of creating an artful combination of eclectic styles. It's not easy to mix and match styles, periods and colours, but if successfully achieved this look can create an inspiring result. After all, I would hate to live in a matchbox home with all furniture cut to the same design.

Balanced approach

The most successful interiors incorporate a good use of space and a balanced approach to every element, with an integrated view of everything you do. For example, you cannot consider buying any furniture without taking into account the flooring, curtains, architectural features and lighting – none of these items can be decided upon without a proper consideration to the others. I preach a holistic approach. When called upon to design, clients are often surprised by my detailed questions about all interior elements of their home. You cannot finalise a solution without weighing up all the different elements of the complete scheme.

I was recently involved in a full-scale refurbishment project of a Hampstead semi-detached. Homeowners Alison and Andrew Hart wanted to make the best possible use of space throughout their home, particularly in the master bedroom, which was located in the newly converted loft space, and which included an en-suite bathroom. Alison asked me to look at their particular storage challenges. I suggested using the otherwise dead space between rafters under the roof for built-in drawers – just in time so that the builders were able to adjust the position of the rafter supports, enabling me to create a design for a bank of drawers with pull-down flaps for shoe storage. Two further areas under the roof were converted to an eaves wardrobe and further half-height, deep cabinets for more shoe storage. Alison's initial idea had been for a walk-in closet, but the solution of two banks of back-to-back wardrobes in the middle of the room gave her a feeling of more space, provided more storage than a walk-in-closet could have done, and also neatly separates the bedroom from the en-suite.

Inventive solutions

There are lots of trade secrets for inventive storage solutions, but I always start by imagining the space as completely empty. You may discover that there are items of furniture you no longer need in your new home. If you are undertaking a refurbishment, don't be afraid to move doors, radiators and sockets. I am often shocked that clients allow electricians to dictate where vital power points should be placed.

Another project that put my creativity into practice was a unique London renovation that converted three flats in an old industrial unit into one large spacious home. The homeowner asked us to turn his design ideas into reality and we were asked to create a bed with headboard, cabinets for beside the bed and a customised AV unit at the base of the bed to



The colour grey is set to remain a favoured hue

Trend insight:

"The colour grey continues to dominate, whilst satin and matt finishes overtake high gloss. I have recently noticed the general preference for more classic styles and cosy-looking designs. Natural materials within design schemes using stone is definitely on the rise. Oak is strong, but with neutral stained finishes rather than natural, whilst walnut is beginning to feel over-done."

Clever storage is integral to functional interiors





Above: Open-plan spaces benefit from bespoke solutions

Above right: A TV is hidden neatly in Barbara's bespoke bed design

Right: Freestanding baths make a stunning bathroom statement

incorporate a TV. The end result was to use a natural oak veneer and then stain it the particular grey shade desired, so that the furniture finish was in keeping with the industrial feel of the building.

Inventive storage

The master bathroom for this renovation was a work of art, creating a modern light look. We used minimalistic fittings and mounted the sinks of the walls, concealing all pipe work behind the walls and under raised flooring, while floor to ceiling windows let in loads of light. There is a huge walk in shower, a freestanding bath and of course lots of wall mounted storage units, which we specifically designed. At each



end of the storage space, there were open shelves to store towels and some toiletry items. But then cleverly concealed behind mirrors was further storage space, accessible by a gentle push on the mirror.

If space is an issue, think of integrating storage in inventive ways. I once designed a very grand 'through-wall' bookcase to fit around a central pillar. The clever use of mirrors meant that even the concealed pillar seamlessly blended in to look the same as the rest of the bookcase that opened onto the room behind. Finished in the same materials as the complementing furniture and 'squeezed' into the wall, this bookcase looked as though it has been there forever!

Draw up questions and problems you are facing and then book a meeting with relevant professionals, be that architect or interior/furniture/lighting designer.

Often the first meeting is free of charge and you will gain invaluable information which will highlight which areas of your project you might need professional help with and which ones you can manage yourself.

Professional advice

Do not think twice of engaging and speaking to professionals really early on in your self-build or renovation journey. Don't assume your architect is an interior designer or even a space planner, and certainly not a lighting designer! Resolving and considering correlation of the various elements early on into the project will save you money, time and disappointment.

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For more inspiration and the latest bathroom trends - See pages 56 & 57.



Above: A minimalist monochrome scheme suits the industrial heritage of this East London renovation

Below: Make a feature out of unique storage solutions

For the eco-conscious:

The good thing about modern materials is that they are often very eco friendly. Why not incorporate an eclectic style by using antique furniture which you can sometimes collect for next to nothing. A lot of endangered forests pay the price for our greed for solid wood furniture and flooring.

