

# SMALL WONDER



Adding space and light to this pretty 19th century cottage took only a few weeks and cost just £44,000.

STORY: ELEANOR WILDE PICTURES: STEVE TAYLOR

**B**uilding a single-storey kitchen extension just a metre wide may seem barely worth the effort, but this modest addition has enabled Vicky Worthy and her partner to totally transform their home on a strict budget – adding space and value to the three-bedroom cottage.

The couple had been living in a 1930s house in the middle of Leicester, but wanted to find a home with more character. “The big draw for this cottage was that it’s in a village we know which is close to our families,” says Vicky, a pharmacist. “It proved difficult to find three-bedroom houses in this area within our price range, and this property ticked all of our boxes apart from the kitchen/dining space.”

The brick semi-detached cottage had a large 9.4m long sitting room, with a small kitchen and a separate single-storey dining room on the ground floor. “The dining room had once been a pig sty when this was a miller’s cottage, and was poky and dark, with just one small window to the front,” says Vicky. “The previous owners had converted the attic into a third double bedroom though, which was a big selling point for us.”

A builder was invited to visit the cottage before the couple made an offer, and confirmed that the central staircase running up through the property could be relocated. “The stairs between the kitchen and dining room cut up the whole floorplan and made it unbalanced, creating a long dark

Vicky Worthy in the garden of her renovated cottage (right).



An existing rear entrance porch (below left) set the line for the new extension (opposite), which is just a metre deep. Reclaimed bricks and roof slates ensure that the new and old blend together.

corridor leading to two bedrooms, a bathroom and toilet on the first floor,” Vicky continues. “We wanted a more light and airy layout and knew that moving the stairs would allow us to rethink the interior.”

Three cottages originating from the 1880s had previously been combined to make two larger properties, which resulted in one bedroom and half of the sitting room forming flying freeholds extending into the neighbouring cottage. “People are always surprised when they walk into our house and see how large it is,” says Vicky. “We didn’t need a huge amount of extra space, just a better use of what was already here.”

**“People are always surprised when they walk into our house and see how large it is. We didn’t need a huge amount of extra space, just better use of what was already there.”**





### What a difference

What was formerly a single-storey dining room is now a kitchen, lit by conservation rooflights inset into the raised roof. Cream cabinets and oak worktops were sourced from Howdens. All windows have been replaced with hand-made hardwood units made by a local joiner.

After buying the cottage in June 2009 the couple moved in and lived there for almost a year. This allowed them to start decorating the bedrooms and to lay wooden flooring in the sitting room while saving to afford the more ambitious building work. Fortunately the roof, electrics and plumbing were all in good order, so there were no unexpected expenses and they were able to live in the property quite comfortably.

The first builder who was asked to quote for moving the staircase was going to charge around £10,000 more than the couple had budgeted.

“He took ages getting back to us, so while we were waiting we saw an advert in a local free magazine for Blackstone Building Contracts and contacted the managing director, Garry Black, who lives in the next village,” Vicky continues.

“Our initial brief was simply to move the stairs, but Garry has an eye for design and came up with the idea of extending across the whole of the back of the house, raising the roof in the dining room and adding two conservation

rooflights. He developed our ideas but was mindful of retaining the character, which was very important to us. He also quoted to do all of this for our original budget.”

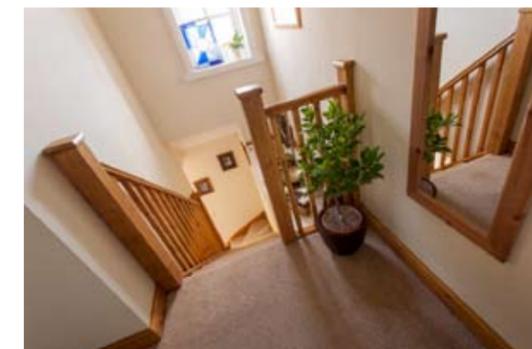
The brief was to create a light living area with a new kitchen, bathroom and stairs, while only extending the rear by a metre. This was made possible by many internal alterations, along with the extension, and plans were drawn up by local architectural practice PD Architecture. Party wall agreements were required and planning consent was also necessary as the property stands within a Conservation Area.

“We were hoping to match the exterior of the extension to the existing cottage, re-using materials where we could,”

Vicky recalls. “The planners had no problem with what we wanted to do – they acknowledged that it would make the house far more family orientated.”

The cottage was vacated for just six weeks in the summer of 2010 while Garry and his team completed the work. This involved demolishing an existing rear porch and excavating new foundations for the single-storey brick and block extension, which has a lean-to roof in the dining area.

“At one point the whole rear wall of the house was taken down and there were Acro Props holding up the roof,” says Vicky. “We stored our furniture in the lounge and then spent time moving between family and friends – only



### Light and bright

The one-metre rear extension has created a bright, spacious dining room. Guests enjoy trying out the vintage pharmacy weighing scale which is operated by old pennies.



### Making a statement

The cottage already had a large sitting room with an open fireplace, and this room has been given an oak floor and is decorated with a feature wall of Sanderson's Dandelion Clocks 1950s-style wallpaper.

### Luxury bathroom

Combining the separate bathroom and WC has formed a single bathroom on the first floor, with a large walk-in shower and a roll-top bath. Black floor tiles contrast with white wall tiles and there's a feature wall of black floral tiles from Laura Ashley.

staying for a couple of weeks with each so we wouldn't get on anyone's nerves!"

The single-storey dining room was partially demolished and 300mm insulated cavity external walls built up using blockwork and reclaimed facing bricks. These raised walls increase the roof height in what is now the new kitchen, creating a high vaulted ceiling pierced by two conservation rooflights. Roof slates and bricks were salvaged from the demolished porch and dining room and have been re-used wherever possible. This means that the extension appears to have been built at the same time as the original cottage and many visitors simply assume that it was part of the 19th century building.

Moving the staircase to the far end of the new dining room has enabled the kitchen and dining areas to connect. The previously separate rooms now form one light, open-plan space overlooking the rear garden through new hardwood windows and patio doors made by a joiner in the village. "We wanted to use local people wherever possible," says Vicky. "In fact we were so pleased with the windows in the extension that we asked the same joiner to make replacement windows for the whole house."

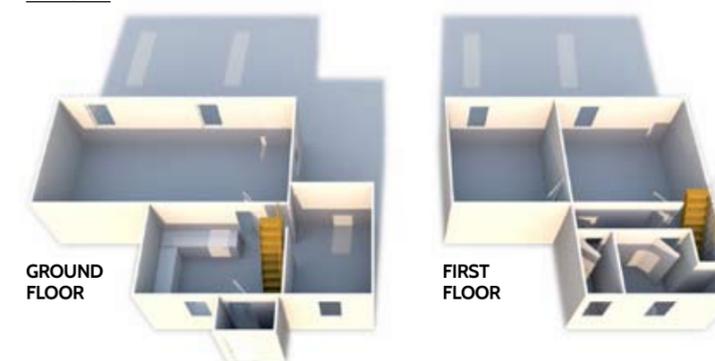
Structural steelwork was introduced in the kitchen/dining room, where an existing load-bearing wall has been removed, leaving a nub wall to one end which serves as a privacy barrier beside the sink. "We love the fact that the wall juts out just enough to hide any dishes or mess when we have guests sitting at the dining table," says Vicky.

A brick pillar has been left exposed beside the new staircase in the dining room, creating an attractive focal

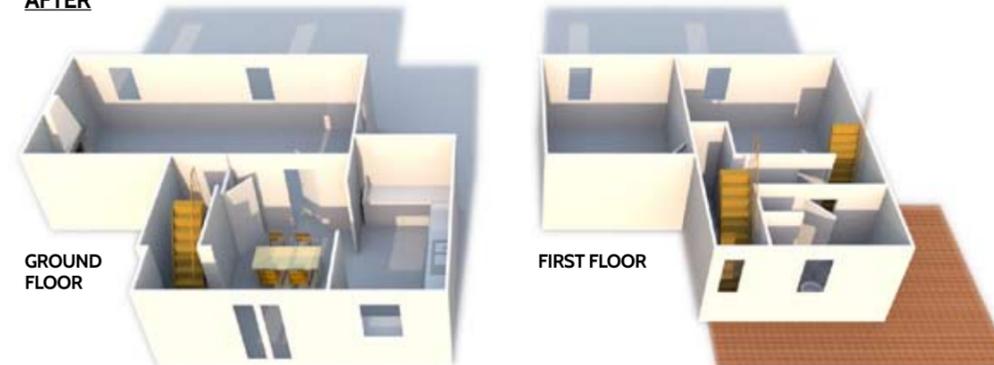
### Floorplan

Extending the ground floor by a metre and moving the staircase has allowed the interior to be radically reconfigured. The cramped dining room and kitchen have been replaced with an open-plan kitchen/dining space overlooking the garden. A WC and bathroom have been combined on the first floor and space-wasting passages reduced to create a coherent layout.

#### BEFORE



#### AFTER



point. This pillar was initially supposed to be rendered, but Garry Black felt that exposed reclaimed brickwork would look more striking and spent a day creating the feature. Attention to detail was impressive throughout the project, and all pipework has been meticulously boxed in and concealed to create clean lines internally. Garry also devised the lighting scheme, with various options for different functions and times of day.

Budget was a prime consideration when it came to fitting out the interior, and the couple chose radiators instead of opting for more expensive underfloor heating. "We were also concerned that if anything went wrong with underfloor heating we would have to lift our lovely stone tiled floor," says Vicky.

"We couldn't afford our dream kitchen, but Garry suggested a cream one from Howdens which matches our range cooker and the Smeg fridge. It seemed like a compromise at the time but it all works so well together that we now prefer it to our original choice."

The couple spent two weeks tackling the decorating themselves in order to keep costs down, choosing a pale shade of green for the kitchen walls which they had used in their previous home. This contrasts with ivory paintwork in the new dining room, which has also been used up the stairs and on the landing.

Additionally, the first floor bathroom and WC have now been combined to create one practical family bathroom with a roll-top bath and a large walk-in shower enclosure. "We chose to spend our money on more permanent items like flooring and tiles, which can't easily be replaced," says Vicky.

"Coming in on budget was hugely important to us, because there really was no more money available, and we're so pleased with how the funds have been used. Now the house works for contemporary living but it's still got real character, which we love."

### The bottom line

The original house cost £235,000 to purchase and £44,000 was spent remodelling and extending the property, which is now valued at in excess of £350,000.

### Contacts

#### PROJECT

**Building contractor**  
Blackstone Building Contracts:  
[www.blackstonebuildingcontracts.co.uk](http://www.blackstonebuildingcontracts.co.uk)  
**Architect** PD Architecture:  
[www.pd-architecture.co.uk](http://www.pd-architecture.co.uk)

#### STRUCTURE

**Windows** Main Cabinet Works: 0116 269 3078  
**Conservation rooflights** Velux: [www.velux.co.uk](http://www.velux.co.uk)  
**FIXTURES AND FITTINGS**  
**Kitchen** Howdens: [www.howdens.com](http://www.howdens.com)  
**Sanitaryware** Bathstore: [www.bathstore.co.uk](http://www.bathstore.co.uk)

**Bathroom tiles** Laura Ashley:  
[www.lauraashley.com](http://www.lauraashley.com)

**Sitting room wallpaper** Sanderson:  
[www.sanderson-uk.com](http://www.sanderson-uk.com)

**Tiles** Parkside Tiles: [www.parksidetiles.co.uk](http://www.parksidetiles.co.uk)



### Home truths

#### What was the high point of the project?

Garry and his team of builders were a great bunch: professional and so trustworthy. We even went away on holiday and told Garry to do what he thought best while we were gone.

Nothing was too much trouble and they thought of everything – right down to creating a tunnel-style catflap. ...and the low point?

The builders uncovered a cellar when they were excavating new footings, which meant they had to dig deeper foundations than planned. They also found a redundant gas pipe that needed to be moved, which also delayed progress.

#### Is there anything you would change?

We really wouldn't. The new kitchen and dining room are used all of the time and now we can look out onto the garden, whereas before we had to stand at the sink to see out. It's an all-year-round room and we love having the doors open in summer.

#### What was your best buy?

The reclaimed timber table and benches in the dining room were hand-made in Derbyshire and cost £480 delivered.

#### ...and your biggest extravagance?

The Italian stone floor tiles in the kitchen and dining room were probably our biggest extravagance.