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Homes & Property

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WHEN model Rebecca James changed careers to become an interior designer her first project was to revamp her home. The results proved that, if nothing else, versatile parts of the house are seamlessly and serene, others show flashes of her, unadulterated madness.

Rebecca, 39, had been living happily in a house in East London seven years ago but decided to uproot and move to a larger house in East Dulwich, London, in search of more space. "I particularly liked a wide house, and for the same reason I was able to get double the space in East Dulwich," she says.

The move was something of a plunge into the unknown, but her timing was impeccable. East Dulwich's fortunes have been transformed over the past few years, as middle-class buyers have squeezed further into the area in search of affordable homes.

The area now shows all the signs of gentrification: organic delis, pretty patios, and wall-to-wall small creative businesses.

The property's previous owner was an elderly woman who left it gloomy and cluttered with a collection of tired, worn rooms. Undeterred, Rebecca started her first, year-long project when she was studying interior design at Chelsea School of Art and setting up her now award-winning firm, Rebecca Desires.

"It was a lovely thing to make something beautiful," she says. "I also liked the structural work – I'm not a knick-knack buyer. I wanted to stop modelling before I stopped wanting me – that must have been a terrible feeling. It was a wonderful job and I picked up a lot of ideas from all the travelling I had enough. It was time to move on."

She bought the house for £291,000 and immediately set to work opening up the first floor, originally four bedrooms, into one large living and dining space that flows into the

Sensory overload: the kitchen has zingy orange walls, cupboards of Macassar ebony and stainless steel surfaces

it was done I would let the house out for film and television shoots to help pay for it, so it needed a bit of bling about it, but at the same time the ground floor needed to be very light and spacious. Then, upstairs, it just gets wilder and wilder."

The living room is elegant and restrained, with dark wood floors, off-white polished plaster walls that look and feel almost like stone, and minimal furniture. A false wall hides all the unsightly wiring that controls the state-of-the-art audio-visual system, and also offers storage space since Rebecca claims to be terribly messy and in need of lots of hiding places.

But from then on, prepare for sensory overload, from the zingy orange kitchen to the inferno-themed staircase to the Oriental-inspired bedroom suite – which comes complete with fuchsia faux-suede floor tiles, silk upholstered wardrobes and a sunken bed. It's like entering a play area for grown-ups.

When she started on the kitchen her chosen scheme was orange walls with cupboards veneered in Macassar ebony, which is deeply grained in natural swirls of brown and orange.

"When I saw the cupboards up I actually cried, but once I had painted the walls orange and got the lighting right, and the stainless steel surfaces in, it really worked."

The hall walls are also stippled in oranges – but more soothing, in a marmalade-ish sort of way.

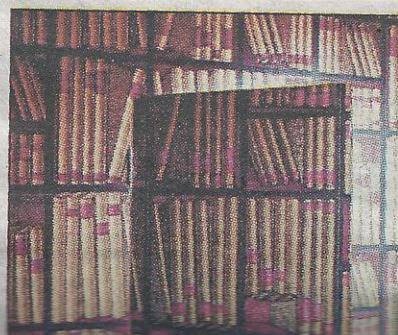
BUT after this burst of colour hyperactivity in the kitchen, she calmed down for a guest bedroom in a soothing cappuccino colour with a sensible run of built-in cupboards for storage, and the inside of the door to the room papered in a pretty, oriental-flowered wallpaper in soft gold.

Once you start to climb the stairs, however, the colour reservation ceases. Rebecca's bedroom suite takes up the entire top floor. "It is a bit more



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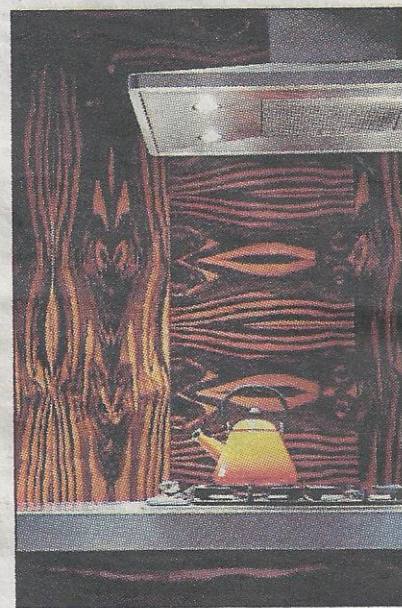
When former model Rebecca Ja



Bookish: a door in the bathroom is covered in wallpaper that looks like library shelves



Mild to wild: the living room, left, is elegant and restrained, while Rebecca's bedroom, above, uses vibrant jewel colours and tactile fabrics. The kitchen cupboards in ebony, right, are swirled with brown and orange



THE BEAUTIFUL

a film set with plenty of headline-catching bling, discovers **Ruth Bloomfield**

the project cost also included garden. She put the property's on the market, Rebecca would be a more

that she spent less buying and still represents a loss by the fact that to earn a second hand out by the day for



Get the look

■ For information about Rebecca James's interior design, visit interiordesiresuk.com.

LITTLE BLACK BOOK

■ Rebecca had her veneered kitchen cupboards made by H Shawyer and Sons (veneeredpanels.com).

■ For elegant, French-style furniture, Rebecca recommends Brissi (brissi.co.uk), which is particularly strong on pieces to fit small London flats. Mrs Robinson's in East Dulwich