

IT'S TIME TO...

DECORATE

Totally made over

ONCE DULL, THIS FLAT HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO A FABULOUS HOME ON A BUDGET. AFRICA DALEY-CLARKE REVEALS HOW SHE AND HUSBAND JERMEL DID IT



PHOTOGRAPHS CHRIS TUBBS
WORDS RACHEL LOOS



AU NATUREL

Natural wood predominates. 'It lasts,' says Africa. 'You can also add vintage to it.' The wood is complemented by green tones, including many plants. 'As well as having a positive impact on me mentally, I love that they allow the space to feel like it's somewhere other than central London,' says Africa. Shelving is also key, keeping the floor space (wood-effect laminate) clear for an open feel. Second-hand books and box shelves add height and a mix of horizontal and vertical lines for structure. Below, baskets give great storage. Pride of place is a print of Eliza Southwood's *London Is The Place For Me*, showing Empire Windrush arriving at Tilbury Docks in 1948. 'It cost £250 and I sold all the prints in my old flat to afford it.'

WHEN AFRICA DALEY-CLARKE took this apartment, she did so despite cardboard tile flooring, windows that had been painted shut, doors that were too short, skirting that had been cut away and no electricity connection.

Seeing beyond the wreck to the apartment's potential was just part of the story though – the home was being offered for rent by her local housing authority, and after waiting three years to swap her one-bedroom flat for a two-bedroom one – which meant she and her husband, Jermel, did not have to share their bedroom with their two young girls – Africa was not about to turn this one down. 'I saw it in my lunch break, showed Jermel what it looked like via a video on my phone, and then snapped it up because I knew we wouldn't get offered anything else for a very long time,' says Africa, who is about to have her third child (find her @thevitaminproject). 'I was the sixth on the list to see it and I didn't think I stood a chance because usually places are taken by the first people to see them, but everyone else had said no. I can understand

that because it was in a terrible condition with so much work needed, and not everyone is able to take that on.'

However, Africa, a showroom designer, and Jermel, a DIY expert (he has a degree in set design), were confident they could turn the first-floor flat in a three-storey Victorian villa into a family home. And despite the neglect, the bones of the flat were good, with high ceilings and plenty of light.

Having got permission in writing to renovate the flat (social housing tends to be more flexible when it comes to home improvements, as leases are longer), they got cracking using the money they had saved up over the previous two years and did the work in just three months.

The transformation, which finished last autumn, is extraordinary; the kitchen and bathroom, in particular, are totally unrecognisable from what went before. It's all the more remarkable for being done on a budget, with Africa mixing high street with vintage and eBay finds that included buying tiles in job lots. 'I found a lot of great pieces on eBay,' she says. She knew just how she ▶



Bamboo wallpaper (Poodle and Blonde) lifts the narrow hallway – and hides fingerprints and pen marks

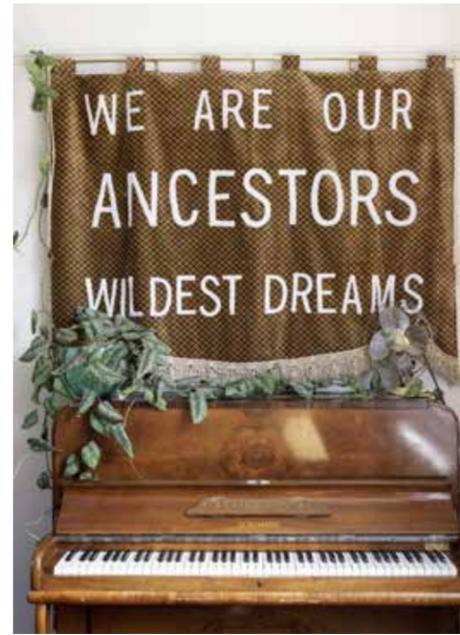
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Vintage theatre chairs against the wall in the living room add extra seating when needed, but fold up neatly out of the way when not in use – a cool small space solution. Cann Hall Road is where Jermel's grandmother lived for all of her life in England.

KITCHEN KARMA

Fitted cupboards left the couple too little space so they opted for a mix of lower units and shelving. Jermel made the units out of MDF with an oak veneer finish. The worktop is reclaimed scaffolding cut to fit with a metal strip protecting it from water around the sink. The shelves are also scaffolding, and reach almost to the ceiling to use all the space. Wire baskets provide extra storage. The terracotta tiles were bought on eBay for the bathroom, 'But we had some leftover so we created a splashback with them,' says Africa.



wanted the flat to look. 'I don't believe in copying anyone's style – this flat works because it reflects what we love and how we live; everything functions for our family.'

The look fuses Europe and the Caribbean. 'My dual heritage played a huge part,' says Africa. 'One of my grandmothers is from the Windrush generation but my other is from Yorkshire, and I also love Danish design, so my style is a mix of all these influences.'

Today, the flat is how she hoped it would be when the couple took it on last summer. 'It's a joy to come home to,' she says. 'We're all too aware of the negative impact a bad living space can have on your mental health, but a home you love and feel safe in can have a really positive effect. It also means we can parent how we want to – having two children sharing a room with us meant we overcompensated in ways we needn't have, such as unnecessary gifts that we couldn't even afford. Having a second bedroom has given us the opportunity to shirk that guilt and focus on parenting in a way that's true to us. Although it's a modest flat, today everybody has a space that is purposeful and that they feel happy in.'



BATHTIME

'Because we had to get professionals in to plumb in the bathroom, the materials had to be cheap,' says Africa. The terracotta tiles on the floor and side of the bathtub 'give the illusion of getting into a stone bath, which is what I originally wanted but which was too expensive', says Africa. The blue wall tiles were also found on eBay. 'They're a bit cracked around the sides but using grey grouting means you almost can't see the damage.' The shower screen (Victoria Plum) and rose gold taps and shower add style. The radiator is also from eBay.



The couple's bedroom was the last to be done and has been kept simple, the lime paint (Bauwerk) giving the room a warm vibe and looking good against the rattan bed.

AFRICA'S EXPERT ADVICE



The kitchen before Africa's renovation

- Be sure to check that any wear and tear is cosmetic only and won't require a great deal of investment to be usable. Costing is subjective, though – think of cost per use; eg, if I plan to have this dresser at least 10 years, how much will it cost me on average per year?
- Take some time to think functionally what it is you need. Then invest a bit more time into thinking about your style. Don't get sucked into a short-term trend; have a think about how that piece would work in your space with your current pieces.
- I use Any Van for eBay delivery, which makes it easy. You just give them the eBay serial number for a delivery cost quote.
- When it comes to DIY, know your limitations. We would never attempt electrical or plumbing work ourselves for obvious safety reasons and Jermel always does a trial small scale practice when it's a 'skill' he hasn't used in a long time.
- Paint your walls before laying new flooring – we didn't and found out the hard way the order it should be in.
- Measure three times so you only have to cut once.
- While you may be able to scrimp on salvaged materials, don't scrimp on DIY tools – it's often better to hire something if you don't think you will be getting regular use out of it than to buy a cheap tool.