

SELF BUILD
& DESIGNCase
study

Open house

Caroline Gregg has built an ambitious contemporary home for herself and her four children, which was designed to be fully accessible for disability.

Story: **Debbie Jeffery** Pictures: **Paul Leach Photography**

After spending more than seven years embroiled in a complex legal battle, which she finally won, the last thing that mother of four, Caroline Gregg, wanted to do was to take on a new challenge.

“My son, Jake, was negligently starved of oxygen during his birth, which resulted in severe brain damage,” she explains. “He’s wheelchair bound, can’t speak, and has a limited life expectancy, so now he has a 24-hour care package following admission of liability.”

The family’s previous home was not suitable for a wheelchair user, and Caroline contacted Martin Bell of Transform Architects, who specialises in designing for disability, to help her assess potential houses which could be adapted. Unable to find anything appropriate in the area, she was forced to consider taking on her first self-build project.

“Martin was recommended to me and tackled a small adaptation on our previous home,” explains Caroline, a building surveyor by profession. “Over the course of several months we went on house viewings together, but with such specific needs to meet there was nothing that fitted the bill, even with an enormous amount of adaptation. Then a plot of land was identified, and – very reluctantly – I concluded that the only thing for it was to build my own house.”

Martin Bell started designing from the inside out, discussing the household’s needs, which included accommodating the 24-hour care team, who provide Jake with line-of-sight supervision. The brief was that Jake should have easy access to every room in the house, using his powerchair, while the care team should be able to work as discretely as possible to avoid impacting on other members of the family.

“Jake needs a therapy room, a specialist bathroom, hoists and equipment storage,” says Caroline. “At first, I assumed we’d be building a bungalow on one level, but the plot of land just wasn’t large enough, so we decided to build over two storeys with a lift to access upper rooms.”

Level thresholds, wide doorways, and wheelchair turning spaces were all vital, as was an integral garage and a store for equipment. Jake’s bedroom, bathroom and therapy room are on the ground floor, together with a spacious hallway, the carers’ accommodation, and an open plan living/dining/kitchen with glass doors onto the terrace and a pyramid roof lantern. Upstairs, the three other children and Caroline have their en suite bedrooms, and there is also a private lounge.

“We knew that this would be our home for life, so it had to include everything the children will need as they grow older,” says Caroline. “I also told Martin that the two girls’ bedrooms had to be exactly the same size



EXTERIOR

Carolyn told her architect she didn’t want a shiny white box, opting instead for stone and timber cladding.



In brief

PROJECT New build
LOCATION North Yorkshire
COST £400,000
SPENT £800,000
WORTH £1.3m+



to avoid any arguments!" With current ages ranging from thirteen down to seven, care was taken to plan ahead, ensuring the house would adapt as needed.

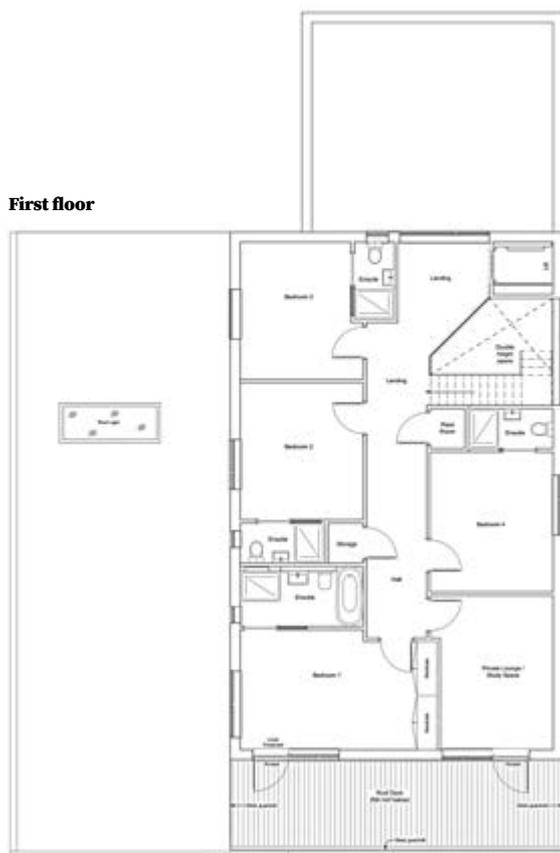
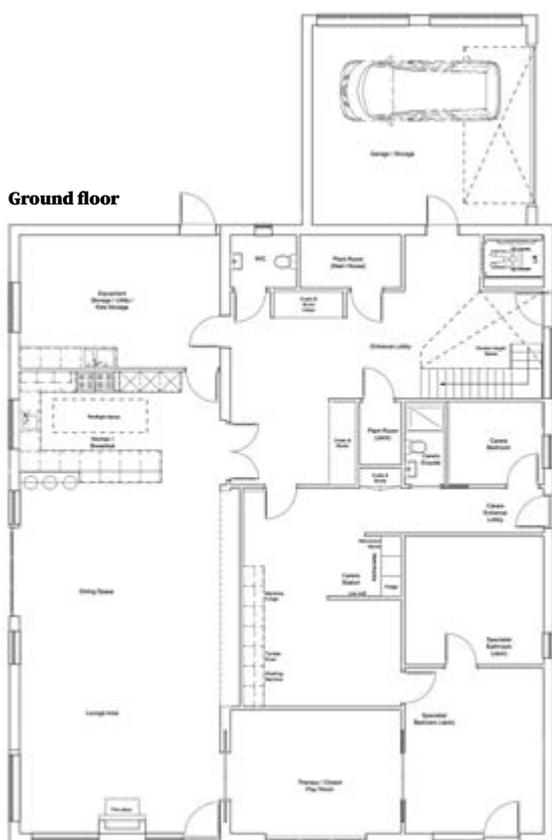
The plot of land is located in a valley in a small North Yorkshire village, and previously belonged to the house next-door, whose owners sold off their tennis court, complete with planning approval for a new four-bedroom dwelling.

"The plans were for a square box, so we knew that Martin would be redesigning the whole house," says Caroline. "I didn't want the building to look too large from the street, and the wrap-around single-storey extension at the back is hidden from view but doubles the size of the ground floor accommodation."

Overall, the contemporary new building covers more than 500m², but was sympathetically

The floorplan

The ground floor contains an integral garage, spacious entrance, a lift, store, carer's accommodation, bathroom, kitchen/dining/living room and a bedroom, bathroom and playroom. On the first floor are four en suite bedrooms, a study and a balcony.



designed to suit the village setting, which meant that gaining planning permission proved straightforward. The family continued to live in their home four miles away during the design and build process, so they were still close to the children's schools.

"Not only did I give Martin a difficult brief for the accommodation, but I also had strong ideas about the external look of the building," says Caroline. "I told him that I definitely didn't want a shiny white house, and he took that on board and suggested stone and timber cladding instead."

Built from cavity blockwork, with 75mm of insulation, the external walls are faced in either untreated vertical cedar cladding or stone slips, which were individually attached to the blocks. Aluminium-framed windows and doors were installed, and solar thermal panels and photovoltaics are mounted on the steel standing seam roof, providing both electricity and hot water.

"After all the years of legal battles and moving, we needed a homely house that would be a place of safety and refuge," says Caroline, who decided not to tender for the build. Instead, she chose a large Yorkshire building contractor, HACS Construction, who could deliver the project in under a year. "The children had moved around so much, and I was sick of fighting," she explains. "I knew that we could properly start to live only once we were all settled, and therefore time was a priority for me."

Work started on site in June 2017 and was completed in May the following year. Not only that, but the previous family home needed to be adapted while they were still living there, meaning that the two projects ran concurrently – both designed and overseen by Martin Bell.

EXTERIOR

Stone slips and cedar boarding clad the blockwork walls of the new detached house.

In detail

PROJECT

Architect Transform Architects:
transformarchitects.com
Builder HACS Construction
Ltd: hacs.co.uk

STRUCTURE

Insulation Kingspan: kingspan.com
Limestone stone slips Real Stone Cladding: realstonecladding.co.uk
Colorcoat Urban steel roof Tata Steel: tatasteelconstruction.com
Lift Ability Lifts: abilitylifts.co.uk
Windows, bifolds, rooflights Express Bifolds: expressbifolds.co.uk

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Wood floor V4 Wood Flooring: v4woodflooring.co.uk
Kitchen and utility Inspired Design Kitchens: inspireddesignkitchens.com
Bathrooms Spinks: aespink.com
Doors Howdens: howdens.com
Stove Stonehouse Fireplaces: stonehouseharrogate.co.uk
Bathroom fittings Innova Care: innovacareconcepts.com; Astor Bannerman: astorbannerman.co.uk; Yorkshire Care Equipment: yorkshirecareequipment.com

NEW BUILD



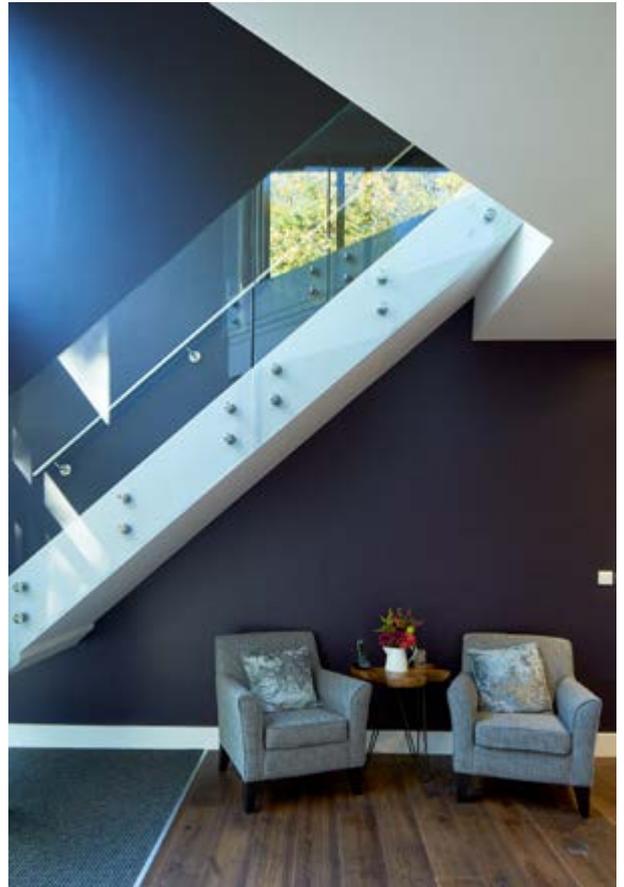
“We try not to think too much about that time,” laughs Caroline. “I could never have imagined what was required for me in terms of all the decisions to make for things like door handles, tiles, and blinds. I have to say that Martin was brilliant, as he not only managed the contractors, but he also managed me, and walked me through every decision.”

A culvert running across the site dictated the orientation of the property, which is located on the more level former tennis court, and a long first floor balcony enjoys country views across fields to the rear.

This outdoor terrace may be accessed from the principal bedroom and private lounge, where level thresholds make wheelchair access possible. “In order to have flat access out onto the balcony, the whole house had to be raised by around 300mm,” explains Caroline. “It was an extravagance, but that space is somewhere for me to relax and have some quiet time, so it’s been absolutely worth the money.”

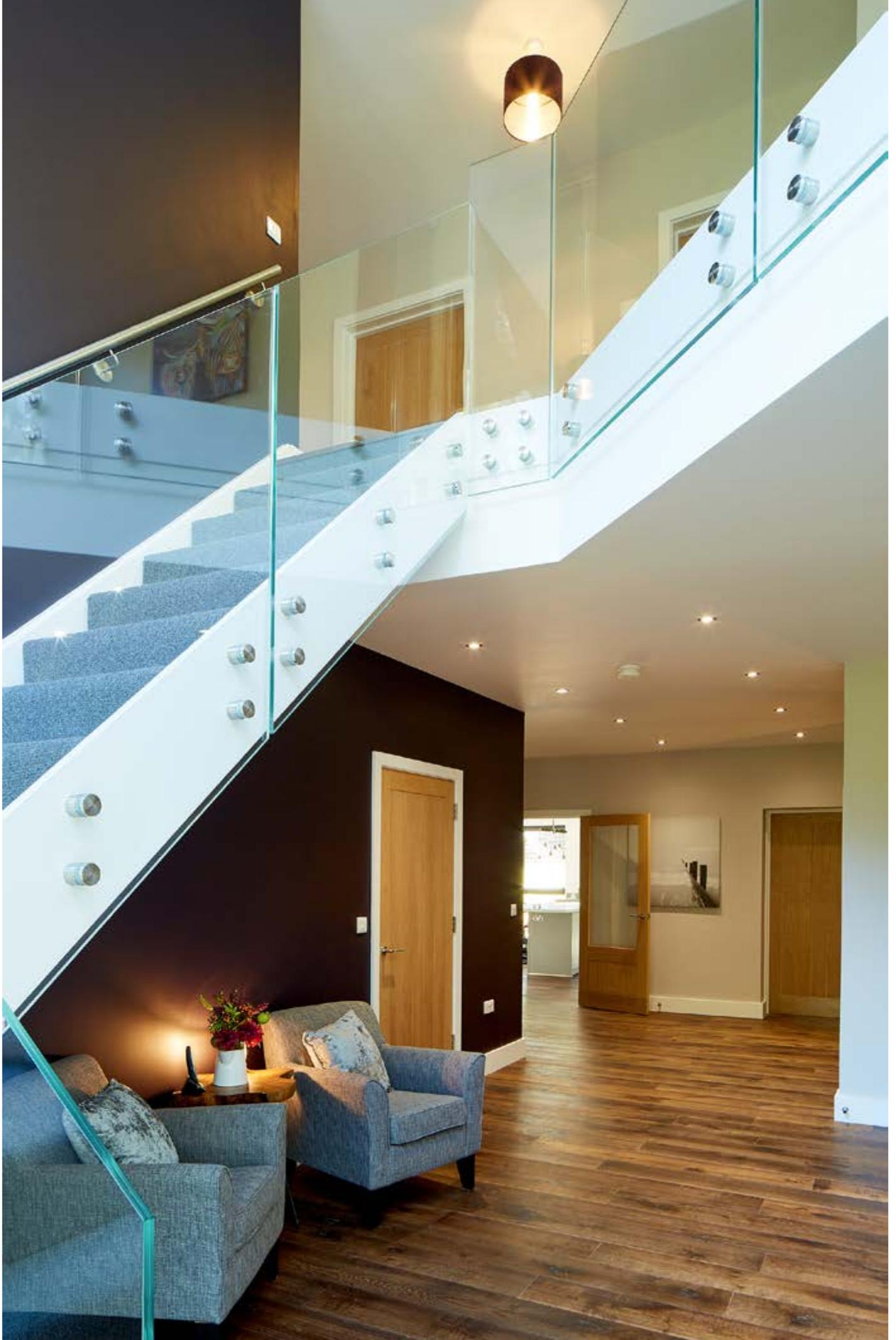
HALL AND STAIRS

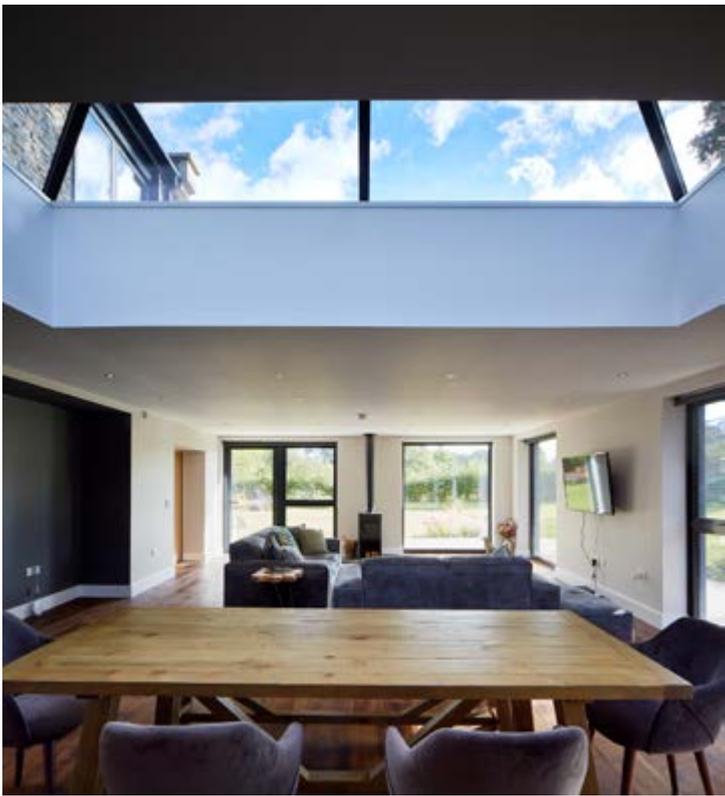
A feature hallway and staircase were designed with space for a seating area tucked below the stairs.



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KITCHEN/ DINING

The kitchen/dining/living area overlooks the rear garden through glazed doors and features a wood-burning stove. Simple grey cabinets were chosen, together with a practical island.



FLOORING

Engineered wooden flooring has been laid over underfloor heating downstairs for a practical, wheelchair-friendly finish without thresholds. Wide doorways connect the spaces.



Architect, Martin Bell, accompanied Caroline to search for items such as the fireplace. "I think as a client you don't want to disappoint the architect," she says. "They put so much effort into creating this amazing space that you don't want to ruin it."

The staircase is a particular feature and was constructed by the building contractor, using a glazing subcontractor to fit the balustrades. Martin suggested a bold wall colour to offset the white-painted timber stairs, and Caroline agreed to a striking deep aubergine shade. A double height entrance adds further drama.

"When we started out, I told Martin that I didn't want a single wall in the house to be painted white, so we've chosen a pale mushroom colour instead," says Caroline. "One of the problems I had was coming to terms with the sheer scale of the building, after living in a standard-sized house."

Caroline chose an engineered wooden flooring to bring warmth and character to the spacious interiors and as a wheelchair-friendly surface. "We have underfloor heating downstairs, as it's a large house to try and heat with



NEW BUILD



BEDROOMS/ BATHROOMS

The principal bedroom has direct access to the balcony. Jack's bedroom has a ceiling hoist and specialist items for his bathroom.



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radiators, but I have to say I prefer radiators,” she admits. “It takes such a long time to reach the right temperature compared to radiators, which react so quickly.”

Overall, though, the family's new home has been a resounding success, giving the space and wheelchair access they needed, with discrete hoists recessed into ceilings.

“The children have plenty of room to run about, and are always in and out to the garden,” says Caroline.

“Yes, we have a lift, but it's not in your face. None of the equipment is, which is exactly what I'd hoped for. It's been a long struggle to get this house, but now we can finally settle and get on with our lives in fantastic surroundings. I still can't believe we live here, and the independence Jake has is priceless.”

Final word

What was the high point of the project?

The freedom that the space now offers us as a family.

...and the low point?

All the decision making, especially for smaller items – I was definitely stressed from the constant planning.

A top tip?

Prioritise decisions so you are working through them in order to avoid holding up your builder and ask for a deadline for each choice.

Your best buy?

I bought quite a lot of the smaller pieces of furniture from Homesense, such as occasional tables.



And your biggest extravagance?

My bedroom balcony, which caused a few structural headaches but is probably my favourite space.