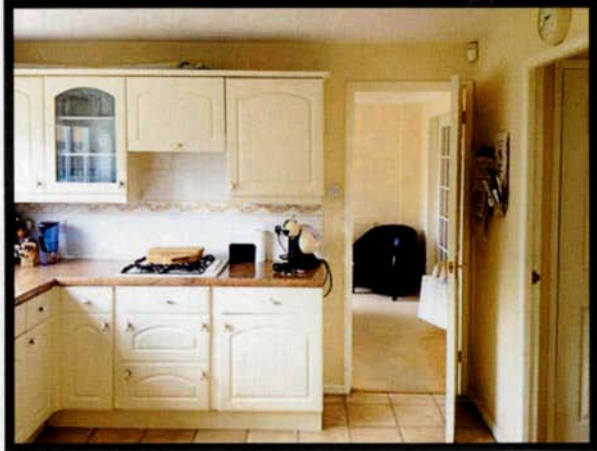


BEFORE



ORIGINAL KITCHEN

Left Claire and Nick's old kitchen was dated and its built-in appliances reaching the end of their lifespan. The adjoining dining room was largely unused

NEW DESIGN

Right A trio of prismatic pendant lights from Original BTC hang above the multifunctional island designed by Ice Interior. The Milton cabinetry in Stone from Second Nature is teamed with off-white quartz worktops

'We invested in a completely fresh new look'

Claire and Nick Hoyes have moved walls and updated doors to turn two separate rooms into one bright, spacious kitchen-diner

WORDS ANNABELLE GRUNDY PHOTOGRAPHS COLIN POOLE



FACT FILE

THE OWNERS

Claire Hoyes (left) and her husband Nick, both business systems analysts, live here with their sons, Jamie, 14, and Daniel, 10

THE PROPERTY

A detached, four-bedroom house built in 1995

THE LOCATION

Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire

WHAT THEY SPENT

The kitchen project cost around £40,000

We had always planned to replace our kitchen at some point,' says Claire. 'We knew it would be a big investment, so we wanted something special, and a totally new look.'

Claire and her husband Nick had moved into their four-bedroom home around 10 years ago, shortly after their younger son, Daniel, was born. 'With three-year-old Jamie, and the new baby, we simply needed more room, and there wasn't scope to extend our two-bedroom period cottage,' recalls Claire. 'This house had

REAR EXTERIOR

Left Installing Origin bi-fold doors in the existing door and window openings minimised building work and costs





DESIGN TIP
 Plan kitchen lighting in separate zones, one each for cooking, dining and living, then plan layers, starting with ambient lighting to supplement daylight, then task and accent lighting

four good-sized bedrooms and plenty of green space nearby – ideal for a family.’

The house still had its original layout, with the kitchen overlooking the garden at the back, and although everything worked, its cream units were worn and dated, and the appliances were becoming ever more unreliable. ‘We didn’t want to replace things piecemeal, so we managed until the oven broke down,’ says Claire. ‘Then, we knew that it was time to take action.’

Adjacent to the kitchen was a neglected and under-used dining room, with a sliding

patio door to the garden, and double glass doors through to the living room at the front of the house. To make more of what they had, Claire and Nick removed the dividing wall, combining the kitchen and dining areas in a single space. ‘As the boys are growing up, we wanted a big room where we could all spend time together, sit down to eat, and entertain friends,’ says Claire.

The couple considered various layout ideas before deciding what to do. Both the sliding patio door and the main kitchen window would be replaced with modern,

bi-fold glass doors, giving easy outside access and filling the space with natural light. The double doors to the living room would be blocked up, creating additional wall space, and the new kitchen fixtures installed in the former dining room area, leaving room for a table and chairs at the opposite end, where the kitchen had been.

‘It would have been simpler and cheaper to leave the kitchen in the same position and just renew it, because there would have been a lot less plumbing and electrical work,’ admits Claire. ‘Even so, ▶

SEATING AREA

Right The new room is a flexible, family-friendly space, with a sofa and armchair from Made.com, complemented by the darker tones of Amtico Spacia Bronze flooring from Flor



we wanted a complete change. I'd done a rough cost estimate, and although the new layout added a bit, it was still within our budget and we felt it was worth it.'

Claire and Nick spent time browsing magazines for ideas and inspiration. They also picked up some valuable nuggets of advice from talking to friends who had replaced their kitchens. 'We're in a hard water area, so one friend warned me off dark granite worktops because of limescale and watermarks,' recalls Claire.

Following up a recommendation, the couple asked local builder Steve Cooper to carry out the

structural changes. As a benchmark, they also arranged a second quotation and were pleased to find the two figures were very close. 'That gave us confidence,' says Claire. 'We

then chose Steve because our friends spoke so highly of him, and he was happy to co-ordinate the electrician and plumber as well.'

Friends also reported a positive experience with kitchen installers Ice Interior, and Claire and Nick immediately felt at ease with its owner Matthew Parnum, describing their ideas to him so he could work on a design. 'The first proposal had a peninsula, but we felt it was a little tame, although we liked the big bank of cabinets and ovens along the wall,' says Claire.

'After Matthew tweaked the design, changing the peninsula island, the space seemed more dynamic and interesting.'

The couple wanted their new kitchen to feel inviting, relaxed and timeless, and found themselves drawn to pale, painted units. After costing several options, they settled on Second Nature's Milton in-frame cabinets in a soft grey shade, teamed with sleek, off-white quartz work surfaces. They explored the idea of adding a burst of colour with a purple glass splashback, but eventually opted for a stylish co-ordinating grey. 'We realised

changing it could be tricky if we got fed up with it over time,' says Claire. 'We kept everything quite neutral so it's more flexible and easy to accessorise with colour.'

As they planned to have two sets of

bi-fold doors installed – one fitting the gap left by the old patio door, and the other replacing the existing kitchen window – Claire and Nick put time into researching them, visiting several local companies as well as the National Self Build and Renovation Centre in Swindon. 'There's a lot of choice, and some are definitely easier to open and close than others,' says Claire. 'We eventually opted for a design by Origin, and installers Herts Bifold Doors were brilliant – they also fitted the glass with a dog flap for our Jack Russell, Sidney.'

Within around three months, the plans had been made and work began. The building phase, including taking down the wall, blocking up the internal living room doors and installing the bi-fold doors, took about two weeks, after which the kitchen itself was fitted. 'The home office was the only usable room downstairs, so we had the fridge and microwave in there and just made do,' says Claire. 'We also went away for a few days, so it was manageable.'

Once the kitchen was in and functioning again, the couple took a breather while they weighed up their flooring options. Practicality was key, although Claire also wanted a warm, welcoming feel. Both she and Nick agreed on dark grey vinyl tiles, and Nick came up with a smart, herringbone-style layout that would add an extra layer of interest. 'We didn't realise until the fitter explained it that our chosen pattern made his job quite complicated,' says Claire. 'It used up a lot of tiles, so he had to be really careful with wastage to ensure there were enough to finish the job.'

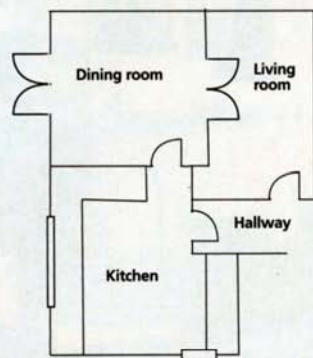
Laying the floor was the final touch, after which Claire, Nick and their boys could really start to enjoy their new kitchen. The transformation from a dated kitchen and under-used dining room to a modern family space is striking.

'Investing in a completely fresh look was the right decision, and I'm really proud of what we've achieved,' says Claire. 'We weren't as keen to entertain before because the space made it difficult, but now it works really well. It always looks good, and everyone loves coming here.' ■

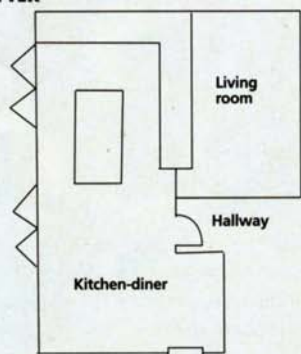
'Choosing an island over a peninsula has made the space much more dynamic and interesting'

THE PLANS

BEFORE



AFTER



The dividing kitchen and dining room wall has been knocked through to create a spacious kitchen-diner. Internal doors into the living room have been blocked off for more wall space, and the patio door and kitchen window replaced with bi-fold doors

THE COSTS

Kitchen units	£12,000
Appliances, sink, tap	£8,200
Building work/labour, including plumbing and electrics	£6,000
Bi-fold doors	£5,800
Worktops	£3,800
Kitchen installation	£2,000
Flooring	£1,900
Pendant lights	£390
TOTAL	£40,090

THE CONTACTS

Kitchen design and installation Ice Interior, 01442 864178, iceinterior.co.uk
Construction Steve Cooper, steve_t_cooper@yahoo.co.uk
Kitchen units Second Nature
Bi-fold doors Origin, Herts Bifold Doors
Flooring Flor
Lighting John Lewis, Original BTC

Buying a kitchen

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Follow this simple advice to ensure that your project is a success



Research before you buy

A new kitchen is a big investment of time and money, so it's worth thoroughly researching suppliers and fitters.

Choosing trades accredited by Trustmark, the Kitchen, Bathroom, Bedroom Specialists Association (KBBSA) or the Institute of Kitchen, Bedroom and Bathroom Installers (IKBBI) can help to resolve any issues that may arise, as you can approach the accreditation board for a dispute resolution directly. 'Where possible, buy from a supplier you know and trust. In some situations, kitchen providers may offer you a special deal, which is legal, but if it seems too good to be true, it probably is,' says founder of Checkatrade, Kevin Byrne. 'Prevention is better than cure, so researching and checking is key.'



When you are ready to buy...

Keep a clear record of any quotes, design briefs, plans or communications with your supplier, and get in writing what the agreed price covers, including who will be responsible for disposing of old units or appliances, and any requirements specific to your project. Before you commit to a payment plan, check the company on Trading Standards' approved Buy With Confidence scheme, which lists businesses that have been vetted to ensure they meet stringent regulations.

Paying by credit card is advisable, as all purchases are protected under Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act, so if a business goes into liquidation before delivery, you are entitled to a full refund from the card provider. This covers all purchases between the value of £100 and £60,260, but never pay the full balance of the job before completion.



What if the kitchen is not as expected?

'Goods must be fit for purpose when they arrive,' says Peter Stonely, lead officer at Trading Standards. 'If you have made specific requests regarding the design or asked for any bespoke features to be included, these must be as promised. If you ordered units on a supply-only basis, you may prefer to reject the goods on delivery if they are faulty in any way.' If you find any issues with the kitchen after it is fitted, the first step is to open a clear communication channel with the suppliers and keep a record of any action, ensuring it is done within a reasonable period (ask each for their timescale) from when you receive the goods.'

When a tradesperson fails to turn up, call and ask for an explanation first. 'Give them a second deadline to start the work and if they fail to turn up again, get quotes from other fitters and warn the first supplier you'll be looking to recoup extra cost from them,' advises Amanda Diamond of Which?. If a company disappears before the fitting is completed, recuperation can take some time.

If you have phoned and written to the trader, with no response, put your complaint in writing to Trading Standards, or go to the Citizens Advice Bureau for guidance, says Kevin Byrne. 'If there is still no response, legal action is the only recourse, but exhaust other mediation methods before this.'

Useful contacts

Checkatrade checkatrade.com
 Citizens Advice Bureau adviceguide.org.uk
 IKBBI ikbbi.org.uk
 KBBSA kbsa.org.uk
 Trading Standards tradingstandards.gov.uk
 Trustmark trustmark.org.uk
 Which? which.co.uk/consumerrights

ON THE WEBSITE

For advice on your rights under the draft Consumer Rights Bill, visit realhomesmagazine.co.uk

FEATURE LINDSAY BLAIR