



# Friends with benefits

When interior designer Susan Bremner met Alex and Daniella Benson in a pub they hit it off straight away. Two years on, Susan has just completed the full interior design of the Bensons' house in Troon.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY IAN MONK

Having opened her first shop, Homes and Interiors, in Troon only 18 months ago, Susan Bremner recognises that she took a big gamble. "At the time, I really didn't think too much of it," says the interior designer with a rueful smile. "I'd been working as an interior designer from home for seven years when I decided it was about time I opened up a showroom. I have been really lucky with the choice of location though – the local area has remained fairly buoyant. Fingers crossed!"

Susan took on Alex and Daniella Benson's project before she had opened her shop but the couple have done so much structural work on the property that the house has only just been completed. "Alex owns Alexander Morton Homes and so was able to take on a house that needed significant work," says Susan. "I saw the property just after they bought it – it was totally not to their taste and needed tons of work." The finished result is a stunning family home full of open space, quirky small rooms and interesting features that lay testament to the Benson's vision and Susan's design flair.

"Sometimes the actual design is the easy part – it can be agreeing on the fundamentals at the start that causes the problems," laughs Susan. "My job can be a little bit like being a marriage counsellor at times. There are so many different tastes that need to be interpreted and the end result can be messy if the brief isn't clear." This was one such case: Alex likes a more traditional look whereas Daniella likes things to be 'comfortably modern'. "Susan and I spent lots of time just chatting," says Daniella. "That really helped because we bounced ideas around and really got to know each other. It really helped me to trust Susan's ideas."

The respect is mutual. "Daniella and Alex were great clients actually," says Susan. "They were really certain about what they liked and the disliked, and they really trusted my gut instincts. We got on so well that they're coming to my birthday party next month."

*Susan talks us through the design...*



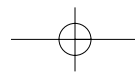
## DESIGN NOTES Kitchen

"This is the room that had the most structural work done on it. There used to be a false roof in here, which Alex removed to allow for as much height as possible. There was also no natural light in this room, which the couple rectified by adding the French doors.

The kitchen itself is from Howdens and Alex and Daniella ended up choosing wood worktops instead of granite as they were going to take too long to come and they were dying to get the project finished! The flint grey colour looks absolutely stunning and the gloss finish bounces light around really well.

I love the tiles here – they're Original Style tiles from City Ceramics in Irvine. I use them quite often on projects as they have a great range of tiles and are really competitively priced. The mosaic tiles and red glass splashback here really complement the red walls that Alex and Daniella were brave enough to let me go with. The purples, reds and metallics add a bright dimension to the relatively muted cabinets and Porcelanosa floor tiles.

The kitchen then opens up to a family area that is connected via the double-sided fire to the lounge. In here we went for an over-sized two and a half metre sofa covered in Romo faux suede and a bar table and stools. We accessorised with quirky utensils from Alessi to add a bit of fun for the kids and Daniella's black and white prints complete the room."



## DESIGN NOTES Living area

"This was a great space to work with as the lounge and dining room had been knocked through to create one huge living area. The dining suite was Alex and Daniella's from their previous house, so we kept this and worked the design scheme around it. By far the biggest extravagance is the extra-width suede Cole and Son wallpaper in the dining room, but it was so worth it. It gives the room depth and the dijon colour is really striking. The opposite wall is papered in textural wallpaper by Brian Yates.

The lights in the lounge were all by Franklite and were chosen because they fit into the grand scheme of the whole house. The sofas were by Choice Sofas in Glasgow, who I would absolutely recommend to anyone. They can custom make a sofa in a week, to any specifications, and the quality is second to none – I use them in loads of my projects. We went for a mocha fabric from Moon here – Alex and Daniella have two boys and so they needed a dark sofa that would continue to look stylish after the inevitable bumps and spills! The statement chair in the window is by Effezetta and the rug is by the Designers Guild."



## DESIGN NOTES Bedroom (right)

"The flooring was the main consideration in the bedroom – in the end we decided to continue the oak floor through here for unity of space. Because of this, we needed to move away from a light oak finish for the furniture. The bed was made by Belgian company, Hemelaer. It is a super kingsize solid oak and is stained in an olive green colour which really adds something to it. This slightly darker colour allowed us to be a bit more adventurous with the accessories and the mirrors at either side of the bed were by far the most extravagant purchases. They are from Heathfield and are hand painted water leaf mirrors. We went for a linear theme with the Casamance wallpaper and the slatted blinds and just used Dulux Trade Porcelain on the other walls. Alex had made all the window surrounds in solid oak, so they look so chunky and are perfectly made. To make the most of the space in here, I designed a fitted wardrobe system that hides all of their clothes and the TV. This was made up by Sliderobes in Hillington who are great at what they do. To add the finishing touches we used Villa Collection bedding and throws."



## DESIGN NOTES Snug

"This was the first area of the house to be done and our main purpose was to make the most of the unusual space. We have used a Designers Guild sofa that is open at the bottom to create a feeling of space. I had the cushions and the throw custom made to fit in with the linear theme. The wallpaper should actually be hung vertically but we decided that it would look better horizontally in this room. Because there was no space for a big armchair, we used an Eames reproduction chair in the corner with a retro lamp. The mirrored console was made by Deknuck Decora and bounces light around to maximise the feeling of spaciousness. The main room leads onto a versatile sitting room that can be used as a guest suite as it has a bathroom off it and sofa bed."

