

LIVING ROOM

'We tore out the Seventies cornicing someone had added and replaced it with reproduction period mouldings,' says Alex. 'With high ceilings, you need something dramatic to stand out.' The same is true of lighting. 'Light fittings work best hung low, otherwise they're lost. It was a chance to go for a big, dramatic chandelier.'

GET THE LOOK

The cornicing is by Butcher Plasterworks. For a similar chandelier, try The Vintage Chandelier Company. Graham & Green sells mirrors like this. The console is from Coote & Bernardi. The table is from George Smith. This is the Stupa Silver rug from The Rug Company. For a green retro chair like this, see Ideas To Steal. For a similar compact wing chair, try Two Columbia Road. RE sells iconography. Chris Levine's *Lightness Of Being* portrait of the Queen is available from Stolen Space Gallery.



KITCHEN-DINER

'With four kids, there's no escape from cooking and eating in,' says Alex. 'The open-plan space means we can keep an eye on everything.' It's still a cook's kitchen, though, with an induction hob and instant hot water tap. As ever, the key to a sleek finish is storage. 'I've built in stacks of cupboards and drawers, so there's nothing on show,' she says. 'I used to be constantly stuffing equipment onto small shelves, living in fear of things falling on me.'

GET THE LOOK

The kitchen was made by **Holloways Of Ludlow** to Alex's design. The worktop is Corian. The C265 Habana stools are from MRF Design.



if modern

life zooms by too fast, it must move at the speed of light for Alex Mahon and husband Richard Barker. Five years ago, they were working in Los Angeles and living in an ultra-minimalist home.

'Now we're married and back in the UK with four children under five – how did that happen?' jokes Alex. They've been busy on the home front, too, but while they've upsized twice, they've never moved from the same house in west London. Impossible? Not when your property has five storeys and you've worked your way through most of them.

The couple originally lived in the top-floor apartment, but, in 2007, Alex approached their neighbours about buying the lower-ground and ground-floor flats. Both agreed. The flats were knocked together to create a duplex, then in 2010, just after Tennyson was born, the couple bought the flat above. Rather than simply add a floor of additional bedrooms, Alex saw this as a chance to have a second bite of the architectural cherry. 'Often you renovate a home, then later think, "I should have done that differently,"' she says. 'Here, we had a chance to make good the mistakes from the first time round.'

Working with the same architects, Newman Zieglmeier, Alex set about improving the configuration, so the children's rooms were on the upper floors, not near the kitchen as before, and every room had a purpose. 'Before, we had a posh living space upstairs,' says Alex, 'but no one ever went in it.' The new layout works for everyone. 'We use the whole house now,' she says. The boys play in their room, with the happy consequence that most of their toys stay there, too, while the journey



DINING SPACE ↑

Installing a mirror along one wall is a clever way to increase the sense of space. Alex chose a long bench because 'it's less formal. You tend to lounge on it more than you would a dining chair and lots of children can sit together on it,' she says. The table came from an office Alex worked in. 'It has lots of scribbles on it from that time, which I like. It feels indestructible.'

GET THE LOOK

The table is from The Conran Shop. The Calvo side table is available from Heal's. The wallpaper was hand-painted; Brian Yates' Early Bird at Tangletree Interiors is similar. Buy Moooi's Heracleum lights from Viaduct. Made In Design sells Areaware's Bank In The Form Of A Pig.

from lower-ground floor upwards takes you through the formal living room, so it gets plenty of use for business meetings, children's story time or pre-dinner drinks.

If the layout is a success, the décor is a triumph. It blends the playful (a flamingo in the loo), the modern (Moooi lights and poured-resin flooring) and the grand – think chandeliers and a decadent claw-foot tub. 'It's luxurious but different. It definitely reflects our personalities and my creativity – for good or bad!' laughs Alex. 'But it's our family home, so it has to be cosy and fun for the kids.'

With the children in mind, practicality was key. 'I want them to roam the house without me worrying that they're breaking stuff,' says Alex, 'so most things are indestructible.' Spills aren't a problem, either. The dining-space bench is covered in wipeable vinyl, which is lucky, as daughter Tennyson once took a marker pen to it. 'We almost had to have her adopted then,' says Alex, 'but after a lot of cleaning, it came off.'

Alex project managed both conversions, despite being pregnant with Lincoln on the second and new parent to Atticus on the first. This is all in addition to a demanding job as CEO of Shine, a TV company that makes programmes including *Spooks* and *The Bridge* for 14 countries. 'I like doing a lot of things,' says Alex. 'I'd carry on having babies if it were up to me, but Richard says, "In what way is four children not enough?"' She'd even consider moving, but not yet. 'I love this neighbourhood and our home,' she says. 'After all, we've had a lot of opportunities to get it right.'

Find out more about Alex's architects by visiting newmanzieglmeier.com; the building work was carried out by woodlandcommercial.co.uk.

HOME TRUTHS

Alex, what do you hope your children inherit from you? A sense of adventure and fun, as well as a work ethic. The ability to follow their hearts and to appreciate what they have, but understand that friends and family are the real riches in life.

How do you relax? Read, watch a *Law & Order Special Victims Unit* marathon, and sleep.

In another life, I would be... an astronaut.

What makes a house a home? The family that lives in it.

Any tips for juggling family life and a career?

Get help where you can, prioritise, and don't feel you have to do everything others do. Aim for practical results not perfection. It's a war of attrition.

Which word or phrase do you most over-use?

'Surely it must be time for a drink already!'

Dress up or dress down? Glam parties go with the trade, so that is a great excuse for shopping, but I also enjoy jogging bottoms in front of the TV.

Sweet or savoury? Growing up in Edinburgh, we used to adore deep-fried pizza and chips with 'salt and sauce'. And my brother and I are on a life's search for the best Mexican hot sauce, so definitely savoury.

This autumn, I'm looking forward to... series two of *Homeland*.

Where would you like to be right now? Parrot Cay in the Turks and Caicos, playing on the beach with my closest family and friends as cocktail hour (and the children's bedtime) rapidly approaches.

MASTER BEDROOM →

'I chose this wallpaper for its scale and sense of luxury, but also because it's not too feminine,' says Alex. She's had the lighting wired so it all runs off one set of switches by the bed. 'My husband used to drive me mental leaving lights on,' she says.

GET THE LOOK

The wallpaper is Zoffany's *Le Temple De Jupiter*. The Platner Lounge chair is by Knoll. Upholsterer and curtain-maker Pat Giddens covered the headboard and did all the upholstery in the house. The chandelier is antique. For similar, try Rainbow London. The palm lamp is from Circus Antiques. For sconces, go to Richard Taylor Designs. Source Gustavian-style furniture from Sweetpea & Willow.





CLASSIC TRADITIONAL

Left: This Shaker kitchen by John Lewis of Hungerford, has Stove Grey painted back boards in the dresser which accentuate the pale Pearl cabinets of this traditional in-frame kitchen. The pink Cool Fridge integrates a Neff fridge, and was inspired by early refrigerators and ice cream parlours. The Beverston bi-fold cabinet sits directly onto the worktop and is the perfect hideaway for your most used kitchen paraphernalia. The island with its broad staved Oak worktop coordinates with the Oak edged Fusion surface of the main kitchen cabinets. From £17,500 including cabinetry, worktops and appliances. **0700 278 4726 www.john-lewis.co.uk**

Above: This hardwood Painted Shaker kitchen from Davonport has timeless appeal that will look fresh in years to come. Granite worktops, and stainless steel fittings give a contemporary twist. The kitchen features a striking island unit and elegant corbels around the cooker mantel. It is hand-painted to order in your colour choice. From £35,000. **0845 468 0025 www.davonport.com**

Right top: The mix of fitted and freestanding furniture gives a relaxed feel to this Shaker-style kitchen by Podesta. Character Oak Island with honed Carrara marble worktop, hand-painted larders and cabinets with Iroko worktops plus a slate topped Bakers Table. From £30,000. **01494 677 770 www.podesta.uk.com**

Right centre: This Canadian maple and walnut Edwin Loxley bespoke kitchen benefits from curved cabinetry to soften the lines. As with all Edwin Loxley commissions, this kitchen is awash with exquisite details, unique to this particular property – features that only true bespoke manufacturing can provide. From £20,000 excluding appliances. **0115 975 8168 www.edwinloxley.co.uk**

Right: Bespoke, hand-painted in-frame kitchen by Holloways of Ludlow. The peninsula in the design provides extra countertop and storage space, but also defines a clear boundary between the kitchen and living space. The in-frame kitchen features oak veneer interiors, bespoke oak veneer drawer boxes and brushed nickel knob handles. Cupboards painted in Farrow & Ball 'Railings' paint that contrasts with the Blanco Eclipsia quartzite 3cm thick worktop. From £25,000. **020 8487 9422 www.hollowayskitchens.com**

