



design
for living

INTERIOR DESIGNER ELAINE SKINNER TACKLES THE TRICKIEST PROJECT OF HER CAREER →

Words by **Alice Westgate**, photographs by westcountryphotographers.com/ **Sam Morgan Moore**





Dreaming up beautiful living spaces is all in a day's work for interior designer Elaine Skinner, but tackling her own home turned out to be her most demanding job yet. "It was the decorating challenge of the century," she laughs.

The problems were manifold. First, there was the building itself – a 1960s' house in Newquay that desperately needed a facelift. Next, there were serious time constraints because the transformation needed to happen in just six weeks. Finally, there was the issue of what colours should be used inside: "My husband Steve likes red and orange, whereas I prefer softer seaside shades such as duck-egg blue and sand," says Elaine. Her design company, Camellia Interiors, specialises in coastal decorating but she knew that the blue-and-beige approach was not strong enough to work here. "Finding a colour scheme that would please us both, and give character to a rather characterless house, was a really tall order."

Elaine tackled the project as she would any other, but with herself and Steve, along with their three youngest children, as clients. "We sat down and asked ourselves what we needed from the space, then we balanced how that would work with our lifestyles and reconfigured the rooms accordingly."

She decided to make drastic changes to the ground floor layout, moving the main living rooms from the back of the house, where they overlooked a dull patch of garden, to the front of the property, where they would have panoramic views down the Gannel Estuary and out to sea. The old kitchen became an office, and two garages were made into a utility room, a children's play room, a wet room and a spare bedroom. Upstairs, she created a dressing room for the master bedroom, and added en suite bathrooms.

Elaine solved the colour scheme problem when she was out on a run along the headland near the house. "I stopped in my tracks when I took in the view," she remembers. "There was a rock in front of me that was a warm, grey colour and it was covered in lichen in the most incredibly vivid shade of mustard-yellow and burnt copper. Beyond it was the deep turquoise of the sea. And that was it – there was my colour palette."

Work started in late September 2010, and by the time the couple returned from their honeymoon in early November the house was ready. "Six weeks sounds tight," says Elaine, "but it took three or four months of planning to create that time frame. I drew up intricate floor plans and set out


detailed instructions for all the tradespeople who were due to come on site, so when the work got under way there was no room for error. Being super-organised at the outset speeds everything up in the end."

For example, Elaine bought and measured every item of furniture before a single studwork wall was put up. "I made sure the big items such as sofas fitted in to the space, and that all the electric sockets were in the right place," she says. "Most people only bring in an interior designer for the painting stage, but the real work should begin well before that. It saves a fortune in mistakes."

The house is filled with mid-century furniture and accessories, including a G Plan-style sideboard that cost just £9.99 on eBay. "I have always loved that whole retro upcycling look," says Elaine, "and it ties in very well with current trends for nostalgia and thrift. This house was the perfect place to explore it."

The colour scheme that Elaine had devised on that cliff-top run works particularly well in the sitting room. It has burnt copper-coloured wallpaper (a design called Elemental by Zoffany) and a range of soft furnishings in shades of grey, rust, celadon, ochre and orange.

Things are more varied upstairs, though, where the bedrooms and landing are decked out in iconic wallpapers by Cole & Son – a reminder of Elaine's passion for cutting-edge design. "I went to town in the children's rooms and let their personalities shine through in each scheme." One paper depicts flamboyant pink flamingos, while another is a series of blank picture frames ready to be doodled on by young designers.

"We bought the house because of its location," says Elaine. "It's close to Crantock and Fistral, so Steve and the children can surf as much as they like. We overcame all the problems we faced at the outset and now the house works well on a practical as well as an aesthetic level." A perfect showcase, then, for the craft of the interior designer. 

INFORMATION

All wallpapers, paints, soft furnishings, flooring and kitchen and bathroom fittings are available from Camellia Interiors, which specialises in refurbishing coastal homes, from complete renovations to small-scale projects. For more details, visit them at 38 High Street, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 2AF, tel 01326 311193, www.camelliainteriors.co.uk