

# A WARM EMBRACE

A DARK PALETTE PAIRED WITH CLEVER LIGHTING MAKES THIS EDINBURGH HOUSE COSY AND WELCOMING IN EVERY SEASON

Photography ZAC and ZAC Words Gillian Welsh

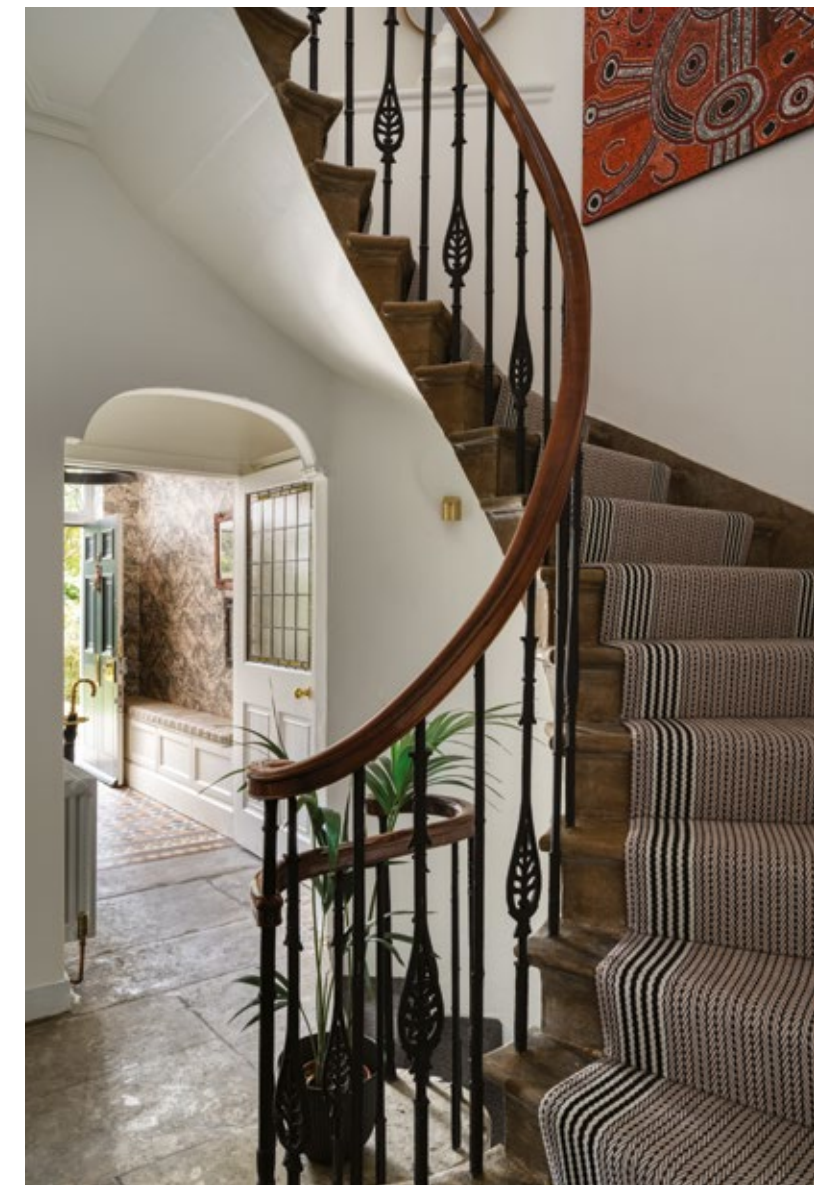


## DETAILS

**What** A four-storey Georgian house

**Where** Central Edinburgh

**Design** Kimberley Bremner, Jeffreys Interiors



ong-distance love affairs can go one way or the other: out of sight, out of mind – or absence makes the heart grow fonder? Kimberley Bremner, a designer at Jeffreys Interiors, was hoping it would be the latter when she took on a project for a family based in Australia. With their teenage son and daughter poised to start school in Edinburgh, they'd fallen in love with a house near Stockbridge and were going to relocate once the necessary renovation work had been carried out.

And when you see the house, it's easy to understand why they fell for it – it's a Georgian gem in one of the loveliest streets in the capital, with most of its period features intact. But being based nearly 10,000 miles away meant they saw their new home in the flesh just once during the three-month refurb, with Jeffreys acting as the link between the two sides of the globe.

Bremner met the clients in Jeffreys' Edinburgh showroom, and they'd hit it off straight away. There was a lot of overlap between their personal styles, so it felt like they'd be a good fit for each other – which was just as well: the 200-year-old traditional house, its four storeys full of small but interesting rooms and nooks, was the polar opposite of the bright, ultra-contemporary open-plan home the family were currently living in.

But the contrast was part of the attraction, and the wealth of period features, such as cornicing, architraves and fireplaces, only added to the appeal. The sheer number of small rooms, however, did pose something of a challenge both to the owners and the designer. Three bedroom suites, a snug and a dressing room make up the first and second storeys; the lounge, another bedroom, the main bathroom and the vestibule are on the ground floor; and the kitchen, utility and sunroom are in the lower-ground level. The clients had only ever seen the house once before they visited during the renovation work, at which point, says Bremner, it was "in a complete building-site state – I was a nervous wreck waiting on them to arrive." Thankfully, they were thrilled with what they saw.

Bremner was acting as project manager as well as designer – the keys had been sent to the showroom when the purchase went through – so it's no surprise that she felt the weight of responsibility on her shoulders. It's also no surprise that the owners were pleased with the way things were looking; ►



**[Above and previous pages]** This living room is an elegant but inviting room with an eye-catching Lunar pendant by CTO. The wallpaper is by Jim Thompson. The cornicing has been painted in Zoffany's Quarter Linen, while the panelling and cabinetry are all in Basalt by Little Greene. The rug is a Crucial Trading design and the curtains are made from Romo's Zinc fabric with detail at the bottom by JAB. The sofa, ottoman and armchairs, upholstered in fabrics by Mark Alexander and Casamance, and the side tables were all made by Charlotte James, an Edinburgh trade-only furniture-maker. The cushions are by Elitis and Andrew Martin, the floor lamp is CTO. The sideboard came from the owner's old house, the Pear Lamp on it is by Porta Romana. Also on the previous page is a wool stair runner by Roger Oates Design



Bremner had kept them abreast of progress all the way through, having presented all the design proposals remotely. “We sent fabric swatches and paint samples to Australia and photographed moodboards – communication was key.” (This was all pre-pandemic, of course, and has turned out to be excellent prep for the team’s current projects: “We’ve done all the troubleshooting,” she says. “Now we can just roll out the process.”)

Happily, the bones of the A-listed building were in great condition, even if the style and some of the finishes weren’t right. The brief was to create warmth out of the dark and spatially challenging layout, using lots of textures to reflect the family’s passions and their world travels and experiences with different cultures (the Jim Thompson wallpaper in the living room, showing a Thai silk weaving scene, is one example).

The owners’ extensive art collection, which includes many

traditional tribal and aboriginal pieces from their time in Australia and Papua New Guinea, had to be incorporated, too. The team carefully worked out hanging arrangements and groupings, adding complementary items and lighting to show off the artworks to their best. One painting, by the late Scottish artist Alan Davie, is a recent addition. Now hanging in the hallway, just outside the master bedroom, it looks very much at home, connecting the rest of the collection to their new surroundings.

Artwork aside, colour was at the heart of the design scheme, in particular tones at the moodier end of the spectrum. With so many small rooms, ceilings that were not especially high (at least on the top and bottom storeys) and a north-easterly aspect, this was never going to be a light-filled house. Rather than trying to fight it, Bremner embraced it: “I decided to work with the dark, keeping it classy and interesting in a subtle way.” ▶

**[Left and above]** The guest bedroom is cool and calm. The textured wallcovering by Jim Thompson harmonises with the curtains in Larsen’s Orwell fabric. Charlotte James made the side tables, the chest of drawers (above) and the headboard, the latter covered in a Mark Alexander velvet. The chair and rug already belonged to the client. Designers Guild bedding, Elitis cushions and Parrot lamps by Jeffreys Interiors complete the look. **[Right]** The bathroom’s fixtures and fittings came from Lusso Stone and have been paired with floor and wall tiles by Mandarin Stone. Zoffany’s Raw Umber paint introduces a softer note

“DELIBERATELY USING MOODY COLOURS IN AN ALREADY SMALL AND LIGHT-RESTRICTED INTERIOR CREATES ATMOSPHERE”



[Left] Olive tones lead the way in the master bedroom, with a woven wallcovering by Tektura and panelling and skirting boards painted in Little Greene's Invisible Green. The bedside chests are by Charlotte James, as is the headboard, covered in a Jim Thompson corded velvet and Dedar trim. The bench is by Ethnicraft and the pendant is by Porta Romana. The rug is the client's own and the lamps are from Jeffreys Interiors



[Above] Another view of the master bedroom, showing its original marble fireplace. The curtains are a Casamance fabric edged in Jim Thompson's Seabra linen. The drawer fronts of the Charlotte James tallboys are inlaid with James Hare silk. The lamps are Porta Romana's Barbara design.

[Right] Peden & Pringle's bespoke cabinetry in the dressing room has been painted in Zoffany's Olivine. The blind is a House of Hackney fabric

A good example of this is the kitchen, with its dining area and banquette seating. The cabinetry is painted in Farrow & Ball's powerful Studio Green, augmented by gold metal handles and warm walnut work surfaces. It replaces the previous owners' kitchen, which had two problems – not enough storage and a split-level floor that made it impossible to improve the layout. The solution was to level the floor and start afresh. With a blank canvas to play with, Edinburgh firm Peden & Pringle was brought in to come up with a bespoke kitchen. This contributed a sizeable amount to the overall spend, but the quality of the craftsmanship is outstanding and makes the kitchen a worthy addition to such an impressive house. ▶





**[Above and bottom right]** This bedroom on the top floor is painted in Little Greene's Tuscan Red, a striking contrast with the Bonsai wallcovering by Pierre Frey. "This was one of the most adventurous designs in the whole project," says Kimberley Bremner. "Our decorators were cursing us as they tried to match the pattern! It's a big show for the smallest room in the house - we had to make it sing." Elitis cushions and Designers Guild cushions complement the look. **[Middle and top right]** The master bedroom en-suite and the top-floor bathroom both have wall and floor tiles by Mandarin Stone and sanitaryware by Lusso Stone. Lusso Stone also supplied the vanity unit in the former, which has a Vaughan Ribbon wall mirror above it, flanked by wall lights by Cotterell and Co

"Deliberately using moody shades in an already small and light-restricted interior creates atmosphere," says Bremner. This approach has been taken throughout, with deep tones on the walls and furnishings making this home feel lived-in. Certain colours were chosen because they meant something to the family, such as the top floor's corals and greens that call to mind a trip they made to the red sandy dunes of Queensland's Simpson Desert. But in the main, going for an understated dark palette ties things together naturally and quietly. Even the bright spots - mustard gold in the lounge, say - are more lowlights than highlights.

But this subdued and subtle scheme never descends into gloominess, thanks to the designer's layering of textures to create heat and depth - silk on velvet, linen with fringes, corduroy in headboards, black on black-patterned walls and marble and limestone finishes in the bathrooms.

Much of the appealing ambience is also down to the lighting, both decorative and functional. "We used a lot of lamps in this project - we didn't want to pepper the original ceilings with ▶





[Left and above] The kitchen is a bespoke design by Peden & Pringle, painted in Farrow & Ball's Studio Green. The banquette is upholstered in Talamanca by Osborne & Little. Jim Thompson's Watercolour Wash fabric was used for the blind. Classic Wishbone chairs sit next to the table and banquette. "As instructed by Jeffreys, the contractor, Bann, took out the old fixtures and fittings and installed the kitchen and all the new bathrooms. They took care of the flooring, tiling, decorating, electrics and the addition of a new security system. Only one structural change was made: the master bedroom didn't have an en-suite while the guestroom next door did. They flipped this around, sealing the guestroom door and making an entrance to the en-suite from the master. An existing cupboard was absorbed to create more space."



[Left] The hall floor tiles are original, paired with a Jim Thompson wallpaper and a mirror and accessories from Jeffreys Interiors. [Above] A classic Georgian façade in Edinburgh

lots of downlights or spots so we used oversized focal pendants with ample side lamps in each room.” The downlights in the hallway were removed and a spectacular central pendant was added. But this alone left the stairs shadowy, so decorative lamps on a 5-amp circuit were fitted. The lounge has a feature pendant along with wall lights positioned to showcase two key art pieces, plus table lamps and floor lamps for reading.

It wasn’t all plain sailing, of course. Access was tricky – the tight spiral staircase meant certain pieces of furniture had to be constructed in situ. The main bathroom didn’t have a shower, so the plumbers had to be creative in making space for one. And there were issues with some of the flooring: “We’d planned to sand, stain and reseal the ground-floor boards, but they ended up

having to be relaid, which put a lot of pressure on the timeline.”

But there were unexpected bonuses too. Peden & Pringle’s kitchen cabinetry turned out so well that the designer commissioned the firm to fit out the dressing room as well. “It wasn’t part of the original plans, but I just knew instinctively that a design as beautiful as this would work there,” she says. “We also uncovered lots of interesting period details during the renovations, such as an original fireplace behind a wall in the bathroom, and worked these into our plans.”

This house is welcoming and enveloping, pulling you in and stimulating your senses. It feels personal and free of the ‘stamp’ of a designer. Bremner, who firmly believes interiors should reflect the owner and the brief, couldn’t be happier with this. ■