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found out. The flat had been owned by a couple who lived in Hong Kong, and they had let it out to tenants and left it to deteriorate. 'The carpets were dirty, and the bathroom grungy,' confided Margaret. 'It was meant to be neutral, but it had gone past that into dingy. As a result, we weren't excited about spending time here, and Huw ended up commuting back to Rugby every night, which was far from ideal. We hardly used the place. It was such a waste.'

Their short-term solution was to let the place out themselves but, when their tenant left, they knew the time had come to take a deep breath and make the apartment their own. 'Neither of us has much time, so we decided to use interior designer Christine May, who we found through the internet. She 'got' what we wanted at once and grasped that, as well as needing a facelift, the apartment also needed some practical storage solutions, especially as our daughter had started to spend time in London.' ▷

◀ With only one window, it was a challenge to make the basement living area bright. So Christine's suggestion of recessed lighting, along with pendant and wall lights, gave the couple the light space which turned the flat from dingy into welcoming. The addition of the colourful rug from Woven Ground and selection of mismatched bright cushions from Next gives the space extra vibrancy

▼ The storage unit from Ikea is ideal for a small compact room. 'I love the fact that you can hide the television completely with the sliding doors, which then reveal tasteful shelves with co-ordinated knick-knacks on. A brilliant design!' smiles Margaret



INSIDER INFO

THE HOME

A one-bedroom 1950s apartment in central London.

WHO LIVES HERE?

Margaret Roberts, a housewife and secretary, and her husband Huw, a solicitor, who use the apartment as their London base a couple of nights a week. Their daughter Rhiannon, 21, often stays and is currently using the flat as her base while she job-hunts in London.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR INSPIRATION FROM?

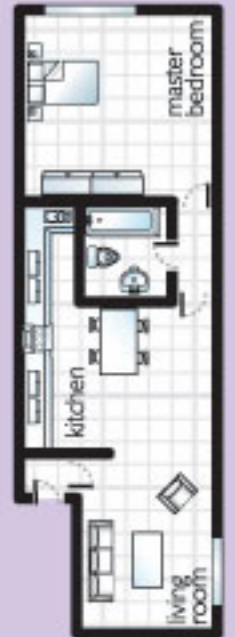
'We used an interior designer, Christine May of Christine May Interiors, who came up with ideas and practical solutions. She was our inspiration really.'

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE?

'It is a little more expensive using an interior designer but, if you are busy, it's a good way to get it done and finished.'

WHAT'S NEXT?

'We'd like to buy somewhere a little bigger and refurbish – perhaps with a maritime feel.'



# We turned our apartment from crash pad to home

Margaret and Huw made an all-out effort to make their London base more welcoming



Living in Rugby, but working in London, Huw needed a place to stay a couple of nights a week,' Margaret explains. 'We'd had previous places, both in The Barbican and Shad Thames, but wanted somewhere much more central. So when this place came on

the market, only 15 minutes walk from Oxford Circus, it seemed like such a good idea. It had previously been an old Ministry of Defence building, and we liked that historical aspect. On paper, the apartment looked great.'

But location isn't everything, as they soon



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▼ The mistake some people make if they want to create the illusion of space is to paint the room magnolia,' says Margaret. 'In fact, I think this closes in an area. Pale blue on the walls opens it up.' The classic Egg chair from Blue Suntree creates a statement in this room and gives it a modern edge



**Good idea!**

Using large rugs, as Margaret has done in the dining and living areas, helps section these spaces off from each other in an open-plan layout.

◀ Christine called on her team of builders and craftspeople, and immediately went to work taking down a glass brick wall between the dining area and kitchen. 'We are on the lower ground floor, so it tends to be quite dark. Doing this helped open the place up,' says Margaret. The dirty carpet was ripped up and a light wood laminate put down, again to work with the light. The couple had hardly been using the kitchen, but the makeover gave it a much more liveable feel and atmosphere.

The brief they gave Christine was very open, merely saying that they wanted to



**Good idea!**

A dining table that folds down small enough to become a console table is a great space-saver.



▲ The kitchen area is surprisingly large, but has the advantage of being tucked away. The units were inherited from the previous owners, but the addition of neutral mosaic tiles from Homebase as a splashback ties in the area with the rest of the living space

◀ It would have been tempting for the couple to go for white chairs to match the table, but these walnut ones from Dwell look classy and are very reasonably priced. They even have a 1950s office feel, which is a nod to the fact that the building once belonged to the Ministry of Defence

'With such a small space, we couldn't jump from one colour to another. Instead, we unified it with one colour flowing throughout.'

use four Chinese paintings that were hanging in the living area as inspiration. 'We found them on the internet,' says Margaret. 'They represent the four seasons. Huw is a Buddhist, and we wanted to have that gentle Oriental feel flow throughout.'

Christine took the greys and greens of the paintings, together with the berry colours in the rug the couple had in the living area and used that throughout the apartment. She introduced the slightly Oriental look with the Buddha in the living room, and a jade wallpaper in the bedroom, but without

going too over the top.

Christine tackled space problems by commissioning a sofa bed in the living room and matching ottoman where the bedclothes and linen can be stored. The dining room table also folds down into a console table, and a wall of cupboards at the far end of the living room both hide the television when it's not needed, and provide space to pack things away. There are also additional shelves that hold boxes to hide everything from bits and bobs to books.

But it wasn't all a complete revamp.

Sometimes, all the apartment needed was a little loving care. 'We kept the bathroom suite as it wasn't too bad,' explain Margaret. 'All we really had to do was make it less grubby and we did that by re-tiling it, which was enough to revitalise the room.'

'Using Christine pushed our boundaries a little too,' admits Margaret. 'We would never have chosen the funky grey chair, but Huw really likes it now. He says it's really comfy, and you'll often find him sitting there with his laptop. She also chose a very bold wallpaper for the bedroom which



◀ At the back of the flat is the bedroom. The basement window doesn't have a pleasing view, so the couple have a translucent screen permanently up. Once again, light is an issue so Christine suggested the mint green wallpaper by Linda Barker from Graham & Brown to give the bedroom brightness, as well as creating a serene and calming feel

'Storing the duvet and pillows for a sofabed in a stylish footstool makes it easy for when guests stay over.'

◁ Huw would never have chosen, and I have to admit he probably wouldn't even now, but it works well.'

Using an interior designer has been a good decision. Margaret points out that neither of them had the time to research and source builders, much less project-manage the refurbishment. 'We perhaps might have saved a little money doing it ourselves but, with Christine in charge, everything got done on time with no hassles from the builders, no disasters, and no dramas – without her, who knows what might have happened?'

And now? Huw stays at the flat much more often, with Margaret joining him. They put their feet up and relax and, even though they still prefer to eat out, the couple now look upon it as their London home, and not just as a place to stay. **WIN**

## 5 IDEAS TO STEAL



### 1 CHOOSE SPACE-SAVING ESSENTIALS

Margaret and Huw have a console table that doubles up as a dining table, which is incredibly useful when space is at a premium. The Opus Oak Hideaway dining table, £150 from Next, does the same. It's also available in lacquered black.

### 2 ADD LIGHT AND SHADE

In the couple's bedroom, Christine chose a mint green wallpaper to brighten the darkness. The added benefit of the iridescent finish on the paper means that light reflects off it, too. For a similar look, try Oriental Garden Eau De Nil Floral wallpaper, £37 per roll, from Laura Ashley.



### 3 DISGUISE TECHNOLOGY

With television screens getting bigger these days, they can look ugly and don't do much to enhance a room. Margaret's hidden television storage unit solves that problem, as well as creating additional shelving. Try Ikea's Besta range, for smart and affordable storage solutions.

### 4 COMBINE COLOUR SCHEMES

Wooden flooring is a practical choice, but can look a bit plain. Use striking rugs to add a statement in a room and to also tie colour themes together, as Margaret has done. Tesco Direct has a wide range of rugs to suit every taste and budget.

### 5 MAKE FURNITURE A FEATURE

One 'wow' piece of furniture can really make a room and the Egg chair by Arne Jacobsen will do this in any environment. Designed for the lobby and reception of a hotel in 1958, this reproduction chair is £399 from Blue Suntree and comes in a wide selection of finishes and colours.



### Good idea!

Using mirrored picture frames on the wall, either side of the bed, helps to bounce light around a room that is lacking in natural daylight.

◀ The use of mirrors will always add space and brightness. So the wall of fitted wardrobes behind panels of mirrors is a good idea in this bedroom. The walnut trim matches the bedside tables from Dwell

▶ The couple had no need to change the existing bathroom suite, as it was relatively new. However, the walls were given a revamp with large rectangular tiles from MGA tiles. The band of darker brown tiles helps break up the neutral expanse

