THE TIMES

MAGAZINE

27.09.14

Behind the mask

The loneliness of Paul Merton

By William Leith

SMALL – AND PERFECTLY FORMED

Stylist Amber Jeavons used tricks of her trade to make her tiny flat feel bigger

REPORT Vinny Lee **PORTRAIT** James Balston

The sitting room with white painted floor and walls, looking through to the revamped kitchen

The chalkboard wardrobe. Right: the sitting room fireplace. Below: Amber Jeavons

Rising up the property ladder in London is a slow process, but Amber Jeavons has a clever formula. Her previous home was a studio flat that was once the ballroom of a gothic-style house in Tooting. She used mirrors and a monochrome colour scheme to give it a feeling of space and chose a few interesting furnishings to add style, all within a very strict budget.

Two and a half years ago she bought a one-bedroom flat in a Victorian villa off Wandsworth Common. Investing in this larger property took Jeavons to her financial limit, so she has used the same decorating formula and furniture as she had in the studio flat.

The walls, floors and ceilings are predominantly white. The windows and the large glass doors that separate the kitchen and living room are framed in matt black.

The fireplaces in the sitting room and bedroom were Thirties tiled "monstrosities" and had to go. In their stead, Jeavons made simple mantels from wooden shelves and scroll brackets. The sofa used to be her bed in the studio flat, but is now draped with antique table runners and some House of Hackney Queen Bee cushions.

The starburst mirrors also came from the studio flat, as did the oversized mirror, which is now propped against the wall opposite the window that overlooks the leafy garden. It was an eBay purchase. Jeavons is handy with a paintbrush and gave the brash frame a more modern gold finish. The table was a hand-me-down from her mother, while the oriental cabinet, which once served as her wardrobe, now holds books and other paraphernalia.

"The kitchen was a mess," says Jeavons. "There was red lino on the floor, it had yellow walls and most of the equipment had gone, so I invested in a good oven and dishwasher, and put a quality bamboo worktop on top of cheap units. I found a great builder to install it all and tile it. I made some chopping boards from the off-cuts. I think the builder was pretty impressed; he let me use his sander."

Keen to let nothing go to waste, when Jeavons noticed a neighbouring house was having a roof extension, which needed new doors to comply with building regulations, she asked the owners if she could have the old ones. Three of the doors have been used to make a folding screen for the bedroom; the other two frame a full-length mirror.

The bedroom, a luxury after the studio flat, has a simple four-poster bed from Lombok. Jeavons bought the wardrobe in a shop on Balham High Road, painted it with blackboard paint and then decorated it with chalk-written script from the opening paragraph of CS Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.*

"I love fairytales and fantasy," says Jeavons, which is perhaps why she has draped her bed with swaths of House of Hackney's Hackney Empire Midnight Stripe fabric. The print features a bush baby playing an accordion, a sloth smoking a hookah and a possum drinking tequila. "The fabric was beyond my budget really," she says. "But the pattern is so intense that I decided I could economise by using just a single width over the top and down the back."

In the bathroom, Jeavons added a frieze of House of Hackney's Palmeral wallpaper. "I liked the idea of a hot house, a tropical element in the bathroom," she says. Jeavons's home shows how a little money and a lot of work can make a big difference and, with her nifty paintbrush skills, perhaps she could be known as an artist in residence. ■

houseofhackney.com; amber-interiors.com

Kitchenalia *by Vinny Lee is published by Jacqui Small and is available from the* Times *Bookshop for £27 (RRP £30), free p&p, on 0845 2712134; timesbooks.co.uk*