

SITTING ROOM

Ellie and Kit created a feature of the exposed brick on the chimneybreast and Kit installed a state-of-the-art woodburning stove – the most efficient of its type. For a similar coffee table, try Monterey, £350, John Lewis. **Family Tree** wallpaper by Fern Living, £59.95 per roll, Posture.

HOME TRUTHS

✿ **THE OWNERS** Ellie and Kit Knowles, who run a sustainability consultancy, and baby daughter Eva

✿ **THEIR HOME** Arts & Crafts semi-detached house

✿ **LOCATION** Manchester

✿ **ROOMS** Sitting room, kitchen-diner, office, utility room, cloakroom, five bedrooms (one en suite), bathroom

✿ **PURCHASED** 2009

✿ **PREVIOUS PROPERTY**

'This is the first home we've owned,' says Ellie.

DINING AREA

For Ellie and Kit the open-plan kitchen-diner, with its expanse of glazing, is the most important functional space and brings a light and airy feel into their home. Dining table and bench seating in reclaimed elm, £1,475, Posture. **Brewers Ecochic** wallpaper in silver birch, £45.95 per roll, Wallpaper Direct.

ECO LOGICAL

Ellie and Kit Knowles used their expertise to turn an Arts and Crafts property into an energy-efficient home

FEATURE ROSEMARY BARRATT • PHOTOGRAPHY COLIN POOLE

Not many young couples would purchase the most challenging property they could find when embarking on their first house renovation.

However, Ellie and Kit Knowles were on a mission. They wanted to prove it was possible to undertake a complete refurbishment of a 100-year-old house with sustainable materials, as well as reducing its carbon footprint.

The couple spent over a year searching before they found the perfect property in a conservation area in Manchester. 'The place was as dilapidated as you can get,' recalls Ellie. 'An elderly lady lived here on her own and the

house hadn't been touched for 40 years. The chimneys were full of dead birds, there was lead piping and paint everywhere, and the carpet underlay had turned to dust.'

Drawing on his engineering background, Kit's aim was to 'retrofit' the property using efficient energy-saving solutions, creating a stylish family home in the process. 'We bought the house because we wanted a property with all its period features intact, but also because it was one of the most problematic houses to environmentally upgrade,' he explains. 'We thought that if we could improve the energy efficiency here, we could do it anywhere.'

'There's a lot of confusion about how best to conserve energy in the home,' Kit ►

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KITCHEN

A bright colour scheme here was inspired by the yellow handbag and glasses Ellie had with her when she visited the kitchen showroom. Alno Star Satina kitchen units, £392 for a 600mm base unit with glass door, Diane Berry Kitchens. Jet leather bar stools, £60, Bar Stools Direct. Vernon Pantan Topan pendant light in yellow, £169 each, Posture

continues. 'People are distracted by certain technologies, such as solar panels and wind turbines, but often they're not the most efficient solution. I take a more holistic approach and use a thermal-imaging camera to pinpoint where energy loss is greatest and where I can make the most cost-effective improvements.'

So the couple got stuck into a full-scale renovation that saw the house dismantled around their ears in order for Kit to install the latest eco-technologies and systems. All

the floorboards were pulled up, the ceilings came down and the old plaster was chipped off as the house was stripped back to its bare shell. To create a two-storey extension, the rear of the house was knocked out completely, leaving Ellie and Kit living in freezing temperatures.

'In the winter, we had to wear several layers of clothes,' recalls Ellie. 'The temperature in the bedroom was just five degrees.' Top priority was to create a 'sealed-envelope' effect by encasing the whole of the house in super-thin

insulation — the world's first such use of a NASA-developed product. The base of the building was built out in false brick and the Arts & Crafts façade covered with insulated render, without detracting from its period looks.

Windows were restored to their former glory by replicating the frames using sustainable wood resources. Kit even came up with a way of harvesting rainwater and redistributing it through piping to use for flushing the toilet and the outdoor tap. Internally, Ellie and Kit were

able to pursue their creative design ideas and put their own stamp on the house. 'We reclaimed all the original features and created our own in keeping with the property's age by reusing any surplus materials,' says Kit.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for the couple was to source modern kitchen units that ticked all their environmental boxes. 'We found one company that made cupboards out of recycled yogurt pots, but they weren't for us,' says Kit. 'We solved the problem by having glass-fronted ▶

BATHROOM

The mosaic tiling in this room was made by Ellie and Kit from all-natural materials, including large pebbles found on the beach. Natural tiling, from £30 per sq m, Ecospheric

FAVOURITE ROOM 'The kitchen has surpassed all of our expectations.

It's the hub of our home and it even won an award for sustainable design'

DESIGN TIP

'We think about every material from the perspective of where it's come from and where it'll go after we've finished with it,' says Ellie. 'This approach produces distinctive aesthetics with a feel-good factor.'

**MASTER
BEDROOM**

Kit intended the bed to be the focal point of the room. He incorporated a floating platform that acts as a functional seat, and a padded headboard made from offcuts of upholstery fabric.

Patchwork bespoke bed, £1,690; Dreamweavers Executive cushion, £43, both Posture



FAVOURITE SHOP 'We worked very closely with our local interiors boutique, Posture, which helped turn our environmental ideas into amazing furniture and accessories'

units, while the worksurface is made of 75 per cent recycled material, which looks like granite.'

For the decoration, Ellie and Kit went for a neutral look with feature walls of vibrant colour, using natural clay-based paint and eco-friendly wallpaper. 'Rather than over-decorate, we like the fittings in the house to add colour and texture to the space,' says Ellie. 'We appreciate things that have had a long life, so our home has become an eclectic mix of old and new.'

The couple have succeeded in reducing their carbon footprint by over 60 per cent, without

sacrificing their living standards. 'What we've achieved has made us realise the worth of everything from an environmental perspective,' says Ellie. 'We've put our personalities into this house and made it so much easier to live in. Our first Christmas, we played host to 11 people for a week and found the open-plan space created a fantastic social atmosphere.'

'For me, it's a great feeling of satisfaction,' Kit agrees. 'The house has already been here for 100 years and now I feel confident our work will see it safely through another century.' 25

INSIGHT

CHARACTERFUL HEADBOARDS

✿ Old doors, windows, bamboo or wooden screens, mirrors and even reclaimed wooden boards can be used as a backdrop for your bed.

✿ An original alternative to conventional off-the-peg headboards, bold fabric wall hangings, lined with wadding for comfort, catch the eye.

✿ To create a headboard on a budget, add a panel of bold wallpaper behind the bed. Paper the width of the bed and halfway up the wall to liven up a plain room.