

COOL & *Simple*



Isobel and Zac Nicholson transformed a Victorian convent into a modern family home - with a light and bright kitchen designed for spacious living

PICTURES: DARREN CHUNG | WORDS: AMELIA THORPE

It's hard to believe that this elegant four-storey house in West London was once a rather gloomy convent. 'There were nine dormitories and a series of tiny rooms with endless partitions,' recalls Isobel Nicholson, a TV producer who shares the house with husband, Zac, a film cameraman. 'Our goal was to open up the whole house to create a family home with a much more spacious and light feel.' An essential part of the refurbishment of the Victorian house was the conversion of the nuns' former sitting rooms on the ground floor into a large living-kitchen-dining space, designed for family life with children Bea (seven), Tilly (four) and Amelia (10 months). After ripping out those awkward partitions, Isobel and Zac concentrated on creating an open-plan space, adding floor-to-ceiling sliding folding glass doors which fill the room with natural light, and provide direct access to the garden.

It was word of mouth that led the couple to Tim Higham of Higham Furniture for their kitchen. 'We had been all over the place looking for the right company, so we rather fell on Tim when we met him,' laughs Isobel. 'He approaches each design individually and offers a very personal service which appealed to us.'

As a keen cook (and a devotee of hip chef Yotam Ottolenghi's cookbooks), Isobel's brief to Tim was to ensure that the cabinetry was robust and the layout designed for some serious recipe preparation, with plenty of work surface, and appliances and storage in easy reach to make life easier for Isobel.

'I also felt that the room should be designed to suit a London house,' she explains. 'So I didn't want 'country' and equally nothing too shiny or stark, but more of a blend of contemporary and classic with individuality.' Working with Tim to create a simple look, and in a palette of chic and gentle greys topped with classic marble, Isobel added vintage industrial enamel pendant lights on red cords, red stools and an antique bronze utility rail (to hang utensils). 'They are warm touches which add personality and make it feel like home,' she says. *EKBB*

MODERN METALLICS

An antique bronze utility rail below a simple painted shelf adds a characterful - and useful - touch



ESSENTIAL *kitchens*

TREADING SOFTLY

Oak planks of different widths are finished with a white wash for an interesting look



FOCAL LIGHTING
Isobel found the vintage industrial enamelled pendants from Artisan & Co in Gloucestershire, and hung them with red cord for a stylish touch.

Kitchen profile

Bespoke framed Shaker cabinetry painted in Little Greene French Grey with island in Lead creates a cool and simple backdrop in this spacious and light-filled kitchen. Teamed with worktops and a splashback of polished Carrara marble, the latest AGA Total Control cooker, and vintage industrial touches in the pendant lights, steel bar stools and wall clock, this is a stylish setting for modern family life.

HIGHAM FURNITURE
Flint Barn, New Barns Farm, Drove Road, Southwick, Hampshire, PO17 6EW. Tel 0800 047 0235. higham.co.uk
Kitchen prices from €15,000.



COOKING

The AGA 3-oven Total Control model has independently controllable hotplates and ovens, designed to reduce running costs and save energy. You can choose to turn the AGA off most of the time in summer, cooking with individual hotplates and ovens when you want them.

SHELVING

The larger cupboard contains oak drawer boxes and pull-out shelves, plus wicker vegetable baskets and integrated lighting.

IN THE DETAIL

The wall cabinets are topped with a simple cornice for a smart, but not ornate, finishing touch.



TIM HIGHAM
DIRECTOR AND
OWNER, HIGHAM
FURNITURE

Can you tell us about the furniture?

The cabinetry is classic, framed Shaker-style design, with simple linear detailing. There is quadrant beading on the doors and a double-beaded edge to the drawers which helps to enhance the modern feel. It is hand-painted in soft shades of warm grey, with a darker shade used for the island to add definition. Grey is a modern neutral and it contributes to the room's classic and contemporary appeal.

Everything is within easy reach, and Isobel can cook without the children or guests under her feet, but still be part of the conversation in the rest of the room. The AGA is both a homely, traditional feature and a focal point, and it is topped by a shelf with a utility rail to make a display area.

And the storage areas?

As Isobel is such a good cook, it was important to include masses of storage for all of her pots, pans, equipment, specialty ingredients and cookbooks. The island is large,

so it houses cupboards and drawers, while the tall cabinets include a spacious pantry so that it's easy to see and reach dry goods. And we were even able to make use of some of the otherwise wasted space above the doorways to build recessed shelves to house Isobel's recipe books.

What materials are used?

Painted cabinetry is smooth and classic, and in its shades of light grey, it enhances the spacious feeling of the room. Polished Carrara marble is always elegant, with beautiful natural veins that run through the stone and create a sense of subtle movement.



How did you create the layout?

The island serves as the main food preparation and presentation area, with the



ISLAND LIFE

The island takes its design cue from a traditional country house kitchen table, brought up-to-date by its smooth lead-grey painted finish



WORKTOPS

30mm thick polished Carrara marble makes an elegant worktop. It is a design that is inspired by French cool marble slabs used for making pastry.

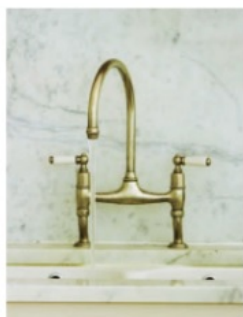
STORAGE

Wall cupboards are painted in French Grey eggshell from Little Greene, with solid oak shelves.

TAP

A Perrin & Rowe tap in Pewter finish offers a traditional-style with lever handles and a swivel spout.

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Stockists

APPLIANCES

AGA 3-oven Total Control in Black, £9,895; AGA KL38A50GB integrated tall **fridge-freezer**, £832; KURISA50GB integrated under-counter **fridge**, £396; SMV6ST30GB integrated **dishwasher**, £969, all Bosch.

FIXTURES AND FURNISHINGS

Isorian 4893 **tap** in Pewter finish, £48; Perrin & Rowe Farmhouse 80 **sink**, £307; Villeroy & Boch Carrara Bianco marble **splashback** and **worktops**, priced to order; Sabre Stone Reconditioned industrial enamel vintage **pendant lampshades**, £78 each; Arton & K Similar **wood flooring** from a selection; The Natural Wood Floor Company; Walls painted in French Grey 10 intelligent **matt emulsion**, £40.50 per 2.5 litres; Little Greene; Tolix **high stools**, £87 each; Made in Design; Similar **wall clock**, from a selection; John Lewis.

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SLIDING DOORS

Folding sliding patio doors open out to allow full access to the garden on brighter days.