## HOMETOWN GLORY

Returning to the town she grew up in and renovating a beautiful Arts & Crafts house inspired a change of career for print designer Nicola Cliffe













## AT HOME WITH

**Owners** Nicola Cliffe, a print designer and founder of Madder Cutch & Co (maddercutchandco.com), and her husband Jonathan, a dentist. They have three grown-up sons, George, Ted and Bertie, and a Parson Russell Terrier called Ernie.

**House** Five-bedroomed semidetached Arts & Crafts house built in 1904. They moved in in 2005.

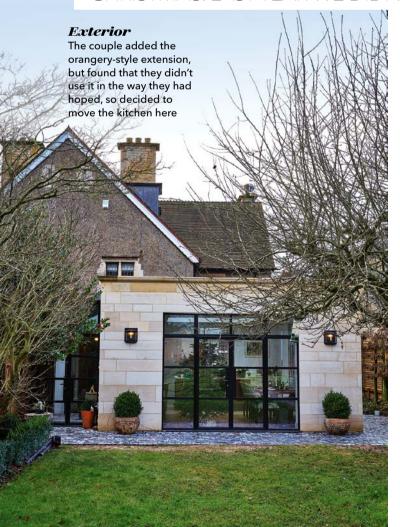
icola Cliffe has a soft spot for Arts & Crafts houses and used to love walking past this property in her home town of Stamford, admiring the flower displays on the windowsills. Having moved away in her youth, she returned to the town with her husband Jonathan to bring up their boys George, Ted and Bertie, and this house was on the route to the children's school where Nicola also worked, teaching science.

'We lived just down the road in a tiny house and when Bertie came along, we really did need something bigger,' says Nicola. 'These houses don't come on the market often and when they do, they sell very quickly, but we were very lucky - I knew the lady who lived here and she let me know in advance that she was putting it on the market."

Nicola had been inside the house and knew it still had some Arts & Crafts features, such as the staircase, tiled floors and the fittings in the dining room. She also liked the proportions: 'The windows say "country house", but it's not too big inside - it still feels like a comfortable family home,' she says.

The house had been altered over time and there was work to do to the kitchen, bathrooms and the configuration of the ground floor rooms, but the priority was to get the boys settled. 'We moved in in January >













2005, and George and Ted were up in the attic rooms, which were freezing,' says Nicola. 'There was no insulation and we had to duct-tape the door to the eaves space closed as it kept blowing open.'

The attic was stripped out, insulation added and beams moved to accommodate new dormer windows. One side of the space became a study area and the remainder was divided into two bedrooms.

The ground floor has also benefitted from some structural work. The couple added an orangery extension and rebuilt a wall to return a knocked-through living room to two separate rooms. 'It's nice to have larger spaces where everyone can gather, but it was also good to have the piano separate from the living room, and to have somewhere for the trombone to go, along with all the other instruments the boys were playing at the time,' says Nicola.

One of the biggest unforeseen expenses was replacing the windows at the front as road noise was an issue. 'We kept the original single-glazed little leaded lights in the hallway, but the front ones are all now bronze casement windows,' she says. 'It was an investment, but they don't rust or need painting so they are very low maintenance.'

The room that was trickier to fix than expected was the kitchen. 'It has taken three attempts over the years >













to get the kitchen right, adding various extensions and moving it around, but that's how a house develops,' says Nicola. 'We did it over years - we could have moved house three times in that time so I don't fret about it.' The final kitchen rejig saw it move to the orangery, which they had built earlier, and it's now a large, open space.

As the boys have grown up, the couple have adapted the space to suit the changing family dynamic. One of the biggest impacts this house has had on Nicola is the launch of her own textile business, Madder Cutch & Co, creating English prints in natural dyes. 'I went from introducing a bit of William Morris fabric in every room, to going back to college to study for an MA in sustainable textile design,' she says. 'I now work from home in a studio at the back, but I also use the study and Ted's old bedroom is my sewing room,' she says.

Even though they've moved out, the boys come home for Christmas - and now their girlfriends join them. 'Last year it was fantastic having the extra space and large table, I don't think we left the room all day,' says Nicola. Cooking is a family passion, so the Christmas lunch preparations are shared, with Nicola taking on the head chef role. 'We finish with a walk - Ernie needs tiring out.' she says. 'Then it's lots of games and visits from friends. It has become a very social home that has grown with us.'





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