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PHOTOS: CHRIS NEELY

a family affair by Ali Fell

Families. They can be your biggest fans and your harshest critics – often in the same sentence. Would you let your family loose with a paintbrush in your house? Adrian Baillie's did...

Adrian's brother Geoff and his wife Ruth have lived in their house on the outskirts of Belfast for three years. When they bought the property, they planned to extend the kitchen; consequently they have postponed doing any decorating whatsoever. But now the builders have been and gone, it's time to get stuck into the decorating, and make their home their own at last.

Geoff tells me: "We are really pleased with how the work has turned out. It has really opened up the space, and changed how we use the house. Ruth was saying the other day how much easier the house is to clean now, but that is because we are always in here!" Ruth agrees on how important the kitchen is in their home. "We love having people round, and I hate having to cook in one room and then carry it all into another room where everyone else is. I really feel like I am missing out. So this layout is much more social, and informal."

Having established that they loved the sense of informality and openness in the

room, it was important that Ruth and Geoff continued this feeling through the décor and furnishings. That was where Adrian came in, helping them select items such as the white oak table that can seat eight, and the corner seating which creates a divide in the room, but can also accommodate plenty of friends. Although Geoff also stresses that it can also "allow two people to lie flat out and watch TV!".

One of the most striking design features in the room has to be the gorgeous Mulberry fabric on the windows. Adrian tells me: "We chose the red and blue sunflower fabric, as it fitted in with the colour palette for the room which we had based on Ruth and Geoff's wedding china. It is quite a bold choice because the pattern is so big, but with such a big window you can really get away with it. The whole space is so big that it doesn't feel terribly patterned. We hung them with an inverted pleat which is very neat, and which also allows the fabric to pull back to nothing when the

curtains are open, so they aren't bulky."

The overall look of the kitchen space is quite modern, with cleverly built-in features and a smart tile-back behind the range from David Scott. The kitchen itself was by Edendarriff Interiors, the same company who made Adrian's parents' kitchen.

His mum, Elma, tells me that they also do a lot of casual entertaining, and for that reason: "I love the island unit. I find that it is great for working on, and for serving off. I also love having a table in the kitchen, but up at one end. People can sit and chat with me while I am cooking, but it is far away enough that they are out of my way!"

"It was lovely to be able to choose everything new for the kitchen, and to put things where I wanted them. Ruth and Geoff's kitchen is light oak, but we went for Red Alder, which is quite dark, and which has a lot of grain which I wouldn't ordinarily like. But I think it looks great."

I wonder if having a son continued ➤

LIFESTYLE home comforts

◀continued who is an interior designer means you end up choosing things for your home that you wouldn't have ordinarily gone for on your own. As we move into Elma and Noel's sitting room, Elma tells me: "Adrian always talks about your colour comfort zone. He told me to look into my wardrobe, and see what were the main colours there, and I realised I always felt most comfortable in black, white and red. So I decided to go for red in here, which was a real change for us, as we always stuck to colours like gold and green, but I'm really pleased with how it has turned out."

According to Elma, she liked most of Adrian's suggestions from the beginning, but admits she wasn't sure about the bookcase at first. However, she changed her mind once she saw it installed in the room, and was ever more delighted when she saw he had filled it with some of her favourite Lladro pieces. "I was intending to fill it full of Noel's books, but then I walked in and discovered Adrian had found some of my Lladro - I had packed it away, as I thought I didn't really have anywhere for it here. I wouldn't have thought of displaying it like that, but I think it looks lovely."

I think that is one of the most striking things about this room. The overall look of the room is clean and modern, but touches like the well-displayed Lladro figurines soften the look and betray more of the character of its occupants. Elma has a number of Hummel ornaments which hold huge sentimental value, but Adrian has displayed them, alongside some cross-stitch pictures his mum did, to draw attention to them in an affectionate way without looking kitsch. In fact, throughout the house there are paintings by his father and embroideries by his mother alongside stylish pieces, such as paintings by Gillian Lonsdale (Adrian, his parents and Geoff and Ruth



all own pieces by her!) that betray an interest in modern living and design, as well as an affection and respect for the interests and sentimentalities of his family. As Elma says: "I love the modern furniture and colours, but I told Adrian

'I like to do cross-stitch, and I need to be able to see', so he got me my chair, and put a lamp behind it. After all, you have to be able to live!"

Ruth agrees. "More than anything, I want a home to be a home. It has to be





somewhere that people can come and not be scared to sit on things." Adrian also discusses colour comfort zones with her and Geoff. He tells me: "Their comfort zone would really have been in naturals and neutrals, but we wanted to bring in a bit of colour as well for contrast. So we had a brainstorm and in the sitting room we based it on the curtain fabric - gorgeous Malibar jacquard silk in a soft aubergine which Ruth and Geoff really fell in love with.

"The wallpaper in the dining room is a new paper by Osborne Little: 'Quartz'. It is a metallic paper, which can be difficult sometimes, as they can show up every little bump on your wall. But we liked this paper, and tried it out here - and it has worked really well. I really liked it, and bought the book on the strength of how this one worked. It's not that I used Geoff and Ruth's house as an experiment though...!"

I wonder what it is like to have a family member design your home. Adrian's parents Elma and Noel are understandably proud of what their son has achieved, and are enthusiastic about his work. Elma tells me: "It is very interesting having an interior designer in the family. You get to see some lovely things. He took me to a show in Harrogate which was all full of accessories, gorgeous stuff. The only trouble was that you couldn't buy any and bring it home with you - you had to order everything and wait months! That was very frustrating!"

Ruth agrees. "I think doing the house up with Adrian's help has definitely been more fun than doing it on our own. If I was planning all this on my own, I would really be wondering if it was all going to work. But Adrian's skill is that he can see what it will be like when it is all finished,



which is something I can't do."

However, Geoff recognises that working with family can be difficult. He says: "It is difficult balancing a professional relationship with a lifelong family relationship." Adrian agrees. "It is definitely more stressful working with family, as it is harder for them to accept an idea from you as a professional.

"When you are communicating with them constantly about all sorts of things, it is hard for them to adjust to seeing you in that professional capacity."

But was the stress worth it? Of course it was. Everyone is pleased with the results, and they are all still friends - and when it comes to families, that has definitely got to be the mark of success.