

WHAT'S ON
IN JANUARY

CLAPHAM BATTERSEA FULHAM

time & leisure

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SWING INTO 2016!

TAKE UP THE NEWEST
DANCE CRAZE

EDUCATING A GENERATION

MIRIAM GONZÁLEZ
DURÁNTEZ INSPIRES
YOUNG WOMEN

GET FIT
LOOK
FABULOUS

BIG BUILD SPECIAL

BALHAM HOUSE
TRANSFORMED

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The **BIG
BUILD**
NEW YEAR
HOMES
GUIDE 2016



BUILDING BIG IN BALHAM

Five years ago, Claire Burrage and her husband bought a property in Balham: a wreck divided into flats. Over the next year, they transformed it into a six-bedroom family home

For many people the thought of transforming three flats into a family home would be a daunting one, but for Claire and her husband Trevor, this was just the break they had been looking for. 'We'd been searching for the right property for two and a half years. We knew we wanted something we could do up ourselves, and it had to be in the right area. This property on Ritherdon Road was perhaps a little more of a wreck than we'd have liked – it was practically falling into the street – but the blank canvas was exactly what we wanted. You can impose your taste and requirements on every facet of the house. I remember them telling me that I couldn't even go and see it without a hard hat, and that sounded like heaven.'

Claire's confidence seems to have come from her clear vision of what she wanted. 'Absolutely – and I think that's easier when »





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it's a shell. Yes, there are major building considerations, but it's also a completely blank canvas and you can make of it what you want. I knew I wanted the kitchen to be the main focal point and hub of the house: a big, open and versatile space. I also wanted to have a separation between kids and adults spaces. So we designed it so the kids (we have two girls) could have the top floor to themselves with bathroom, two bedrooms and a playroom. Then we're on the floor below with the spare rooms.'

Today the house certainly looks impeccable, but there are still tweaks and modifications happening all the time and Claire sees renovation as an on-going process. 'When we first moved in we deliberately didn't completely furnish the house immediately. There are so many things you can change your mind about once you're living in the house, and it's nice to have some space

to do that. Also, of course, you may find amazing pieces, and if you do, you want to have space to fit them in. I look back and I still wish I had done some things differently but that is part of the process, I think. For example, and I know it sounds trivial, but if I was to do it again, then I'd insist on tiled skirting boards. We've got six bathrooms and in each there are timber skirtings and in every one they will need to be replaced in a few years. Another element I might add is a dressing room as my subsequent experience of the industry has shown that this adds hugely to resale value.'

The practical reality of taking on a renovation of this size is that it's a lot of hard work and stress, and for that reason Claire is adamant that you need a good project manager. 'I think independent project managers are vital to any serious renovation work. I meet so many people who, either didn't have project managers and have horror stories, or who are left disappointed by architects or builders who say they'll do it, but are not fully committed. You need someone who's on-site at least three days a week. Otherwise costs and deadlines run over – and you'll find you've spent more money on delays than you ever would have on a project manager. There are always problems and you're only kidding yourself if you think your project is going to be plain sailing.'

Claire is founder of Clara Bee Ltd, a client based service to take the stress out of the whole refurbishment process. www.clarabee.com