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# Best of British

Design talent you'll want to invest in



**this picture** The main living space is full of eBay and flea-market finds, apart from the owner's linen Paola Navone sofa

**Homes** Urban renovation

# FRENCH CONNECTION

*Alexandra and Laurent Magne linked two floors of a Parisian apartment block to create a bright home for their growing family*

Words Elizabeth Choppin Photography Lionel Moreau/Living Agency



## AT A GLANCE

**Names** Alexandra and Laurent Magne  
**Ages** 37 and 39  
**Location** Paris  
**Property** Remodelled city-centre apartment  
**Bedrooms** 3 **Bathrooms** 2  
**Project started** 2004  
**Project finished** 2008  
**Size of house** 120sqm

*'I love to mix styles, especially the Fifties look with industrial pieces'*



Interactive  
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**above** Moody, dark-grey walls painted in Farrow & Ball's down pipe give a feeling of depth to the space

**W**hen someone says 'Parisian interior', the mind conjures up a picture of ornate mouldings, romantic cast-iron balconies and parquet flooring as far as the eye can see. It's true that this style of chic *pied-à-terre* isn't uncommon in the City of Light. But as well as being a historic capital, Paris attracts creative folk at the forefront of design and architecture who are reinterpreting classic spaces as modern family homes. One such couple is interior designer Alexandra Magne and her husband, Laurent, who live in a trendy corner of the 10th arrondissement, near the Canal Saint Martin, with their three children Jules, seven, Louise, five, and Achille, one.

The story goes back to 2004, when the pair, now in their late thirties, bought the lower level of their current three-bedroom apartment, which is now 120 square metres situated over two levels. It's hard to pinpoint exactly how old the building is, says Alexandra, but at a push she'd guess it was built in the early twentieth century.

'At the beginning, my husband and I only wanted to buy a tiny apartment – this was before we had any children,' says Alexandra. They rolled up their sleeves and set about renovating the flat, knocking through walls to create an entirely new, L-shaped layout, which consists of a series of light-filled open-plan living spaces. In its original state, the apartment was a rabbit warren of

small rooms and was at odds with how the couple desired to live. 'We really didn't want lots of little spaces – we preferred to spend time in one large room instead,' she adds. 'At that time we only needed one bedroom, and our main focus was to ensure that the spatial flow worked throughout the apartment.'

In 2008, however, the flat upstairs became available and Alexandra and Laurent snapped it up with the idea of connecting the two floors to create a spacious family home. 'It was perfect timing because we were expecting our first baby by then,' says Alexandra. An architect friend, Alexandre Sfantescu, helped with plans for the internal structural work and, most crucially, the design of a linear steel-and-glass staircase that now connects both levels. Permission was needed for the work, but it wasn't a difficult process. Adding the staircase created a sunny mezzanine, which needed to be reinforced with a metal support. This now functions as Alexandra's workspace and features beautiful, exposed-timber beams.

The journey through the family's spacious home starts at the main entrance at the back, where a small hallway painted in a dark, moody colour introduces Alexandra's distinct vision. 'I really like the impact of it when you walk in the door, and then for the other parts of the apartment to be revealed,' she explains. A bathroom and →



**above** The steel staircase was fabricated in Paris out of a single sheet of metal

**right** The kitchen is intended to blend into the background between the dining room and living space



*'I worked hard to find the right things, but everything is constantly evolving'*



this picture Steel and glass railings around the mezzanine complement the industrial furniture of the office space

above A palette of tonal grey, white and pops of mustard give the living room a fresh, contemporary feel

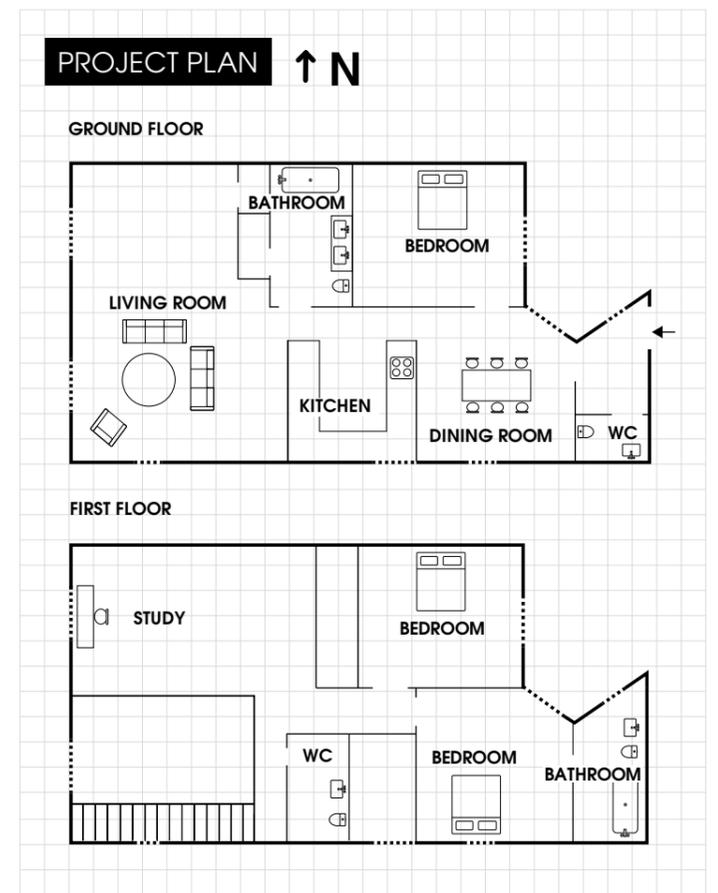
left Alexandra couldn't find pictures for the walls of the dining room; instead she opted for a bold bamboo-print wallpaper

the master bedroom are tucked away at this end of the space – the only rooms on the ground floor with doors. 'Our bedroom is simple; I just wanted something calm and easy to live in,' Alexandra explains. Beautiful salmon-coloured bed linen and grey walls give the room a serene feel, while Alexandra's flea-market finds lend a dose of unique personality that runs through the whole apartment.

Out in the dining room Alexandra has made a bold statement with graphic monochrome wallpaper and black pendant lights. The look is completed with a mid-century-inspired table edged in red and painted shaker-style dining chairs. 'I couldn't find the right pictures or art for the wall, so I decided to go with the bamboo paper. My husband says I knew I wanted it from the start and planned everything around it!' she chuckles.

The kitchen is located in the middle of the ground floor, decked out in glossy white cabinetry and timber worktops; while it gets a lot of traffic, it isn't meant to be attention grabbing. 'I designed it so that it would blend in seamlessly with the rest of the apartment,' Alexandra explains. 'We chose white so that your eyes aren't immediately drawn to it, because the kitchen isn't the focus of the apartment. But it's very convenient and open so that we can be with our friends while we cook dinner.'

On the other side of the kitchen, beyond a breakfast bar with industrial stools, is the main living space, where Alexandra's enviable collection of vintage furniture and trinkets – picked up on her travels, eBay and even the street – really comes into its own. It displays an effortless, modern style that has become Alexandra's trademark, and →



**right** The master suite employs a soothing palette of grey and salmon. Alexandra found the dressmaker's model in a local flea market



**below** The children's bedroom is filled with vintage accessories, which go perfectly with an ornate single bed from Ikea



it's where the family spends most of its time together. 'I love to mix styles, especially the Fifties look paired with industrial pieces,' she says. 'I prefer objects that don't come from the same supplier, or to match things in the same colour.' As a result, the living room is layered with different materials – linen sofas, a Moroccan wool rug, a metal sideboard, vintage velvet club chairs and oak floors.

The children's bathroom and bedrooms are situated beyond the mezzanine level, with the youngest two sharing. 'I tried to decorate the room for both a boy and a girl, which is why I chose a soft duck-egg blue with a really light grey and touches of gold,' Alexandra says. With vintage treasures and an ornate Ikea bedframe, the magical effect is complete.

It was a gradual process to get the apartment just right, and Alexandra is always fine-tuning. 'I worked hard to find the right things, but everything is constantly evolving. I'm always moving furniture around and buying and selling pieces. But I think the project was an overall success, so I'm happy.' **GD**

## Suppliers

### PROJECT TEAM Interior designer

Alexandra Magne (+33 683 039 647; alexandramagne.com) **Architect**

Alexandre Sfințescu (+33 950 306 377)

### FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES Dining table

Atelier 154 (+33 662 327 906; atelier154.com)

### Pendant lights in dining room

Bestlite by Gubi at Nest.co.uk (0114 243 3000; nest.co.uk) **Wallpaper in dining room**

Farrow & Ball (01202 876 141; farrow-ball.com) **Sofa**

Gervasoni at AmbienteDirect.com (0870 005 2275; ambientedirect.com) **Coffee table**

Jardin d'Ulysse (+33 469 420 057; jardinulysse.com) **Floor lamp**

Schottlander (+33 123 456 789; schottlander.fr)

**Table lamp** Gong (020 7266 5657; gong.co.uk) **Wall lamp**

Lampe Gras (+33 140 213 760; lampegras.fr/en)

## STYLE FINDER

Use bright hues and an industrial edge to imitate Alexandra and Laurent's look  
**Compiled by Emily Seymour**



**Vibrant accent** Flax armchair in oak upholstered in Harald fabric in goyave (H69xW76xD80cm), £1,949, Ligne Roset (01494 545 912; ligne-roset.co.uk)



**Upcycled** Brooklyn industrial shelving unit in steel and teak (H164xW160xD40cm), £775, Alexander & Pearl (020 8508 0411; alexanderandpearl.co.uk)



**Forest inspired** Mandara wallpaper in W5511-05, £59 for a 10m roll (W52cm), Osborne & Little (020 8812 3000; osborneandlittle.com)



**Colourful dining** Form table in oak in red (H74xW200xD95cm), £1,460, Normann Copenhagen (+45 3555 4459; normann-copenhagen.com)



**Task light** Penelope table lamp in steel in black and copper effect (H37xDiameter20cm), £45, John Lewis (0345 604 9049; johnlewis.com)