

The Guide

July 2018

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THE NEW OLD

With Beth Dadswell's approach to interior design, it's no wonder her Dulwich home found its way onto Grand Designs

Words BETHAN ANDREWS

Sometimes a change in direction can lead to something perfect, and that is certainly the case for East Dulwich interior designer Beth Dadswell of Imperfect Interiors. Fashion stylist turned interior designer, Dadswell took a leap into the world of interior design and it paid off – a project on her own home, a crumbling industrial Victorian dairy, was even picked up by *Grand Designs*.

But although Dadswell changes the properties' interiors that she works on drastically for the better in many cases, she also focuses on the old, on what is there already to bring change to the old and mix modern with period.

'I started out as a fashion stylist on various different magazines and newspapers, which I did for about 15 years, but I sort of grew out of love with it,' says Dadswell. 'My main passion was more interiors so once I had my son I decided it was time to make the change. My partner and I had been buying and doing up houses for a few years too.'

One of Dadswell's friends was renovating her flat and asked for her help in designing the space – this worked perfectly to kickstart Dadswell's portfolio and she credits it as a great learning curve. She also

credits social media and the internet for helping her to get off the ground in the first place. She's certainly feisty and looks for a challenge, something that strikes me as something of a valuable trait in an interior designer – especially if you want to push your property outside of the ordinary.

Dadswell learnt all that she knows by doing it herself and she thinks the mistakes that she has come across doing it that way have helped toward the whole experience being a really good learning process. 'It's helped me to understand what sort of business I want it to be,' she tells me. 'My priorities have always been having lots of creative input, and it's never been an interest of mine to take on blank, white boxes and to just fill them with generic, matching furniture. There's a big market for that out there, but I would much rather work for a client who has got an interest in restoring period features if there are any and injecting character into a property.'

She goes onto tell me that her USP is that she doesn't want a project to look like it has necessarily been interior designed. Her ethos therefore focuses around finding quirky things and making it look like a home rather than a show home. 'Mixing stuff up and making



PHOTOS BY CHRIS SNOOK

something feel lived in is important,' Dadswell tells me. 'I'm trying to create comfortable, but elegant atmospheres.'

This means that Dadswell works very closely with her clients in order to know their full stories before setting out on the design of a property. 'It's definitely a collaboration,' says Dadswell.

'Mostly, I work with people who have just bought a house and are renovating it from top to bottom, but who have art and belongings to incorporate into the space.'

So, how did Dadswell find herself on *Grand Designs*? Having stumbled across an old Victorian dairy that was being used as a workshop, Dadswell and her partner leapt at the opportunity to buy something that was a little bit different. 'It's in a brilliant spot, just off Lordship Lane,' she smiles. 'It gave us the opportunity to add something to a building that already

had an amazing atmosphere. It was a total dump, but I could see that it was really perfect, and I could mix the industrial vibe with the modern.'

Dadswell contacted *Grand Designs* as she thought it would be lovely for the family to have a record of the build and it was accepted onto the programme,

where her natural talent for design could be seen by the masses.

Naturally, this meant it was great publicity for her own

brand. 'It slightly put the pressure on me to make sure it came in on budget and on time! I wanted to work with the wonkiness of the beams and the crumbliness of the walls,' she says. And as always with Dadswell, she tells me that 'it was about working with what was there already'.

Dadswell tells me that she is obsessed with the courtyard and steel framed façade of the property.

The courtyard, she says, almost feels like a painting. The windows, and what you see beyond the windows, is just as important when Dadswell is designing as what you see inside. 'I'm always looking out and looking at the view,' she says.

With a few new projects that she is taking on, Dadswell is excited to be branching out from south London into areas such as Notting Hill and Primrose Hill. She's also recently worked on a Swiss chalet, and has been working on some weekend homes on the south coast. 'I love working around south east London though and it's nice to be able to manage them when you're close by,' says Dadswell. She tells me how she likes the period architecture of the area and blending the new and the old. 'I get really excited when I walk into a house that still has the original corning and frilly Victorian details. A lot of my work is emphasising those details. There's something about an old house that you just can't recreate.' ■

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