

Think INSIDE THE BOX

THE DESIGNER

Elaine Verdon from Leo + Cici

THE HOUSE

A snug 1930s city cottage on the outskirts of Dublin

Elaine Verdon's renovation of this city cottage proves you don't always have to over-extend your budget with an extension

WORDS ISABEL DEMPSEY PHOTOGRAPHY GARETH BYRNE

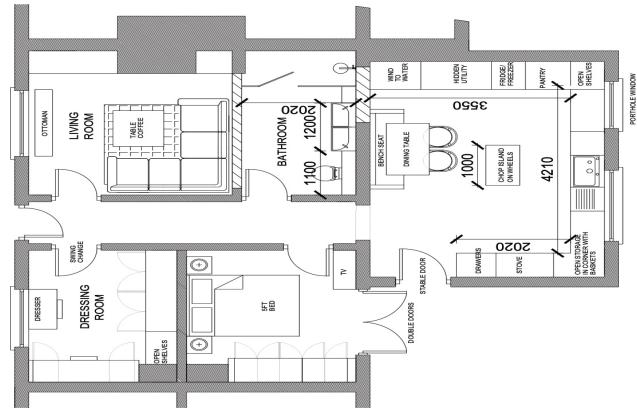


Cosy and homely. Dark and poky. There's always a fine line to creating the perfect cottage feel. A line that becomes especially hard when the cottage in question is located not in a quiet woodland but on a terraced street on the outskirts of Dublin. Tasked with transforming this claustrophobic townhouse into an urban "sanctuary," interior designer Elaine Verdon from Leo + Cici achieved this balancing act with skilled precision, gifting her client a space where she could imagine herself nestled in the countryside while located only a stone's throw from the city centre.

Looking to accommodate her client's long and regular commute between Kerry and Dublin, Elaine aimed to create a space that would "feel like a big hug after a long drive." However, the hug needed not to feel too tight of a squeeze. Built in the 1930s, the walls of this city cottage were now being pushed to their limits. Bursting with two beds and a bundle of scantily square-metered rooms, Elaine needed a way to transform this cold and "poky" space into a warm and calming retreat. The obvious answer was an extension. But when looking at the "crazy" costs of the scheme, Elaine knew she had to start thinking outside the box by working within the confines of the box she was given.

Rather than extending out, she cleared up the space within, gutting the innards and reconfiguring the layout to bring in a much-needed sense of light and space. Elaine explains that the property has quite high ceilings despite its cottagey feel. While there was always potential for the space to feel spacious, it was just "laid out incorrectly." The kitchen was particularly dark. Initially broken up into the kitchen, a bathroom, and a small study space, there wasn't much space for sociability: if you "wanted to have people over, they couldn't sit in the kitchen while you cooked." Looking to transform the area into one big bright space, Elaine opened up the ceiling to create a pitched roof and added skylights to keep it light and airy even on the darkest days. "It was such a dramatic change," Elaine tells me, "pitching the ceiling helped to make the space feel so much bigger." She was able to "create a space where [the client] could sit and look at the table. She can entertain. She can cook. She can chat." Leaning into the cottagey vibe of the home, Elaine introduced a circular window and café curtains for an extra added hint of whimsy.





THE KITCHEN To accommodate the underfloor heating system, Elaine had to make the space work hard to squeeze everything in. She opted for lower-level storage so as not to overwhelm the room and chose a little chop-and-chat island (Elaine's favourite item in the house), which can be slotted back into the bench to ensure ample floor space for all her clients' hosting needs



These whimsical elements can be found throughout the design, from the sugar-plum purple dining table to the dreamy lilac cabinets in the dressing room. Expertly blending her love of colour with the client's aversion to bright shades, they happened upon an idyllic middle ground brimming with powdery purples, floral blues and soft, muted greens. Inspired by the client's love of birds and flowers - as evidenced by the home's wallpapers, fabrics and art - Elaine sought to create a soft and subtly feminine palette. She looked towards the client for inspiration, using the bedroom wallpaper the client had sourced as her palette. "I took the colours from that and brought it to life," she says, incorporating the same shades in the custom-designed headboard and living room sofas.

Describing the whole process as really collaborative, Elaine explains that the pair "got on really well. We clicked immediately,

and she trusted in me and my vision for the cottage [...] I was so lucky; she's incredibly nice to work with." Their visions melded so perfectly that on Elaine's last visit, she exclaimed, "I could actually live here." Their friendship wasn't the only stroke of luck in this project. Celebrating their build team, AK Construction, and their tight schedule, she emphasises that "we were fortunate" with the people they worked with. Ensuring to order all the big items early on meant there were only a couple of small supply chain issues along the way and, thankfully, no major hiccups.

Joking about the ulcer she fears developing from some of her more stressful renovations, she applauds how "joyful" this project was, grateful that everything just "worked out really well." Looking back, is there anything she would change? "No," she nervously jokes. The client assures her she's happy and warm: "She always tells me she's warm. That's very important." **H**





THE LIVING ROOM The kitchen had been all about opening out, but for the living room, Elaine focused on cosiness. She cut down the oversized space to form the bathroom. The bright pop of sky blue around the fireplace creates a strong focal point in the room, keeping the attention far away from the TV

“I wanted it to feel like a big hug after a long drive. The feeling of coming into a sanctuary”

ELAINE'S TOP TIPS FOR RECREATING THIS LOOK

1 THINK LUXURY Elaine was keen to create a sense of hotel luxury in the home, the feeling you get “when you walk in and everything just feels premium.” Although she playfully quips that the client “really likes nice things”, she didn’t want the space to be pretentious. Instead, she tried to muster luxury in terms of “comfort, design, and wellbeing”, crafting the calm, reassuring feeling that everything has its own space.

2 SMALL BUT MIGHTY Instead of attempting to do four bathrooms and five bedrooms, where ideas and budget may run high and dry when you reach the guest rooms, the smaller space meant they could pay close attention to every inch of the property. As Elaine explains, they could put the investment into one beautiful marble bathroom” rather than two more mediocre designs.

3 MAKE IT TACTILE For Elaine, the fireplace tiles in the living room were necessary to introduce a sense of tactility amidst the home’s powdery wash of colour. As seen in the wall panelling, cabinets, and textured handles, this texture helped incorporate another layer into the design without overwhelming the small space.

4 COHESIVELY COORDINATED By repainting the client’s old kitchen table and bedroom side tables, she reincorporated these items into the space, giving them a quick and easy glow-up with little expense. By adding a “punchy colour” to the table, she transformed this otherwise mundane feature into a standout piece of art.

5 LIGHT IT UP Telling me that “lighting is something I’m obsessed with”, Elaine mirrored the glass wardrobe handles in the glass wall lights and the droplets she added to her client’s old chandelier. While she is generally wary of overhead lighting, she made allowances for a few statement pieces that her client already owned.

ELAINE'S TOP RENOVATION TIPS

1 Hiring a designer is at the top of Elaine's list. Not that there's any bias there. While you may have a strong vision, adding an expert opinion will always help bring your design to the next level.

2 Hire good people: construction workers, plumbers, electricians, decorators or carpenters. The people you work with will make or break the project, and you need to know that you're working with reliable people you can trust to get the job done to the desired standard.

3 "Think about your space and how that can work better for you before investing money." An extension might seem like the easy way out, but altering the internal layout can be a much simpler (and cheaper!) way to create a sense of space.

4 Look for grants from the government to help alleviate any of the financial pressure. Renovations can be expensive, so do some research to ensure you get all the financial help you can get.

5 Work with what you have, repurposing old items for a new lease of life. Elaine transformed her client's old curtains and bedspreads into a stool and held onto her 20-year-old Aga in the kitchen to create a gorgeous standout feature.



THE DRESSING ROOM Much of the faff that can take up space in the bedroom was relocated to the walk-in wardrobe. While Elaine and her client went through a couple of different ideas for this room, they eventually conceded there wasn't enough space in the house to warrant two bedrooms. Elaine wanted to create a space that would work for her client all the time, as well as one that she could work in, offering her laptop a change of scenery from the kitchen table if it so desired

THE BATHROOM While the kitchen won the favourite room in the house, Elaine joked that she "could happily spend a long time" in the bathroom, too. The bathroom was sourced from Deluxe Bathrooms and designed in marble, with a hexagon mosaic on the floor and large marble tiles on the walls. The fittings were sourced from Burlington to create a little bit of softness and glow

“Think about your space and how that can work better for you before investing money. Sometimes, reconfiguring the space helps”



Elaine's sourcebook

- » **Herringbone flooring** Canadia.ie
- » **Joinery** Custom Carpentry, @customcarpentry.ie
- » **Bathroom** Deluxebathrooms.ie
- » **Mirror**, townandcountryinteriors.ie
- » **Tiles** Tilestyle.ie
- » **Kitchen** Bespace.ie
- » **Builder** AK Construction, Akconstruction.ie
- » **Wall lights** Pooky, Pooky.com
- » **Rug** in dressing room, Rugs.ie
- » **Hallway bench** Orianab.com
- » **Blinds** Rosetaylorcurtains.com

THE BEDROOM Elaine's careful attention to detail has guaranteed that even the smallest rooms in the house don't feel dingy or cramped. Ensuring ample storage space was created throughout the home, this room's lack of floor space established the bedroom as a dedicated sleep spot. As Elaine asserts, "Your bedroom should just be your bed anyway"

Elaine Verdon, *Leoandcici.ie* @leoandcici



Head over to our Instagram page or Houseandhome.ie for more inspirational homes