



A refreshing change

When an arty couple decided to move from London to coastal Margate, they transformed their lives as well as their home environment. By Emma J Page. Photographs by Rachael Smith

The handsome Georgian and Victorian facades that stud the seafront at Margate have attracted their fair share of admirers over the years. TS Eliot is said to have worked on *The Waste Land* from the Albemarle Hotel in 1921, while several of Turner's paintings were inspired by the Thanet skies, which he described as 'the loveliest in all Europe'. And despite its more recent mixed fortunes, the area's faded grandeur still holds an allure, with a growing number of creatives making it their home and turning the tide back towards gentrification.

Advertising director-turned-entrepreneur Dom Bridges moved to the town with his wife Jo, a photographer, five years ago from Willesden Green, in north-west London. Disillusioned by the capital's overheated property market, they traded their one-bedroom flat for a Victorian townhouse, complete with six bedrooms. 'We'd honeymooned here and always had a soft spot for the area,' says Bridges.

The study 'I like to rotate the pieces that are inspiring me,' says Dom Bridges (pictured with his wife, Jo). The hat once belonged to his great-uncle. The lights are from Scott's (scottsmargate.co.uk), with flex from Lampfix (lampfix.co.uk). The framed drawers (from the Natural History Museum), chair and table were found at Retrouvius (retrouvius.com).



'It wasn't just about being able to afford a larger property; we craved a lifestyle change.'

Bridges has travelled far and wide in his career, working for corporate giants such as Coca-Cola and Nissan, but he has always been drawn to counter-culture hotspots. 'The way the area is regenerating reminded us of our time spent at Venice Beach

and in Brooklyn,' he says. 'It's evolving – we moved here as the Turner Contemporary gallery was opening and there was a new energy in the town.'

The pair settled in Cliftonville, once a thriving part of Margate favoured by holidaymakers. 'The space appealed to us, but the house had been renovated cheaply,' says Bridges. 'Original features were

plasterboarded, the plumbing was basic and the walls were painted magnolia. We knew we'd have to start again.' What the couple weren't prepared for was the extent of the remedial work. Early renovations unearthed a severe case of dry rot. 'There was a ventilation issue,' recalls Bridges. 'On the ground floor, we broke through three layers of

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The living area To delineate the space between the living and dining room, the floor is inset with tiles from Fred Earth (fredearth.com). The couple found the dining table and bench at Metroretro (metroretro.co.uk). They have reinstated period features throughout the house, including this Carrara marble mantelpiece bought on eBay. The walls are painted in Mole's Breath by Farrow & Ball (farrow-ball.com). A purple armchair from Sofa.com adds a splash of colour. A skull lino print by Bill Fick (billfick.com) hangs in one of the alcoves.

The hallway This vintage distressed cabinet comes from Retrouvus (retrouvus.com).





concrete, all the way back to the original Victorian parquet, which was sodden and unsalvageable.'

But their instinct to strip the property back has paid off. The ground floor has been laid with reclaimed oak, fireplaces have been restored, comicing has been exposed and the layout has been simplified so the dining room opens up to both

the sitting room and the rear kitchen, with space for a downstairs cloakroom and a cellar-cum-utility room. The first floor houses the master bedroom; a snug; their 18-month-old daughter Dukie's room; plus a guest bedroom and two bathrooms; while Bridges's office and a further bedroom are tucked away at the top of the house.

The move coincided with the launch of Bridges' skincare brand Haeckels, which has attracted a cult following. 'Our products are created predominantly from the seaweed on the Margate coastline,' he explains. 'The business came about organically - I couldn't believe that somewhere as beautiful as this could be forgotten about. This is a coastal town

Salvaged fittings include a paint-spattered former gym floor that now clads the staircase and alcove storage in the spare bedroom

The hallway An old gym floor sourced from DDS Demolition (dds-demolition.co.uk) acts as an eye-catching front to the staircase.

The dining room alcove A collection of Bossons heads, some bought in Margate's Hunkydory-24 (hunkydory-24.blogspot.com), hangs on the wall above taxidermy Kingfishers in a glass case, from the shop Paraphernalia in Margate.

The kitchen An island made from reclaimed Iroko and bar stools are from Steel Magnolias (steel-magnolias.co.uk). The science funnels repurposed as adjustable lights are from Retrouvius (retrouvius.com).





and its most important asset is the beach. But it was only when we moved in and I had my favourite possessions around me that inspiration struck.'

The pair's love for all things natural is evident in the way their home is furnished with a quirky mix of muddy colours, salvaged fittings (including a paint-spattered former gym floor that now clads

the staircase and alcove storage in the spare bedroom), industrial furniture, artwork by Jo and treasures that range from repurposed drawers once belonging to the Natural History Museum to a specimen jar of baby iguanas. 'We are born collectors,' says Bridges, 'although we occasionally disagree on layout and spatial design. But since we've

had Dulcie, we're not precious. Now it's about creating a home that she'll have fun exploring.'

The place remains a work in progress. 'We want to update the bathrooms and rework the garden,' says Bridges, 'but the house seems to teach us how to live in it, rather than us trying to mould it to our vision. That's how it should be.' *hazekels.co.uk*

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The master bedroom A bedspread made by Jo's mother adds a pop of colour. Large-scale Victorian windows sourced from a local salvage company and at Retrouvius (retrouvius.com) form a striking, alternative walk-in wardrobe. 'It's a great way of adding a partition without compromising on light,' says Bridges.

The downstairs lavatory is papered in pages from editions of *The Merchant of Venice*.

The guest room The green leather chair is from a local antiques fair, and the rug was bought in Marrakech. Jo made the patchwork bedspread.

