



The garden with its tropical planting provides the perfect backdrop to this uniquely designed space.

# WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

Inspired by botanical themes, Clare and Jamie Elson went bold with their new kitchen-diner, adding bright colours, raw materials, and subtle industrial aspects which give this family space a cool look with a quirky edge

Words and styling: Sally Smith Photography: Malcolm Menzies

## THE FACTS

**Who?** Clare and Jamie Elson with their children Charlie and Millie  
**What?** Kitchen renovation  
**Where?** Hackney, east London  
**Cost?** £70,000  
**Time?** Six months



The impressive conservatory roof allows light to flood into the room. **Light-up arrow**, God's Own Junkyard; **leather armchairs**, Peppermill Interiors; **floor tiles**, CTD Architectural Tiles; **copper lamp**, for similar, try Next.



When IT director Clare Elson and her husband Jamie, a sales director, moved into a converted former pub coach house in Hackney, east London over 20 years ago, it ticked all the boxes. Perfect to accommodate their growing brood, the property was in an area they knew well, as Jamie's family lived locally and they spent their weekends eating out and going to comedy clubs nearby. It was also affordable, with lots of space, a south-facing garden, near grandparents, and – most importantly – had lots of potential to expand. "We had limited finances and two small children, so knew it was going to take time to get the layout right," says Clare. Over the years, they completely reconfigured the house, including a side-return

extension, to form a utility room off the old kitchen and added a glazed extension across the back to create an open-plan kitchen-dining-living area. The final thing on the agenda was to incorporate a much-desired log burner, which the family dreamt of sitting around in winter. They spend most of their time together in the space, so they wanted to update it to feel more relaxing, stylish, and grown-up. However, they couldn't visualise where the new fireplace would go in the existing layout and it wasn't until chatting to Helene Gullaksen, a good friend who is also an architect, that an idea for the ideal layout came about. "Helene suggested incorporating the former utility room into the kitchen-diner. It was such a simple plan – by ▶

knocking down this small room it opened up all sorts of possibilities," says Clare. "Eventually, we decided this would be the perfect place to put a new dining area, creating more space within the glazed extension for seating."

Jamie contacted building company Modern Arc, who he already knew from an earlier project, to carry out the works as soon as Helene had finished drawing the plans. "It was going to be a big job, as the builders had to knock down the rear exterior wall at the back of the house and the side-return wall that housed the utility room and put in steels to support the rest of the property," explains Clare. "I remember the day the builders arrived. It was Millie's 17th birthday – it felt like they were going to pull the house down."

The next challenge was to find a place to put the old utility room's contents. That's where Simon Tipper, owner of specialist cabinet-making company Tipper Joinery – who the couple contracted to design their kitchen after Jamie's sister recommended him – came in. "Simon had the idea to use the area under the stairs, so we extended the kitchen slightly into the rarely used front room, to give us enough space for storage and larger appliances behind the chalkboard door," says Clare. Simon also designed the living area furniture.

When it came to the kitchen style, Clare and Jamie knew they weren't going to be happy with anything off the shelf. "I didn't want a design that would date quickly. It had to feel classy. I imagined it to be like a members' club you would find in London," Clare explains. The couple love to socialise with family and friends, so the new space had to provide flexibility for daily family life as well as for entertaining and working. "Simon was completely on our wavelength, which was great" she says. "We spent hours in his workshop in east London, experimenting with different layouts and design variations in a range of colours and finishes until we were certain every aspect was right." Their decision: a completely bespoke kitchen, not restricted by the standard carcass dimensions and heights, which Simon built by hand. The cabinets are made from birch ply, which they chose for being strong and stable, with a mix of surfaces including white oak, petrol blue, and copper. In terms of the layout, the couple placed the large island in the middle



The oversized geometric floor tiles define the seating area. **Sideboard**, Ebay; **side table**, for similar, try Ikea.



← The woodburning stove has been integrated with bespoke furniture, including a handy log store. **Woodburning stove**, Stoves; **lamp**, for similar, try Dwell; **coffee table**, for similar, try Atkin & Thyme.

→ The made-to-measure birch dining **table** with white laminate top, by Tipper Joinery, fits the room perfectly. **Wallpaper**, Timorous Beasties; **chairs**, for similar, try Made; **pendant lights**, for similar, try Artisanli.



This island unit is 45mm thick with a stainless-steel worktop providing plenty of space for cooking. **Cabinetry**, Tipper Joinery; **barstools**, Rockett St George; **wine cooler**, for similar, try AEG; **fridge-freezer**, for similar try, Fisher & Paykel; **hob and oven**, Neff.



of the room to help separate the kitchen, dining, and living spaces. It features a seating area, integrated hob, and a wine cooler. "The only thing I would change is the extractor. I wish it had been built flush with the ceiling so we couldn't see it," says Clare. "However, there wasn't enough space between the joists to build it in, so we made a feature of it by constructing a box around the fan to make it the same size as the island."

In terms of style, the couple like industrial influences, which is reflected in pieces like the stainless-steel worktop. "It was a bit of a leap of faith," says Jamie. "It is almost indestructible and you can put hot pans on it. It's actually fitted the wrong way up – shiny side down – with the top side sanded to give it a bit of pattern and texture." They also included block shelving, which Simon cleverly designed to flow seamlessly with the room's natural divide and the split-level flooring between zones.

When it came to the décor, Clare was studying for an art history degree during the project and was inspired to have metallic

finishes with a mix of different colours and textures for the new cabinetry. "Pinterest was invaluable," she explains. "I spent hours finding patterns and materials that appealed to me and created lots of moodboards." The couple also love their garden – so much so that Clare was particularly keen on reflecting this in the overall look. "The dining area's wallpaper is like a work of art," she says. "I wanted a design with a botanical and 'jungle-y' feel. It was extremely expensive – it's made of silk and was printed to order – but it was worth every penny."

The conservatory had almost no work done, apart from installing the long sought-after log burner. Additionally, the couple replaced old terracotta tiles for new monochrome ones, imported from Italy, to give it a more retro look. "We really enjoyed the entire process from start to finish – nothing was too much trouble," adds Jamie. "The space is now an area we all come and luxuriate in while enjoying the log burner in the winter, with the doors wide open in the summer. It feels so much more light and airy than it used to be." ▶



The honeycomb-shaped porcelain tiles, from Solus Ceramics, bring back memories of when Jamie used to keep bees in the garden.

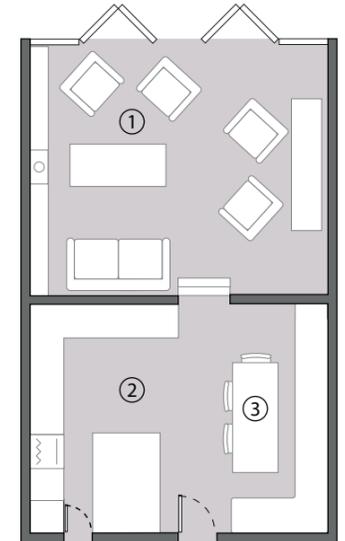


The tap combination complements the stainless-steel worktop. The larger main tap, from Grohe, provides normal water and the second tap, from Zip, is for hot, chilled, and sparkling water.



## THE PLANS

To have a more spacious open-plan kitchen-living-diner, Clare and Jamie removed a former utility room they built as part of a side-return extension. They also completely updated the design and layout with handmade joinery.



- 1 Glazed extension** Despite no structural alterations, the space had new floor tiles fitted and a log burner installed.
- 2 Kitchen layout** Nice and compact, it features the ergonomic triangle with the fridges, ovens, and hob all being close together.
- 3 Dining table** The bespoke design, located where the utility room used to be, fits perfectly within the new space.

## DESIGN EDIT

- 1** Bloomingville green glass pendant lamp, £85, Lagoon. [vivalagoon.com](http://vivalagoon.com)
- 2** 'This Way' light sign, £130, Sweetpea & Willow. [sweetpeaandwillow.com](http://sweetpeaandwillow.com)
- 3** Jungle wallpaper in Luscious Green, £50 per roll, Graham & Brown. [grahamandbrown.com](http://grahamandbrown.com)
- 4** Industrial leather barstool, £200, Smithers of Stamford. [smithersofstamford.com](http://smithersofstamford.com)
- 5** Stainless-steel PearlFinish worktop with an integrated sink and gas burners, price on application, Franke. [franke.com](http://franke.com)



↑ Clare's kitchen features a mix of open and closed shelving. The open design is made from reinforced steel bars that are bonded into the wall, with copper piping detail for a decorative effect. **Cabinetry**, Tipper Joinery; **wall tiles**, Solus Ceramics; **open shelving**, for similar, try Ikea.

## SOURCE BOOK

- Kitchen** Tipper Joinery 020 8988 3000, [tipperjoinery.co.uk](http://tipperjoinery.co.uk)
- Architect** Gullaksen Architects 07905 811115, [gullaksenarchitects.com](http://gullaksenarchitects.com)
- Construction** Modern Arc 020 7383 8830, [modernarc.com](http://modernarc.com)
- Wallpaper** Timorous Beasties 020 7833 5010, [timorousbeasties.com](http://timorousbeasties.com)
- Woodburning stove** Stoves 0344 248 4149, [stoves.co.uk](http://stoves.co.uk)
- Tap** Grohe 0208 283 2840, [grohe.co.uk](http://grohe.co.uk)
- Hot-water tap** Zip Water 0845 600 5005, [zipwater.com](http://zipwater.com)
- Conservatory flooring** CTD Architectural Tiles 0800 021 4835, [ctdarchitecturaltiles.co.uk](http://ctdarchitecturaltiles.co.uk) **KBB**