

ST ALBANS

MY NEIGHBOURHOOD

MOVING TO THIS HERTFORDSHIRE CITY NOT ONLY PROMPTED A NEW WAY OF LIVING FOR EMILY MATHIESON. IT KICKSTARTED HER ETHICAL HOMEWARE BUSINESS

Photography: **BRENT DARBY** Words: **CLARE GOGERTY**



The light and airy kitchen (left), with Ercol table and chairs, opens into the garden. Above: a reading nook in the living room

Emily's husband, Jon, designed the extension to reference black shiplap, a local building material. It has the feel of a Scandi cabin and is a lovely place to read on a sunny day: "We wanted something a bit different from the usual bi-folding doors," says Emily





“I ONLY SELL PRODUCTS I LIKE AND USE. IT’S ALL ABOUT BUYING LESS BUT BETTER”

Emily (above right) with some of the ceramics she sells on her online store aerende.co.uk. Her organic cotton top is by nadinoo.com. The living room (above) reflects the couple's interest in design. Opposite: the kitchen units are John Lewis with counter tops from Ebay. The tiles are from Topps Tiles: “Every time I walk in here, I feel happy,” says Emily

It’s a familiar story: a creative couple, who have forged their careers in London, look beyond the city’s boundaries for a larger home to raise their children. “I had to be dragged away from Brixton,” says Emily Mathieson who moved to St Albans with her husband Jon and their two children Lola (9), and Otis (6) in 2015. “But, although it took a while to adjust to living here, life gets better the longer we stay.”

Like many other decisions Emily has made, the move was carefully considered. She and Jon looked along the Thameslink route until their eyes alighted on the cathedral city. “It’s on the north side of London, so the commute is quick and easy for Jon, and I can hop back into town to see my sister in under an hour.”

The family lived in rental accommodation at

first, but when an Edwardian terrace house came up for sale on the same street, they jumped at the chance. “The old woman selling liked the idea of a young family moving in, so she sold it to us,” says Emily. “We wanted to do a renovation project so we could manage costs and tailor it to our taste and environmental concerns, and everyone in the street was really friendly, so it ticked our boxes.” The couple set about totally renovating the house, with Jon designing much of the building work, including the smart Scandi-style kitchen extension (“He even designed a window nook so I can sunbathe naked,” says Emily), and reintroducing period details that had been lost.

The move from London also gave Emily the impetus to start a new business. “I had reached the pinnacle of my career as a travel editor at *The* »



St Albans in a snapshot

The Hertfordshire city is close to London, so it attracts commuters seeking rural surroundings, a short train journey from work. A town centre with medieval and Georgian buildings, Roman ruins and a Norman cathedral housing the shrine of St Alban deliver bags of history. The St Albans Museum and Gallery, a recently renovated centre for arts and culture (stalban museums.org.uk), is the latest attraction.



"We take the children to Gorhambury, a private mansion that opens its grounds to the public, to ride their bikes. They can cycle safely for miles while Jon and I chat. There are some great ruins at the top and a Roman amphitheatre at the bottom."

gorhamburyestate.co.uk



"This Art Deco cinema was saved by a crowdfunding campaign – the vision of one man who galvanised the community into saving it. Renamed The Odyssey, it was restored beautifully and there are seats and tables downstairs where you are served cheese platters as you watch the film."

odysseypictures.co.uk



"The Foragers at The Veralum Arms looks like a traditional pub but the emphasis is on wild and foraged food sourced within three miles. It also has homemade herbal liqueurs and foraged cocktails. The food is always inventive and delicious." the-foragers.com





"We pop into The Vintage Emporium on the way home from school. It's a bit ramshackle but it's piled high with secondhand treasures, from toy cars to massive sofas. The kids usually find something they want, and so do I!" fleetvillevintage.co.uk



"Fleetville Larder is around the corner from our house and I head there for all our organic wine and cheese. It's run by a neighbour and is super-chilled and convenient. The wine is too good: we drink more of it than we should!" fleetvillelarder.com



"Charlie's is teeny-tiny but lovely, with a focus on sourcing and responsibility. It's the best place for coffee in St Albans and I love chatting to Charlie and demolishing the mini chocolate vanilla sandwiches. Charlie's wife, Sue, made the lights and some of the furniture, and the coffee is freshly roasted." charliescoffeeandcompany.co.uk



St Albans has plenty of green spaces – ideal for sunny strolls. The mighty Norman cathedral sits at the heart of the city and houses the remains of St Alban. Opposite: a view into the restful main bedroom







RENOVATING THE HOUSE REIGNITED EMILY'S LOVE OF INTERIORS AND DESIGN

The sink in the bathroom (top) was found on Ebay; the floor is marine ply. The bedroom walls (above) are painted in Mole's Breath by Farrow & Ball. Living room cushions (above right) are from Aerende

Guardian," she says. "I wanted to do something different and with more flexibility to fit around the children. I also wanted to create work where I wasn't the only beneficiary." Renovating the home reignited her love of interiors and design, and a long-held desire to run an online homeware shop.

"I didn't want it to be a shop like all the others, though," she says, "I wanted it to count." A chance purchase of a basket at a local craft fair made by adults with learning disabilities crystallised her thinking. "The baskets were amazing quality. I realised that if they were put in front of more people, they would sell loads. I also thought there must be other makers facing social challenges who needed an outlet to sell their work." Sure enough, she soon found other UK craftspeople, including potters, textile makers, soap and candle makers, all making high-quality items, and Aerende (an Old

English word meaning 'care'), her shop selling "life-improving homewares", was born.

Everything in the shop reflects Emily's values and philosophy: each item provides an opportunity for the person who makes it, is made to last, sustainably sourced and covetable. "I only sell products I like and want to use," she says. The principle of 'buy less, buy better' is one she lives by in her own home, too. Alongside ceramics and linens from Aerende, are pieces of furniture sourced from Ebay – "I like to know their provenance" – or secondhand shops. "Introducing carefully chosen things into your home gives it a wider, spiritual value," she says. "It's all about appreciating the space you are in." **S** Check out Emily's shop, aerende.co.uk. To find out more about Emily and other British makers, visit frombritainwithlove.com.