



Alison Armitage is hoping to steer serial hoarders down the route to decluttering. Here she explains her philosophy to Kate Edser, and right, shows how she puts her ideas into practice

NEAT and organised, it's easy to imagine Alison Armitage with her sleeves rolled up, ready to blow through a cluttered, untidy room and come out the other side looking like a new pin.

Hoarding, sloppy housekeeping and interior design disasters are perfect candidates for Alison's particular brand of magic.

"I have always been interested in interior design and have moved house a lot. Designing was a route I was always planning on taking, but I needed to earn an income while I was studying for my masters in fine art, which is where the decluttering business came in."

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The hardest bit for most people is picking up the phone

Alison Armitage

Her decluttering business was born in 2006, but quite often, one thing leads to another and clients will often ask her to stay on and redesign a room once it's been cleared. Popular in the States, Australia and New Zealand, decluttering has made its way to the UK only in the last decade.

More commonly, people ask Alison for help "staging" their home before putting it on the market to sell.

She says: "I also work with estate agents. I have one client at the moment who lives in a lovely big house, but you cannot see it because there's so much clutter. There is a lot of work to be done before it can be marketed.

"Generally what I do is to go through one room at a time and I start with the room that will make the biggest impact on the client's life.

"I work systematically through a room and I do get down and get my hands dirty. We go through each item together and it goes into one of three categories: throw away, recycle or give to charity, and sell.

"The hardest bit for most people is picking up the phone and most people are then just very relieved."

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● Above, Bob's fresh and bright bedroom after the application of Alison's transforming techniques. Below, the bedroom shown before the project

Let natural light contrast with dark furniture

Livinginside

I FOUND this guest room tired, unloved and in desperate need of some fresh ideas and attention, *writes professional declutterer Alison Armitage.*

It hadn't been decorated since my client, Bob, had first moved in 12 years previously.

There was artex on the ceiling and walls, and the curtains and furniture were worn and tattered. The original colours had all faded.

Bob wanted the three-bedroom property completely restyled with a central colour scheme and theme running throughout.

Bob had travelled extensively in his life, particularly through Asia, and had collected memorabilia along the way. We decided that the new look would be bright and with a flavour of the orient.

In the guest room, many of Bob's existing furnishings had personal and sentimental value, and just needed a bit of TLC.

Bob had been nursed in the rocking chair as a child, and the cabinet was a much loved 18th birthday present from Bob's father. We painted both pieces of furniture black, which worked well with the oriental theme in the room. The seat of the rocking chair was covered with a fabric which had a classic Chinese design.

We decided to make use of the natural light and keep the overall colour scheme neutral, which contrast well with the dark furniture and the strong colours of the oriental pieces.

We laid a neutral carpet, painted the walls soft white, that included a hint of pearlescent. This reflected the light in the room beautifully, and provided a fresh, bright feel.

The lampshades were neutral, the bed cover neutral and we added some



orchids (Bob's favourite flower) throughout the room.

The cushions on the bed were given a breath of new life with some embroidered material that Bob had bought on one of his trips to China.

I also discovered some stunning silk embroidered cloth that had been hiding away in a draw.

We resurrected the cloth and gave it pride of place in a large dark frame on the feature wall. We reduced the impact of the pipes by removing the two downpipes from the roof and replacing them with rain chains which are much more aesthetically pleasing to the eye.

These stainless steel chains are excellent alternatives to the plastic pipes that can be a bit of an eyesore.

The sky blue canopy was installed to give a cosier enclosed feel as well as to aid privacy from the neighbour's windows above



The in-built hardwood bench seat and bespoke foam cushion were cut around the new rain chain and existing soil pipe and fitted snugly up against the wall

All the existing retaining walls to the sides of the main steps down were re-rendered, squared off and painted

The colour of the canopy works beautifully alongside the lush green ferns and darker glossy leaves of the Pittosporum toberia Nana in the foreground

A great place to entertain

Stokes Croft-based Katherine Roper describes how she added the wow factor to a basement with concrete raised beds, steep steps, drain covers and utility pipes

Livingoutside

THIS small basement in Bishopston was a typical example of making the most of the smallest of outdoor spaces and turning it into great place for entertaining or just relaxing.

The floor space measured no more than 4m by 2.5m yet the client wanted to be able to sit out and have room to move around without the clutter of tables and chairs.

There were numerous pipes and

a soil pipe cluttering the back wall so incorporating in-built seating was a little tricky. We reduced the impact of the pipes by removing the two downpipes from the roof and replacing them with rain chains which are much more aesthetically pleasing to the eye.

These stainless steel chains are excellent alternatives to the plastic pipes that can be a bit of an eyesore.

The water flows along the



The floor space measured no more than 4m by 2.5m yet the client wanted to be able to sit out and have room to move around without the clutter of tables and chairs

The original terracotta floor tiles were replaced with travertine paving that not only made the space feel brighter by bouncing the light around but also bigger



● Main picture, the finished garden; below left, the scatter cushions made by the client; centre Katherine Roper; and right, the garden before the makeover

glaucous blue hebe which help to tie the colour scheme together.

At night the garden takes on a whole new dimension as the up lighters create shadows against the walls casting fern shapes and leaf patterns.

There are numerous basement gardens across Bristol which lay neglected and untouched, it doesn't take too much expenditure to transform these outdoor areas into real assets to the property and more importantly a welcome retreat for you to enjoy and relax in.

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having to go to the expense of cap-ping each tread with travertine.

The use of fabric in a garden can add a wonderfully homely feel and help soften the edges of the hard landscape materials of stone and wood. The sky blue canopy was installed to give a cosier enclosed feel as well as to aid privacy from the neighbour's windows above.

The main foam cushion consists of a striped fabric which incorporated the blue of the canopy, the

ing that not only made the space feel brighter by bouncing the light around but also bigger.

All the existing retaining walls to the sides of the main steps down were re-rendered, squared off and painted. The neighbouring walls were also painted an off cream colour, which sat well next to the travertine paving.

The steps were painted black with garage floor paint in order to smarten up the finished look without

chains and runs down to the gully inserted along the length of the back wall. The in-built hardwood bench seat and bespoke foam cushion were cut around the new rain chain and existing soil pipe and fitted snugly up against the wall. The other benefit that a chain brings is that it can be moved to the side when it's not raining thereby freeing up the back wall as a backrest.

The original terracotta floor tiles were replaced with travertine pav-