



Agents of change

Property and interiors duo Lester and Natalie Hurst have turned their home into a cosy des res. **Sharon Dale** reports. Pictures by **Gary Longbottom**.

A grown up gap year turned into a three-year stint in Spain for Lester and Natalie Hurst. The couple, who ended up working in the Spanish property industry, later returned home to Yorkshire with a suitcase full of ambitions.

"I really wanted an adventure and so in 2005 we both gave up our jobs and set off. It's amazing how much our lives have changed because of that," says Natalie, who now runs her own interior design company, Murray Hurst Interiors. Lester,

who previously worked in sales, is now an estate agent and owns the Ilkley and Otley branches of Hunters estate agency.

Their house in Harrogate reflects their experience in the homes business. Lester, who has a long record of property talent spotting, found it advertised in the local paper. He bought his first house, a semi-detached in Leeds, when he was just 18 and used all his savings as a deposit. It was in need of a makeover so he stripped off the leopard print wallpaper and gave it a neutral colour scheme before renting it out.

"I've always loved property and bought 'do'er uppers' to let for a long time. When we were in Spain I ended up helping overseas buyers get searches and find a Spanish solicitor," says Lester, who bought his estate agency franchise from Hunters after he went to see them about Natalie's business. "I came back saying 'I think I want to be an estate agent' and I have no regrets."

His and Natalie's house is in the Bilton area of town and was built in 1910. It is detached with a garden, garage and drive and offered better value than



MOTHER'S PRIDE: The Romanesque column that belonged to Natalie's mother and now has a new home in the kitchen.



Robert Aagaard

AND COMPANY

www.robertaagaard.co.uk | 01423 864805

email: robertaagaardco@btconnect.com
Fergimire House, Stockwell Road, Knarsborough,



COSY TOUCHES: Above, the sitting room where Natalie installed panelling with wallpaper above the stove is by Firebelly; left, the master bedroom with bedside tables from Okia; right, the picture wall with a John Lennon print and Bond film posters; far right, the dining area in the kitchen where a large mirror adds interest and reflects light.



MASTERFUL TOUCHES: Top, the master bedroom with bedside tables from Okia; below, Leo's bedroom with furniture from John Lewis and Thibaut turtle wallpaper.

properties on what local estate agents refer to as "the favoured south side of Harrogate".

"You get more for your money here, there are good local shops and you can easily walk into town. There's also great access to countryside via the Beryl Burton cycle way that leads to Ripley," says Natalie.

The property needed work to make it warmer and more suited to their taste, so they have installed insulation and a new roof. Natalie was firmly in charge of the décor, which now takes account of their baby son, Leo, 16 months.

A former PA, she forged a successful career designing and fitting out new-build apartments and villas in Spain before retraining at the KLC School of Design at Chelsea Harbour.

Before setting up her own company she worked for Taylor Howes and Andrew Winch Designs in London, where she planned the interiors for super yachts and for a billionaire's home in Moscow. She has imported some of that luxury into her home by mixing bespoke elements with expensive and inexpensive buys ... and lots of mirrors.

A giant-size mirror fills most of one wall in the dining area of the kitchen and was

made to order by a local glass supplier. The dining chairs are also bespoke.

"If I can't find exactly what I want I'll design things myself," says Natalie, who started afresh with furniture and furnishings and mixed them with a few family treasures.

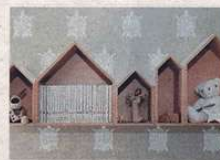
The Romanesque column belonged to her mum and adds height and interest to a corner of the kitchen. She has also revamped vintage furniture and lighting using the services of Mister Toad, which specialises in Annie Sloan chalk paints.

For walls, she prefers Farrow and Ball neutrals such as Old White, Joa's White, Skimming Stone and Oxford Stone. "I never use stark white, even on ceilings because it is not cosy," she says.

The hall, stairs and snug are decorated with linen look, child-friendly and washable paper that is usually used in hotels. To add character to the sitting room, she added panelling to the walls with John Morris patterned paper above. The sofas are from Sofas and Stuff in nearby Bishop Thornton and the giant footstool was designed by Natalie and made by Footstools and More in Morley. Lester opted to organise the fitting of the Firebelly wood-burning stove.



FAMILY HOME: Above, Lester, Natalie and baby Leo in their kitchen; the turtle paper in Leo's room is from Thibaut (top right).



- ### USEFUL CONTACTS
- Murray Hurst Interiors, murrayhurstinteriors.com
 - Hunters estate agency, Ilkley and Otley hunters.com
 - Lester's property blog, warfevalleypropertyblog.co.uk
 - Daedalian bespoke fitted and freestanding furniture, Ilkley, daedalianfurniture.co.uk
 - Mister Toad, Harrogate, Annie Sloan paint and furniture, mistertoad.co.uk
 - Sofas and Stuff, sofasandstuff.com, Bishop Thornton and at Redbrick Mill, redbrickmill.co.uk
 - Footstools and More, Morley, footstoolsandmore.co.uk
 - Smart home systems, Clever Ass, cleverass.com