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# CHANGING SPACES

*Marta Nowicka has managed to make a former St John Ambulance station a beautiful home*

FEATURE ALI HEATH | PHOTOGRAPHY BRENT DARBY/NARRATIVES  
EXTERIOR PHOTOGRAPHY VOYTEK KETZ

**SITTING ROOM**  
A giant L-shaped sofa and central wood burner offer a welcoming space for the entire family. Sofa, £2,471, Camerich. Bespoke coffee table, £400, Voytek Ketz. Similar black leather chair, from £400, Alex MacArthur Interiors. Ekol double-sided wood burner, from £2,374, Saltfire. Artwork by Lucas Kimber. Koldby rug, £179, Ikea



## HOME TRUTHS

**THE PROPERTY** A former ambulance station, rebuilt in the 1950s, redesigned in 2015  
**LOCATION** East Sussex  
**ROOMS** Kitchen-diner/living area, study, four bedrooms (one en suite), bathroom  
**PURCHASED** 2014  
**PREVIOUS PROPERTY** 'We lived in a coastguard's cottage in Camber Sands,' says Marta.



**HALLWAY**  
Simple peg rails are used effectively as handy open hanging space. Walls clad in wooden limed oak floorboards, from £89sq m, WFS Flooring & Tiles. Peg rail, £129, Willis & Gambier



**LANDING**  
A study area was created here. Similar desk, £399, Made. Antique surgical cupboard, £390, Alex MacArthur Interiors



**KITCHEN-DINER**  
The huge dining space reflects the family's love of entertaining. Dining chairs, £89 each, Cult Furniture. Farrier's Cage five bar long pendant light, £1,850, Made by the Forge at Heal's. Kitchen island, from £4,882, Cavendish Equipment

## LESSON LEARNT 'Buy the best quality where possible – it will save you money

Tucked away behind a cobbled medieval street in the heart of fashionable Rye, lies St John, a recently renovated property that's home to Marta Nowicka, an award-winning interior architect, her son Lucas and partner Voytek, a photographer. 'It is a wonderful escape: a short stroll to the harbour, local antique haunts and only three miles to the beach,' says Marta.

The stunning two-storey building is the result of a major transformation by Marta, who has converted the former ambulance

station into a four-bedroom home, set within a private walled courtyard. The original 1930s structure, flattened in the war for material usage, was donated in the 1950s, as a philanthropic gift to St John Ambulance. They, in turn, rebuilt it before adding a further extension in the 1970s to create a town community space. 'We've heard so many tales of locals meeting here at first-aid classes and clubs – even some who enjoyed their first kiss within these walls!' she says.

Marta spent a year planning the renovation, before work began in the spring of 2015. 'We demolished the 1970s side build,

## long term. Always use highly skilled carpenters and tilers, even if more expensive'

repositioned access to the first-floor master suite and built a new extension on the same footprint,' she says. Throughout the main living space, a warren of small rooms was removed to make way for a vast open-plan area, with zones for cooking, relaxing and dining. 'The space feels such a luxury – we can host dinners for 20, drinks for 60, yet it still feels cosy with just two,' says Marta.

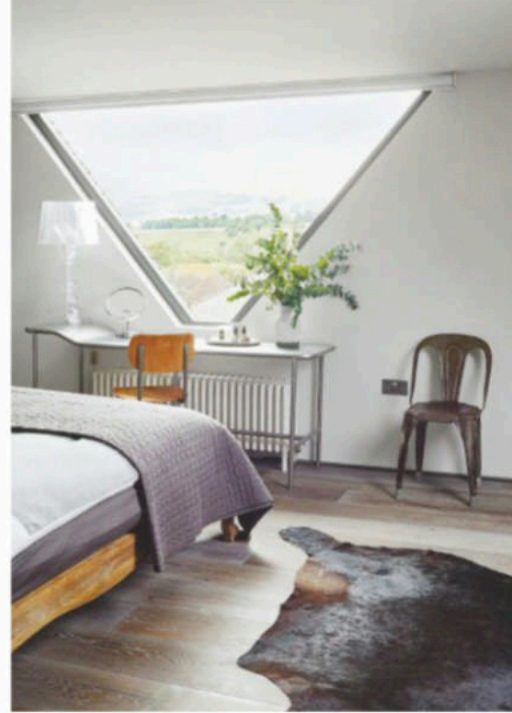
When it came to finding inspiration for the renovation, both medieval and medical design cues were explored. The double-sided fireplace, supported by a large bespoke concrete plinth, creates a

focal point and references a central medieval hearth, around which the family's daily life unfolds. In the kitchen, brushed stainless steel surfaces – a nod to the medical industry – are complemented by minimal grey timber cabinets and refined Carrara marble worktops. 'We love to entertain and the streamlined kitchen is a dream to cook in,' says Marta.

In the master bedroom and main bathroom, stainless steel medical furniture, paying tribute to the building's heritage, has been given a new lease of life: an antique operating table has been



**MASTER BEDROOM**  
Wide limed oak panels line the wall and the floors for a striking effect. Sienna bed, £1,445, Feather & Black. Ranarp spotlight, £19, Ikea. Medicine cabinet, £70, Wishbarn Antiques



**BATHROOM**  
The freestanding bath adds a quiet elegance to this scheme. Falcon freestanding bath, £465, Bath Store. Dechirer La Suite tiles, £202sq m, Domus

**LAST WORD** *'Never underestimate how much time and money an ambitious refurbishment project will cost you. Be patient and have a contingency fund'*

turned into a dressing table, and a vintage hospital trolley upcycled into a contemporary vanity unit with a large basin and mirror above.

Natural materials abound – throughout the house there are exposed original brick walls, wide engineered limed oak floorboards and bespoke concrete casts. 'I am delighted with the timber-clad walls – the wood combines warmth with natural pattern and there is zero maintenance,' says Marta. In the dining area a weathered table, repurposed from a single piece of driftwood and the original St John Ambulance station doors – roughly stripped, waxed and

hung as art – add textural appeal and a sense of provenance. 'I'm not one for things, I like textures to speak for themselves,' says Marta.

Throughout, a strict neutral palette of soft greys, creams and taupe, accented with occasional pops of colour, creates a minimal, sleek look. The renovation also triggered the idea for Marta's business, DOM Stay & Live – a collection of UK and international homes designed by architects and creatives. These are selected by Marta and available to stay or live in. 'It's a wonderful way to experience architectural spaces in beautiful locations,' says Marta. 25