



OVER THE RAINBOW

Jenny Rooney and Stephen Connolly gave their Castleknock home a makeover on a budget, says **Mary O'Sullivan**, and the result is colourfully chic. Photography by **Tony Gavin**

Has anyone noticed how, when we had plenty of money, we opted for the subtlety and safety of muted shades and neutral tones in our home decor, yet, now that we're not quite so flush, colour is back with a bang? It's all to do with the fact that certain colours are known to cheer us up, banish the blues and put us in the pink — all things we badly need at the moment.

Interior designer Jenny Rooney, for one, is totally in favour of a cacophony of colour, and so too is her partner, building services engineer Stephen Connolly. Together they have left no primary-colour card untried in the decoration of their semi-detached home in Castleknock, Dublin 5.

The result of their extreme makeover is a technicolour dream house that explores the fun in functional.

Another result is that they enjoyed working on their house together so much that they decided to pool their talents and experience and start their own company. They advise and help others to renovate their homes and business premises, and the key factor is they're big on budgeting. The duo have only recently started InArc Design, but have already completed several projects — including Burritos and Blues, a restaurant in Wexford Street, and a property to let in the city centre. "In the case of the apartment to let, the client had it on the market for three months

and he just couldn't rent it out. There are tons of new developments, and he couldn't compete. It was very dated," Jenny says. "We did it up for €2,500, and it rented within two weeks. What we've realised from our own experience is you don't have to spend a fortune."

Working together doesn't faze the couple, but then they know each other very well. Though only in their mid 20s, they've been together eight years — they were part of the same circle of friends in secondary school; Jenny in Mount Sackville and Stephen in Belvedere.

They started going out when both families happened to be on holiday in the same resort in Spain. "Stephen just chased me," Jenny says with a laugh, while Stephen retorts, "Yeah, I chased her around the pool." Jenny adds, more seriously, "There was the same distance between our apartments in Spain as between our houses at home. But I suppose at home there would always be a good few friends with us, whereas in Spain we were more alone and found that we liked each other."

They found common ground, too, when they went to college and helped each other with their projects — Stephen's family are "in the building game" so he trained in building services, while Jenny did a four-year course in interior architecture at Griffith College. "My family are all electrical contractors, but my mum is very arty, and I suppose that's where my interest comes from,"



'There was the same distance between our apartments in Spain and houses at home. In Spain we were more alone and found we liked each other'

she explains, adding that she'd always been into decor and colour. "I was allowed to decorate my bedroom from a very young age. It's been wild. I had it pink with yellow skirting boards, and it's also been purple. Pink is my favourite colour — but I've had to hold back on the pink here," she notes with a laugh, while Stephen insists, "It's a unisex house."

They bought their semi-detached four-bedroomed house in the leafy suburb next to Phoenix Park in 2008, and then found themselves in the recession — so they renovated it almost completely on their own, and on a tight budget. As a result, it was a year before they were able to move in, but it was an invaluable experience. Both have worked with companies in their respective fields, but

spending their own money was different. "We learned how to cut corners left, right and centre," says Stephen.

The house had been built in 1985, and so it had lots of Eighties' features such as stippled ceilings, coving, coloured-glass interior panels and doors, and smallish rooms. So Stephen and Jenny took down some walls and added others, and the result is a three-bedroomed house with master en suite. They moved a downstairs wall to create an open-plan kitchen, and they closed off the living room so that it became "a cosy little snug". They got rid of the stippling and coving and put in plain glass, and they also upgraded the central heating, changing the controls and creating separate zones for upstairs and downstairs.

The couple used the internet extensively, and found lots of bargains, including the bathroom tiles which they got for €50 on Gumtree. The Amazon and Littlewoods websites were other great sources for them — as were sales. They queued outside Harvey Norman to get their American-style fridge-freezer for half price. And they weren't proud — they took other people's cast-offs when it suited them. In most cases, the couple



Left Stephen gave Nahla, a bull-mastiff puppy, to Jenny. Still a tad out of control, she's best kept in the garden, which the couple decorated to match the house's interior

Above Jenny Rooney and Stephen Connolly in the dining area of their home. The colour scheme originated with the wall clock. The dining chairs were painted by Jenny's mother, while Jenny made the Missoni-style chair covers

Top right The kitchen is from Ikea. Jenny

planned it and got everything right with just two doors left over. Stephen proudly boasts that he fitted it himself

Middle right The main feature of the living room is the wallpaper depicting a forest, which they bought on Amazon. 'In college I did my thesis on colour, and green was considered relaxing,' says Jenny

Bottom right The mirror on the dressing table gives a glimpse of the cream and gold master bedroom

gave them a new lease of life. A friend spotted that her boss was giving away a table and chairs on the company website and nabbed them for Jenny and Stephen. They had the table polished and Jenny's mum painted the chairs, giving each a different colour, while Jenny added cushions covered in a Missoni-style fabric as seat covers.

And, of course, they used Ikea. Jenny designed the kitchen using the Ikea kitchen planner, and it's Stephen's proud boast that he put it together totally on his own. However, he'll probably never forgive Ikea for the fact that he missed Ireland's rugby match against New Zealand in 2008 because of the Swedish giant's method of selling. It was just before Ikea opened in Dublin, so the couple had to travel to Belfast. "We left at seven and thought we'd home by lunchtime," Stephen recalls. "I discovered that we had to pick up the entire kitchen — which took hours. Finally I had to ring my little brother and say 'You can pick up my tickets, you little fecker'. We lost anyway," he notes sourly, while Jenny adds, "You can imagine the journey home. And it was raining. And then our van wouldn't go through the McDonald's Drive-Thru. But we got



our kitchen." They didn't fit the kitchen until a year later, but it worked perfectly, with only two doors left over — which, as Jenny says, is a good thing, because they might be needed.

The couple did, of course, make the odd mistake during the renovation — they bought a very big shower base for the en suite on Gumtree for a mere €50, but then discovered that a big base needs a big door — and that was expensive.

When it came to the colour scheme, like most designers, Jenny had a particular starting point — the Karlsson multi-coloured clock from Urban Outfitters, which is made up of 12 different coloured cubes and a pair of black hands. "There's so much colour in this house, you couldn't be in a bad humour," Jenny remarks.

There is, though, a threat to the colour, and that's the latest addition to the family — Nahla, a bull-mastiff puppy bought by Stephen for Jenny's birthday. She's taken to scratching everything, including chairs and skirting boards.

They're not worried. But then, they know how to make everything nice again. And on a budget. ■

www.inarc.ie