

INTERIORS



Bright: the sunroom designed by Alex Sykes of Designscape for his mother, left; Tiffany Duggan and her mum Penny Lent in her living room, right



RISCHROER FOR THE TELEGRAPH



Keeping design in the family

What happens when an interior designer gives her mum's home a makeover? *Emily Brooks* finds out

Honestly, all we were going to do was take one wall down. That's how it started. But after that, we decided to do everything." When you have an interior designer in the family, embarking on a small home improvement can snowball, as Penny Lent discovered. With the help of her daughter, Tiffany Duggan of Studio Duggan, Lent is now the proud owner of a home that is almost unrecognisable from its previous incarnation, and she has even purchased the house next door to knock through.

Lent probably wouldn't have undertaken such a large project – which included taking the aforementioned wall down to merge her kitchen and dining area, as well as a complete refurbishment throughout – without her daughter's help. "I probably could have put something together myself, but it would be nothing like as stylish,"

'I was worried it would ruin our friendship but it was the opposite'

she says. "But I had complete trust in Tiffany. I love it."

In Lent's case, it was the death of her husband two and a half years ago that prompted the makeover. Duggan realised that she could turn her day job into an act of love: "Since Dad died I wanted to make sure that Mum could have somewhere she felt really comfortable, that was really hers. A space that made her feel uplifted."

"I didn't know my own taste; it had got lost over the years," admits Lent, who says she was amazed at how well her daughter knew what she wanted, unprompted. Interior designers and architects need to get under the skin of their clients before they can deliver a scheme that's just right for their needs and lifestyle, so if they're designing for a close family member, it makes sense that the final result suits them to a tee – unusually so.

Designers are also brilliant at taking clients outside their comfort zone to deliver something they may not have thought about. "She was way ahead of me," says Lent of her daughter's vision



for her bedroom, with silk wallpaper and cabinetry in antiqued mirror: a scheme that she might have dismissed as being a little too glamorous.

For Valerie Raper, asking her sister, interior designer Henriette von Stockhausen of VSP Interiors, to redesign her Devon manor house meant that "she made me take the brave option rather than the safe option. She knew, for example, that if I used light colours in a big room

Family affair: the sun room by Alex Sykes of Designscape, above; a hallway designed by Tiffany Duggan for her mother, above right

it was going to look cold. Ordinarily I would use colour just in the fabrics or accessories, but she said, 'No. You need it on the walls.' I'm so glad she pushed me."

The sisters agree that the project brought them closer, not least because they were working with recently inherited family pieces. "It got us talking, bringing back all those memories of childhood," says von Stockhausen. "I was worried that it would somehow ruin our friendship. But it was the opposite."

Susan Sykes says she had "no trepidation at all" about putting her Marlborough house extension into the hands of her son, architect Alex Sykes of Designscape, despite their not-quite-aligned aesthetic tastes. "He's a stripped-down modernist and I'm a bit more baroque. But we both loathe the pastiche, and I think it's a great pity to dismiss the modern, because it can fit very easily with the old if it's done with style and tact."

Her son has delivered a scheme that matches their shared philosophy, a

glazed kitchen-diner that makes a better connection with the garden. A contemporary bay window has been added to the first floor, creating a sun room that Susan had intended to spend time in as a means of helping her ME – light therapy that wasn't, in the end, required, since she then made a recovery after years of limited mobility.

In fact, the glazed window was meant to be the only amendment to the house until the architect in the family suggested otherwise. "There was a bit of mission creep on my part," admits Alex. "But it was essentially the same process for working with any client. The added pressure is that you have to live with the results – any visitor to my parents' house is going to judge me by what I've done there. I had to get it right."

"I don't think my parents would have dreamed of doing anything like this if they didn't have an architect in the family; it's well outside their comfort zone. But it's come off trumps, and I don't think they had any idea how transformational it would be."

Surprisingly, all those written about here report no petty squabbles, no regression to the different relationships that they must have shared when they were younger. In fact, all the "clients" came away with a newfound respect for their loved one after seeing them in action professionally. Penny Lent says she was amazed at just how broad an interior designer's job is, from running huge teams of builders to styling up the bathroom with Jo Malone products.

"We saw him in a quite different light," says Susan Sykes of her son. "And of course, it's always a privilege to talk to someone about the thing they care passionately about. That has been a great joy to share."