



Diary of a renovation

The third installment in a series where we follow the renovation and restoration of Dunedin style meister **TAMSIN COOPER's** family home



When we first moved in, the coal range in the dining room had been boarded over. After uncovering it, we found a mantelpiece at a demolition yard. It had the right dimensions but desperately needed refurbishing!

There's nothing like a magazine deadline to kickstart a renovation project. Hot on the heels of showing my winter collection at iD Dunedin Fashion Week is the need to update our dining room with a mantelpiece makeover!

A mantelpiece provides a focal point for a room. It's the best place (or excuse) to display your favourite treasures. I really enjoy changing my mantelpiece displays every few weeks and I always have fresh flower arrangements on show - either from the garden or my favourite Dunedin florist, Estelle Flowers. Sometimes just a simple stem does the trick - I have a single large white daisy sitting in a milk glass vase at the moment.

Recently I've had to start sharing the mantelpiece with my husband Luke's finds too. I came home one day to a contemporary ceramic popcorn sculpture by artist Madeleine Child at the end of my vintage display - it looked so out of place. I'm sure you can understand how this caused a twinge of marital tension! But I do love the piece, so I rose to the challenge and quickly changed my whole display.

I enjoy mixing old and new pieces with different object heights and a balance of colours. I also like to bring seasonal natural objects inside, be it birds' nests, branches, seed pods, large leaves, great weed balls found on a windy beach, stones and more.



When we first moved into our house, the coal range in our dining room had been boarded over. After we uncovered it, Luke tiled the recessed area inside. Then we were lucky to find an amazing man in Dunedin who restores coal ranges. It was a costly exercise, but it means we'll have the most deliciously warm and cosy dining room come winter. Plus the fire guard from Bill's Antiques will be perfect for warming pajamas and drying out the boys' artworks!

I grew up with my mother cooking all our meals on the coal range and her scrumptious food - divine home-baked bread and potatoes, not to mention her scones and wonderful soups - inspired me to try and replicate this for my boys. Using wood, not coal, and mastering the technique of getting the stove hot enough without smoking the whole house out will be our challenge for the winter!

To complete the coal range as a dining room focal point, we found a mantelpiece at a demolition yard. It's difficult to find an original coal range mantelpiece as they need to be unusually high - and our one desperately needed refurbishing.

Walking into the Resene store at 8.30am in the morning after dropping our extremely noisy boys off at school and pre-school was rather glorious. It was a calm, peaceful colour haven ... so exciting!

We needed to decide quickly what colour to paint the dining room. It's something I've been contemplating for some months. My winter 2013 collection of coats and accessories featured a monochrome palette, with details of white hand-embroidered

Resplendent in Resene Lusta-Glo Black and Resene Carefree; an embroidered velvet wrap from Tamsin's 'Anniversary' collection

flowers, silver glass beadwork and a base of luminous jet black or pearl white velvet. This may not seem likely inspiration for my coal-range mantelpiece makeover, but my design world and personal life are completely intertwined! Our black coal range, white ceramic tiles and black floor tiles all seem the perfect fit for the colour scheme. I want the dining room to be a bright, happy place - as well as a clean base to display bold accents of colour.

I also have an amazing piece of Scandinavian-inspired hand embroidery in primary colours with a black base, as well as a collection of vivid boxed butterflies that I want to display.

We painted the mantelpiece Resene Lusta-Glo Black to tie in with the range and floor tiles. I was also inspired by Luke's collection of antique globes, particularly a striking black globe I'd like to have on

In the garden ...

- Louis's runner beans are producing well from their gorgeous leafy pyramid. I love picking them minutes before stir-frying them in a light Asian-inspired sauce with brown rice.
- We've managed to grow some spicy rocket, cos lettuce and kale which I'm hoping to make into kale chips!
- I've just eaten my first cherry tomato ripened outside - I'm feeling proud of my modest veggie garden and look forward to expanding it.



Wall colour was the trickiest choice of all ... which colour would complement the monochrome palette and be a neutral backdrop for my decorative objects?



the mantelpiece. Luke also creates a range of wall sculptures inspired by globes, featuring intricately gilded topography on spun metal hemispheres. He's finally made one to display at home and this will go perfectly above the mantelpiece.

The wall colour was the trickiest choice of all. White would have been the obvious choice, but we'd already painted over the 70s tongue and groove in white, and we wanted to have a hint of colour on the walls above. But which colour would both complement the monochrome palette

and act as a neutral backdrop for my decorative objects? After much discussion, we chose a pale duck-egg blue, Resene Carefree.

Now the painting is done, I can indulge in my favourite job of dressing the mantelpiece. I've chosen a collection of treasures including milk glass vases, a small portrait of Miss Mabel Love (no relation, I just love her name and the frame), the popcorn sculpture, vintage globes, a 1800s black jug, some pieces of 50s green and gold glass to reflect the green in the globe and the gold in the popcorn, a glass bottle fragment (dug up from the stream in the garden with the words Dunedin still visible) and a contemporary Peter Collis vase that was a wedding present from good friends. The focal piece is one I've been given temporary custodianship of - my great-great-grandfather James Gemmell's black marble clock. He was awarded it in 1880 by the Otago Agricultural & Pastoral Association for the "largest prize taker in Ayrshire Cattle". It is a grand finishing touch but a perfect fit (our house was built in 1880) and from the mantelpiece it will preside over the kitchen table, the heart of our family home.

Next time ... we tackle the kitchen!

Things to do:

- take a look at the ceiling, inside back door, window frames and walls
- consider the possibility of a painted blackboard (but not black!)
- maybe add a small feature wall ... but which colour would be best?

