

BOUGH WOW

essential retailer case study

Mandy Stewart's holiday souvenir - a tree trunk - presented interior designer Brenda Gibson with a genuinely unique challenge when transforming the master suite of the Stewarts' south-west London home

Words **Amelio Thorpe** Pictures **James Balston** and **Darren Chung**

'WE DISCUSSED **PRACTICAL** ISSUES, SUCH AS **STORAGE**, SO THAT THE WHOLE **PLACE** WOULD BE HIGHLY **FUNCTIONAL**'

Brenda Gibson, designer, Complete Interior Co

A freestanding bath positioned in the centre of the room adds a luxurious note



It was technically quite a challenge to get the tree installed safely
Brenda Gibson,
designer, Complete Interior Co

This timber trunk, believed to be from a banyan tree, makes a striking shower screen



Crushed velvet and silk fabrics in rich colours and different textures add luxury to the bedroom, leading to the en suite



The colours of this painting provided the inspiration for the room's décor

Interior designer Brenda Gibson of Complete Interior Co says she had never before heard the words 'tree trunk' and 'shower screen' combined in one sentence. But there's a first time for everything, and when client Mandy Stewart let her know she had bought a banyan tree trunk in New York and was planning to ship it over to make a shower screen, Brenda took it in her stride. "Most projects contain at least a few surprises and I try not to be fazed by anything," she laughs.

The tree trunk was Mandy's prize purchase when visiting New York with husband John and sons Harry, 10, and George, five. "We saw it in a showroom and immediately thought it would make a fantastic shower screen for our new bathroom," recalls Mandy. "We love the look and feel of wood and thought it would make a striking addition to the room."

Half way through the renovation of their Victorian home in south-west London, Mandy presented the tree idea to Brenda, who had been busy drawing up plans to create their new master bedroom, dressing area and en suite. "I really appreciated the way Brenda just smiled and treated the arrival of the tree as if it were an everyday occurrence," says Mandy. "Brenda was recommended by two friends, after completing the interior design of their homes, so I knew she was experienced," she adds. "But I also liked the way she was very attentive to our requirements and didn't try to inflict her style onto us."



Twin Duravit Vero basins are mounted on a bespoke unit finished in burnt orange lacquer

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Mandy Stewart

But before Brenda could grapple with the challenges presented by the bulk and weight of the tree she had to re-plan the space, once a small bedroom with a tiny en suite shower room – complete with a basin in the cupboard – and a poky study with a bulky water tank occupying much of it.

The first step was to demolish some of the internal walls and reposition the water tank on the ground floor, so the area could be totally remodelled as a larger bedroom and spacious en suite.

"My brief was to create a very luxurious interior," says Brenda of her initial conversations with Mandy. "I could tell at once from the furniture and paintings already in the house that Mandy and John love the colour combination of dark chocolate and burnt orange, so that gave me a clue to the starting point for the scheme."

Brenda began to work with these colours, mixing in bronze and rich textures against a simple white backdrop in the bathroom. The bespoke burnt orange lacquer vanity unit topped with chocolate brown glass picks up on Mandy's favourite colours, and sparkling bronze mosaics in the wall niches complement the painting on the wall.

"We also discussed practical issues, such as storage, so that the whole place would be highly functional, too," says Brenda of the vanity unit, which provides the main cupboard space in the room. In keeping with the request for contemporary fittings, many of the products were sourced from CP Hart. "It was important to select fittings that were simple, clean-lined and elegant, so as not to compete with the vibrant colours of the room," explains Brenda.

While the freestanding bath is the centrepiece of the

bathroom, it is the tree trunk that really catches the eye. "It was technically quite a challenge to get it installed safely," admits Brenda. "As you can imagine, it's pretty heavy, so we had to strengthen the floor." The timber has been given several coats of yacht varnish to make it water resistant, while lights inserted into the floor ensure the natural grain of the wood is shown off.

"I'm so pleased with the result that I'm going to set to work with Brenda on re-designing the rest of the house," says Mandy. "This palette of colours makes a fabulous starting point for the other rooms, too."

product specification

- Bath** Similar, Hoesch Starck 2 freestanding
- Bath top** Axor Starck freestanding bath/shower mixer
- Basin taps** Axor Starck single lever
- Basins** Duravit Vero
- Shower fittings** Axor Starck thermostatic shower column with Raindance head
- WC** Similar, Duravit Starck 2 wall-hung
- Towel radiator** Similar, C.P. Hart Dona All C.P. Hart. Tel: 01892 570 705. www.cphart.co.uk
- Tiles and stone** Bisazza Bronze mosaics; Classic Travertine floor and wall tiles; custom-made travertine shower tray; all Castelnau Tiles. Tel: 0208 741 2452. www.castelnautiles.co.uk
- Basin cabinet and vanity top** Bespoke wall-hung basin cabinet in high gloss lacquer with glass recess handle detail and back-painted glass vanity top, Complete Interior Co. Tel: 0208 878 2282. www.completeinterior.co.uk



business profile

Complete Interior Co

Who are we? Brenda Gibson, interior designer
Where are we? 18 White Hart Lane, London SW13 0PY. Tel: 0208 878 2282. www.completeinterior.co.uk
What we do Residential interior design
Business history Brenda Gibson, 45, set up her business in 1998 after studying interior design at Chelsea School of Art & Design and obtaining a degree in interior architecture at the University of Brighton. "Previously, I had worked in the financial sector, but I wanted to do something more creative," she says. Today, her practice specialises in classic and contemporary residential interiors in London and the south east, as well as Europe. "I like the challenge of doing different things and enjoy pushing boundaries," says Brenda, who also now lectures on interior design at KLC School of Design in London. Interior design rates start at £100 per hour. Brenda undertakes bathroom projects with a budget of £20,000 or more
Staffing levels Brenda and designer Jane Ranson, plus trusted, sub-contracted specialist teams
Favourite aspect of job "Designing. Unfortunately, it's the smallest part of the job"
Least favourite aspect of job "Ordering"
Strange but true "It's not everyday you get asked to put a tree trunk in a room as a shower screen"

This palette of colours makes a fabulous starting point for the other rooms, too

Mandy Stewart

client profile

Name Mandy and John Stewart
Location South-west London
Client wish list A luxurious en suite – with a difference
Problem "Once we had worked out how to install the tree trunk, the biggest problem was what we were going to do with the shower tray to cope with the completely irregular shape of the trunk," says Brenda
Solution "In the end, we had to stand the tree upright and in position, take a template by drawing around the trunk and have the tray cut incredibly accurately from one slab of travertine"