



JUST DOING OUR OWN THING

A space where the whole family can work, rest and play together or on their own may seem impossible to achieve, but between the brightly coloured walls of their extended living room, the Rabecs have found the inspiration to make the dream a harmonious reality





'I chose vivid colours for our walls because I knew they would bring a joyful energy to our living room. As a family we feel motivated by colour and the children are definitely happier since we've been here. Friends say our home is like a crèche at times but don't be fooled by the slide – it was Christophe who wanted it!'



Christophe Rabec met his future wife Dorothée in Paris when the pair were studying architecture and immediately recognised a kindred spirit. 'I'm a native Parisian but when Dorothée said she wanted to leave the capital and head south, I did it!' smiles Christophe. 'I grew up in Lyon and after my studies I longed to return "home";' explains Dorothée.

Two became three with the arrival of daughter Emma, now four, and the couple realised a move was on the cards. 'We needed more space and began looking locally for a bigger home. Finally we stumbled on an old shoe factory in Vienne, a few kilometres from Lyon,' says Christophe.

The ex-factory was an empty shell but their architect's eye could appreciate the renovation potential. 'What was most important to us was creating a home that had a space where adults and children could live side by side,' says Dorothée. 'I was pregnant with our second child Jules, now two, when we designed the interior. Our challenge was to have an open space where it was possible to do different activities – some quiet, some not so quiet – at the same time and not feel disturbed by each other.'

Dorothée wanted dazzling red walls and despite Christophe's initial misgivings their walls are a myriad of rainbow colours.

One of Dorothée's passions is painting and the children's



'It's important for our children to feel free to choose how they entertain themselves, so everything they need is within their reach on low shelves'



The Rabecs may live in town but they are keen to lead a simple, healthy life. They compensate for their lack of garden by filling their home with plants. The greenery acts as a clever room divider, separating the family cinema and lounging area from the rest of the open-plan space. For more great ways to use plants, see page xxx

'Our cinema corner is a treat. The futon means it can double as a guest room. And when we're watching a late movie, we can snuggle into bed and carry on watching!'



Emma and Jules have important work to do – paintings, craft, stories and poems to write – so they needed a dedicated space where they could concentrate. Sharing their parents' home-office space is ideal – it's cleverly separated by steps but visible from the rest of the room so their mini-art gallery is on show.



bedroom is adorned with colourful scenes. Both children have inherited their mother's artistic side, Jules is especially proud of a portrait of himself skiing with, 'a hairy chest because I'm a man'. You feel the maternal influence in this house. Dorothee, a keen cook, talks warmly of her Vietnamese origins and of learning from her mother. 'I loved cooking with Mum as a child.' Now, she encourages her own children to cook. 'Jules can bake his very own yoghurt cake and he's only two!' Being nature-lovers the Rabecs are also keen to source their ingredients locally. 'We are lucky, we have a farm just five minutes away so we regularly drop in for fresh milk and eggs,' says Dorothee.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PENNY WINCKER



'We decided against lots of wall units in the kitchen,' says Dorothée. 'They would take away the sense of light and space we had created in this room by making it open-plan. Instead we have an island unit. It provides an extra work surface and the children can help too.'



The Rabecs' large dining table could feel quite formal but the chairs in mismatched styles make it less so. It comes in especially handy for the children's birthday teas. All their friends fit round the table, and there's plenty of room for lots of party food. The bright colours are a cheery starting place for decorations.

'I talked Dorothée into an open-plan kitchen. Now she loves it so much she's up all hours clattering her pots making jam, keeping us awake!'





Emma chose jungle designs for the kids' bedroom walls and Dorothée painted them. 'The children love to pretend they are the animals on the walls, so I think the colourful patterns and different textures really stimulate their senses and encourage creative play,' she says.

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