

Starting afresh

Buying an Alpine apartment as an empty shell and dividing the space with multifunctional pods made it possible for a small family to afford their own home

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The view from Delphine Byl and Andrew Steegmans' apartment stretches over the village of Aldrans to the mountains beyond



Delphine relaxes in the living area, enjoying the snowy scene through the floor-to-ceiling windows

After years of renting, Delphine Byl, 33, an interior designer, and her husband Andrew Steegmans, 40, a civil engineer, were eager to create a home of their own with their three-year-old son, Eero. The couple had been living in Innsbruck, Austria, since relocating from Belgium in 2008, when Andrew joined the studio of architect Thomas Fischbach. They were drawn to the area by the outdoor lifestyle, but affordable properties were scarce.

'With skiing in winter and mountain biking in the summer, the city is simply glorious,' says Delphine, who runs her own interior architecture and design firm. 'But finding a home here, one that met our needs as well as our budget, required patience and a little good fortune. Having space for two bedrooms was non-negotiable, and we also longed for a small garden.'

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That good fortune arrived when Andrew was appointed to lead Thomas Fishbach's construction of an apartment block in the village of Aldrans, a ten-minute drive from Innsbruck. The units were selling quickly and there were just two left when Delphine and Andrew decided to buy one for themselves. The location was perfect and the ground-floor apartment they chose had the outdoor space they wanted, while its interior offered the potential for a stylish family home.

'We were desperate to carve out our own space, and had a good idea of what we wanted,' says Delphine. The aim was to create two bedrooms, two bathrooms and an open living area.

Thomas had created a standard fit-out for all the new flats but as Delphine and Andrew intended to do all the internal work on their apartment themselves, they arranged to buy it as a shell only, with no plumbing or electrical fittings. Although the external renderings »

The leather chairs in the living room were rescued from Andrew's aunt, who had intended to throw them away. They complement the modern sofa and textured rug for a pared-back look that feels both welcoming and cosy

IN BRIEF

LOCATION Aldrans, near Innsbruck, Austria
TYPE OF PROPERTY New-build apartment
BEDROOMS 2
BUILD TIME 10 months
SIZE 90sqm
TOTAL COST £300,000
ESTIMATED VALUE £385,000





and windows could not be altered, the interior offered a blank canvas.

'This made it more affordable, but the subsequent work and high-end finishes we included ended up costing more than the ready-made apartments,' says Delphine.

Her plan was for a combined living area and kitchen in the centre of the flat. 'It's a small apartment, so the challenge was to make it feel as spacious as possible,' she says. 'We enjoyed open-plan living in our old home in Belgium and wanted the same thing here, but the long, narrow floor plan meant that the whole space had to be multifunctional, and clever storage solutions were essential.'

With this in mind, Delphine designed two floor-to-ceiling pods, clad in honey-hued oak, to separate the bedrooms located at either end of the flat from the main living area. Each pod contains a compact bathroom.

Sliding pocket doors, which extend out from the pod walls, allow the family to close off

'The narrow floor plan meant the space had to be multifunctional, and clever storage systems were essential'

the bedrooms from the kitchen and living area whenever they want. 'But with the doors open, there's a wonderful sense of space throughout the apartment,' says Delphine.

One of the pods includes an alcove, lined with black laminate, which contains the hob. The cupboards above and below are also defined by a black laminated strip. The pod wall on the other side of the living area replicates this look with black laminate-lined display niches cut out of the corners, and a recess for the large flatscreen TV.

'We took our cues from nature with the materials,' says Delphine. 'Locally sourced oak panels echo the landscape, but we used veneer rather than solid planks to help keep costs down.'

The kitchen island required the most careful attention. Creating a functional yet beautiful workstation demanded versatile materials. 'In the end, we opted for a decorative but hard-wearing >>

The kitchen island is constructed from a wooden frame covered in a 4mm layer of *béton ciré* resin-based plaster, making it a cost-effective and relatively lightweight structure



LEFT For a luxurious finish on a budget, oak-veneer panels cover the pod walls, cupboard doors and drawers. The Feldmark dining table is made from pine and beechwood

RIGHT The shower room sits between the main living area and Delphine and Andrew's bedroom

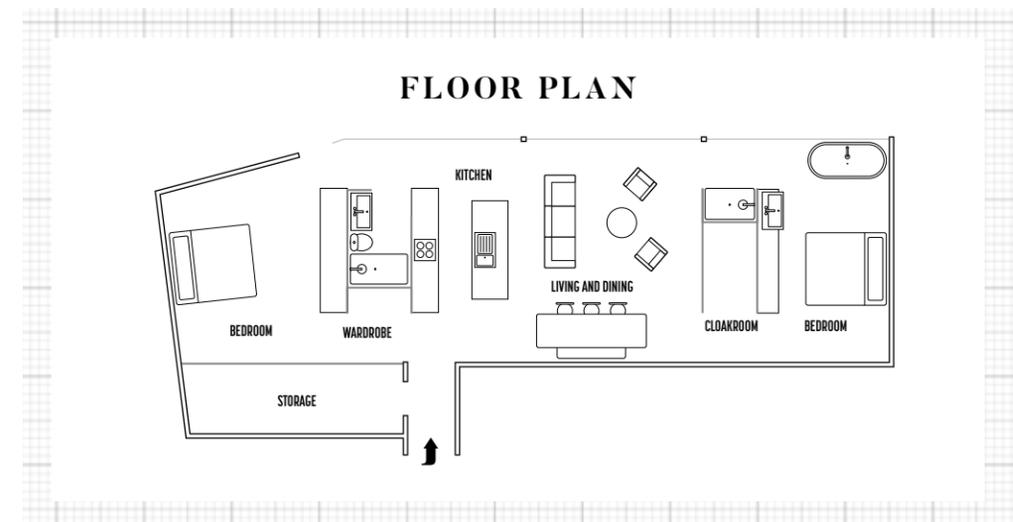


resin-based plaster called *béton ciré* to coat the floor and the island to achieve the look I wanted. It's also more child-friendly than unforgiving concrete,' says Delphine. 'Finding someone who works with this material was not easy. In the end, our contractor travelled all the way from Linz, which is a four-hour drive, at a greater cost than we anticipated.'

A restrained colour palette of greys, blues and greens is evident throughout the

flat. The muted shades perfectly complement Delphine's collection of vintage finds, which are teamed with treasured family heirlooms and sleek design classics.

'What I enjoy most about the apartment is the sense of connection between the different spaces, and the mountains beyond the window,' says Delphine. 'It's a hard-working family home, but there's always space to think and breathe.' GD





LEFT A freestanding Victoria + Albert bath has been positioned to take full advantage of the Alpine landscape outside the couple's bedroom window

RIGHT To create the pine-tree pattern, Delphine painted over stickers using Pure & Original paint before removing them



SUPPLIERS

PROJECT TEAM
Apartment-block architect
 Thomas Fischbach (e-f-p.at)
Interior architecture and design
 Studio Fine (studiofine.eu)
Contractor Franz Thurner (thurner-franz.at)
Structural engineer
 Peter Stippler (+43 512 890 431)

STRUCTURE
Flooring and island surface Manfred Pfandlbauer (+43 676 8448 85544)

Joinery Georg Fichtl (fichtl-schreinerei.de)
Oak-veneer panels Kaindl (kaindl.com)
Laminated chipboard
 FunderMax (fundermax.at)
FIXTURES & FITTINGS
Kitchen island construction
 Georg Fichtl (as before)
Bath Victoria + Albert (vandabaths.com)
Taps Vola (home.vola.com)
Oven and hob Miele (miele.co.uk)

FURNITURE & ACCESSORIES
Floor lamp DCW Editions (dcw-editions.fr)
Sofa Koozo (koozo.be)
Dining table Magazin (magazin.com)
Eames dining chairs Vitra (vitra.com)
Marrakesh wall paint Pure & Original (pure-original.com)
Cot Oliver Furniture (oliverfurniture.com)
Bowl, vase, rug and bedside lamps
 Fritz Hansen (fritzhansen.com)
Fruit bowl Bo Concept (boconcept.com)