

Falling in love again...

Home is where the heart is so **RICHARD WEBBER** asked bespoke interiors expert **Melissa Porter** how to revive a property's lustre on the cheap

Pictures: MARK KEHOE



TALENTED: Melissa Porter with Rupert Sykes in his transformed flat above a shop on *I Own Britain's Best Home*

ATTEMPTING to rekindle the love once felt for a property is a challenge facing more people as they find moving home impossible in the current climate. However, as interiors expert and TV presenter Melissa Porter says, "sexing up your home" does not need to cost the earth.

"It's surprising what effect simple things like adding colour, effective lighting and artwork on the walls can have on the way you feel about your home," she says.

Melissa, 36, who co-owns bespoke design company Uber Interiors, has been travelling the UK viewing a host of sumptuous homes, including opulent Regency mansions and modernist villas for Five's second series of *I Own Britain's Best Home*.

The programme features Rupert Sykes who in two years has transformed a flat above a shop in Putney, south London, into a three-bedroom dream home, including a loft conversion. He has even altered the approach from a back alley into a stylish wooden frontage. It's now up to viewers to decide whether it's crowned Britain's best home.

For the rest of us with rather less funds at our disposal, it is a question of injecting a little magic into our existing properties.

"Nothing feels better than walking through your own front door," says Melissa, who is renting a two-bedroom apartment overlooking the Thames while negotiating on a property down the road.

"I sold my last flat, near London Bridge, in 2007 for £765,000. It was ideal timing because it was at the

height of the market," she says.

"I'd like to say it was a prescribed thought but it wasn't, I was lucky. When the market started to crash I decided to rent and bide my time."

Melissa is hoping to seal the deal soon on her 1,100 square foot two-bedroom Chelsea apartment, which has a double-fronted

reception and open-plan kitchen. "It needs renovation and I'm hoping to buy a share of the freehold."

As soon as she collects the key she will be itching to stamp her style on the apartment. "It's important to personalise your home to create an environment you're comfortable with."

For anyone frustrated by the faltering property market, Melissa offers some excellent tips designed to help you fall in love with your home all over again. "For the 15 years I've been working in interior design the focus has been on pristine finishes, glossy white walls and sparkling wood floors.

"Now it's about imperfections and salvaging items from architectural salvage yards and auctions, combining secondhand pieces with cheaper high street items from Habitat and IKEA, mixing new and old to give your property that lived-in look."

MELISSA continues: "Adding colour injects some of your own personality and makes you happy in your environment. In my study, where I want to be motivated and empowered, I always go for strong colours and motif wallpaper. In my lounge, where I want to feel

glamorous and relaxed, I'll often pick lighter colours such as grey.

"As with clothes, try layering textures in your home, including satins, velvet and corduroy throws on the settee. Find some beautiful fabric and wrap it around a wooden frame, staple it and hang it on the wall: you have your own modern art."

"Inexpensive artwork can be visually stimulating. I bought a photo of Battersea power station for £50 and framed it. People might think I'm mad but it was taken at night and the towers are illuminated. It's lovely.

"Satisfy your senses. When I walk into my apartment I put on fairy lights hanging around my windows

because sparkly things make me happy. Also, I'm mad on scented candles. They're relatively cheap so I use them like no one's business. I have about 15 in my lounge alone!

"Lighting is important. It's like when you try on clothes; if the light in the changing room is harsh it will highlight all your cellulite. That's no good because you want to feel good; the same applies to your home.

"I always opt for a Lutron system where the light levels can be controlled from one panel. You can vary the setting to suit your mood.

"Don't worry about de-cluttering unless you are selling. If you're staying put, clutter it up with all your personal items and create an environment you're comfortable with, providing you have room."

● **MORE INFORMATION:**
I Own Britain's Best Home,
Five, 8pm Thursdays;
Uber Interiors, visit
www.uber-interiors.com