

At-home goals for the new year

Three weeks into 2012, and I've finally managed to draw up a list of resolutions for the year ahead. Since most of them involve me being more organised, this probably doesn't bode well.

The majority of this year's goals focus on the home, which I like to see as a sign of a new maturity. It seems that on some subconscious level I have finally accepted that I will never be a size 10, speak four languages, run a marathon or be able to do a proper Trikonasana (or any other even remotely demanding yoga pose, for that matter). As I hurtle headlong into my thirties, the time has come to adopt a more pragmatic, achievable set of goals.

Improving my immediate surroundings is one. Even though I write about design for a living, because my house is rented I have fallen into the trap of putting decorating projects on the back burner. There are countless things that I would love to do - indulge my extreme love of wallpaper, for one - but have been reluctant to.

I'm not sure how long I plan to stay in my current house, which means I'm hesitant about investing both time and money in an asset that doesn't belong to me. This is an attitude shared by many UAE dwellers, but I can't help thinking that this could be as much a cause as it is an effect of the transience of the UAE's expatriate population. If we never truly turn our houses into homes, how can we hope to create any sense of permanence?

I would also like to be less wasteful, and start sending less to landfill. I'm going to start by being more stringent with the simple, obvious things. I will turn the thermostat up by a couple of degrees in the summer, however tempting it is to have it languishing at 19

degrees for months on end, and I will make sure I turn off unnecessary lights when they're not in use.

I'm also going to have one meat-free day a week, and will remember to take my reusable bags out of the car and into the supermarket when I go shopping. The number of plastic bags that I can accumulate in a single week is almost obscene.

Most importantly, I'm going to redouble my recycling efforts. I live in The Springs, Dubai, and there are two sets of recycling bins within a three-minute drive of my house. Nonetheless, up until now my record has been erratic, to say the least. When it's a simple matter of getting organised, clearing a space in your utility room and putting in a couple of different coloured bins for different types of waste, there's no real excuse not to.

I'm also going to start recycling kitchen waste using Bokashi, the indoor composting system that has been a regular feature on the pages of House & Home over the past year. The system uses a recycled plastic bucket, thin layers of bran infused with microorganisms, and anaerobic fermentation to treat unwanted kitchen waste, which can then be used to nourish plants and soil. A Bokashi bin and bag of bran cost Dh360 and I'm off to get mine this weekend.

Another aim is to shop more smartly. I am finally going to visit the weekly farmers' market at the Dubai Garden Centre, which sells fresh, organic fruit and vegetables that are sourced locally. And although my attempts to cultivate mint and basil have so far proven largely unsuccessful, I'm going to try to grow more of my own herbs.

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2012 will also be the year that I finally finish decorating the spare room. At present, this is a room that fulfils its purpose but is utterly uninspiring. It's home to a perfectly presentable sofa bed, lounge chair and bookcase, and a rug that was demoted from the main bedroom, but there is nothing to tie these elements together. And like many spare rooms, it has that faint air of neglect.

For much of the time, it is a wasted space. So one of my first jobs for the new year will be to spruce it up and make sure that it gets used more. This ties in with another home-related quandary that I have been facing in recent months. I find that, almost without realising it, I am watching more and more television and reading fewer and fewer books. This is because the most comfortable seat in the house is in the nook of our L-shaped sofa, which is directly opposite the television. If anyone else in the house happens to be watching TV, I invariably get drawn in, so am now fully versed in the plot lines of such masterpieces as *Generation Kill*, but also take three times longer than usual to finish even the most straightforward of novels.

The answer, of course, is to create another comfortable seating area as far away from the television as possible, and the spare room is an obvious place for this.

It's as simple as buying a number of oversized cushions from Kas Australia (I love the company's bright, exotic patterns) and using them to plush up the sofa bed and lounge chair. A striking, strategically placed floor lamp (I have my eye on one in Pottery Barn) will create a cocoon of warm light around my chosen reading spot, while a collection of carefully chosen scented candles will make the space even more inviting.

In the corner of the room, I'm going to suspend a cluster of lanterns from the ceiling, as suggested by Pallavi Dean in *House & Home's Ask the Expert*

column a couple of weeks ago. It is an inexpensive and relatively easy way to make a massive impact on a room.

And I may yet invest in that wallpaper. Something by the environmentally friendly Swedish brand Eco Wallpaper, which is supplied by Kollektion and Co, should do the trick.

This is all Design 101, of course, but by making the space just a little bit more inviting, I should be able to transform a room that will otherwise end up being enormously under utilised. The aim for 2012 is to set small, manageable goals that are easy to achieve. And who knows? Once I find success with these, I may yet find it in me to run that marathon.

For details on how to purchase a Bokashi composting bin, visit www.bokashidubai.com

Kas Australia is located in the Dubai Mall, Mercato Mall, BurJuman, Dubai Festival City and Ibn Battuta Mall, www.kasaustralia.com.au

Eco Wallpaper is available to order from Kollektion and Co, www.thekollektion.com

The farmers' market takes place at the Dubai Garden Centre, Sheikh Zayed Road, each Saturday from 8am-1pm