



HOME TRUTHS
WHO? The Bodin family: Henrik, 44, a graphic designer, his wife Catharina, 40, a nurse, and their three daughters, Hedvig, 11, and Olga and Nora, both nine.
WHAT? A former school dating back to 1920 where the classrooms have been converted into a fully functioning home with an unusual layout and striking proportions.
WHERE? Viken, southern Sweden.

THEY THOUGHT WE WERE CRAZY...

Friends predicted disaster when the Bodins bought an old school to convert into a family home - 'too much work and no potential'. But the result has proved them wrong!

By day the hallway has preserved its feeling of school, with hangers for coats and shelf storage. By night, atmospheric lighting and underfloor heating turn the space into an extra room to entertain. There are drawbacks to vast spaces, however. 'Acoustics can be a problem,' says Henrik. 'We've tried more fabrics of course but it's not enough. We're still thinking...'



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” We love that our rooms have a past, and that they were built for energetic little people! “

'Although we were first attracted to this house for its possibilities as a spacious home for a big family, its sense of history soon became a real pull. Because it was originally built as a school, it is very special. We spent time discussing with friends and family whether we should buy it, but everyone was strongly against it! A wonderful elderly lady lived here and, although she loved the house, it was quite run-down because its sheer size had made maintaining it unmanageable for her. Eventually we ignored everyone's advice and followed our gut feeling. Converting it has been both fun and challenging. Most houses are built with intention, so when new owners move in, it's clear to them what each room is for. But we had to decide which room should serve which domestic purpose, and how to carve up the larger spaces into more manageable areas. Our hallway was built very wide and long for the scores of children who used to pour through it at once, so now we use it like an anteroom. When people come for dinner, we lay a table of finger food and drinks there, so that they can remove their coats, help themselves to something and then wander through to the main part of the house.'



'It wouldn't be right to live in a school without books, so I made the bookshelves myself,' says Henrik. 'Ironically, we don't have time to read while the kids are small and with our renovations, but that will change. The lower shelves are curtained off so that we can draw them across any mess. We also pull out the TV-bench from behind the curtains.'



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It's a big house but it still feels cosy. Good storage allows us to be relaxed about our stuff

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Henrik and Catharina knew what they wanted when they planned the kitchen. 'Long workbenches and space is important so the family can be together while doing different things. Friends help out too when they come for dinner.' They found the three-metre dining table in the cellar, still with pupils names etched underneath!

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Friends advised us to paint the paneling white, but the scratches are part of the school’s history
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‘The pannelling is fir wood, which was commonly used in schools at the time. Painting it white would open up the space but we love its imperfections,’ says Henrik. ‘As in the living room, we used curtains in front of the wardrobe so it becomes more vivid and things are easier to reach.’

TEXT: KATE JOHNSON PHOTOGRAPHY: PER GUNNARSSON



'We want the girls to get into the habit of putting their toys away,' says Catharina. 'But we don't want them to have to spend too much time doing it.' Each has plastic boxes – in different colours of course! They keep their favourite toys in clear crates on wheels – easy to drag around the room, easy to see what's inside.



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**In a family home,
 everyone needs a
 corner to call their
 own, somewhere
 that is all about them**
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'We believe a bedroom should be about relaxation. The girls do all the things children usually do in their rooms – play, sleep, draw, have friends over, read... But their homework is done at the kitchen table. We wouldn't want to have to work in our bedroom and neither should they! Hedvig is interested in design and was quite strict about all the colours in her room coordinating. Nora likes "crazy" colours, but we didn't want to go overboard, so indulged her with cushions and the bright beads tied over her bed. They're easy to remove, which is good because her taste could change at any time! Olga loves gymnastics, so we converted the school's old vaulting horse into extra storage for her. It's a beautiful object, and it holds her bigger toys. Recently she's started talking about creating an "aquatic" room and Nora is keen to paint a blue sky with clouds over her ceiling. As far as possible, we try and act on the girls' creative impulses – within reason of course!'



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