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Alice B-B wonders why moving back to The Magic House was not all it lived up to

What is it about men and their sofas? Why do they cling, marsupial-like to their bachelor seat, even though the wretched thing has long past its sell-by date? Is the sofa a symbol of young-free-and-single days that they're desperately hanging on to? And why is it that the item is often an offensive shade of brown and the material probably leather or corduroy? Let's just say, there's a sofa-tussle going on between me and Mr Love at The Magic House in the Cotswolds.

After living for two years with no heating, garish wallpaper and damp, Mr Love and I have finally finished doing-up our pretty 17th-century Cotswold stone house. Last weekend we moved back in. And it was weird.

I've tried to work out why moving back felt so flat, and I think it's simply that... My life hasn't changed.

For the last two and half years, I've dreamed of this moment; made architectural plans, applied for planning permission, had hundreds of meetings, drunk endless coffee, bought millions of sample pots of paint and all the time my eye was on the prize of 'when we move back in'. How suddenly in that moment, everything would be different. I'd imagined that when the house would be shiny, new and perfect, and our bath would have marble all around it, the kitchen would be dreamy, then life would be

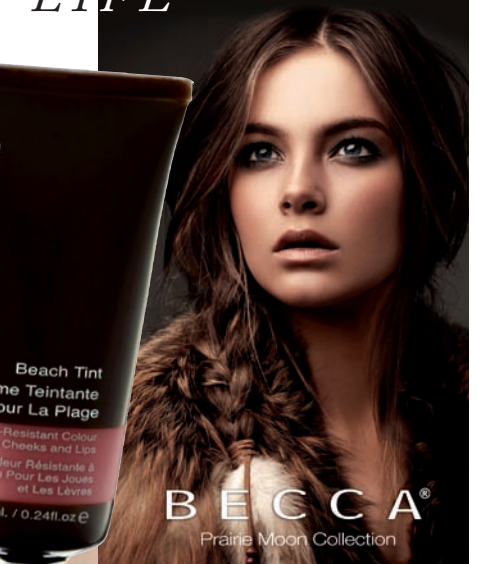
completely wonderful. The daft thing is life is already great with plenty of brilliant ups and blasted downs. But the colour of my kitchen hasn't changed anything. Yes, it feels elegant and, boy, is it nice to feel warm. But the truth is, that instant of moving back into our house, was palpably underwhelming. And Mr Love felt it too.



There's also this odd moment, when the last of the builders – Dave the fantastic carpenter and Darren the brilliant (and extremely patient) decorator – left. That was strange. Because in a way – it's been their house for the last six months. It hasn't been our house at all. For us it's been a lovely project, a blank canvas that we've been playing with. So, as I forlornly waved goodbye to Darren and Dave, I realised this was the end of the project and it was our house again. And we were going to

have to make friends with the space that had so dramatically changed. It was time to live here again and make this house our home.

We unpacked the barn, which had been stuffed with furniture and there was more disappointment; our gear was still the same. No little elf had magically swapped Ikea for George Smith. So, compared with our swanky new house, the furniture looked decidedly lowly. And then came the sofa tussle. Mr Love announced that he loathed my oversized grey



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wool Conran armchair. 'You've got to get it out of the house, NOW. It's offending me,' he said. I told him that his oatmeal cord Ikea sofas made me nauseous and if they hung around any longer I would vomit. All over them. We hit stalemate for a split second. Then, thankfully, we both agreed that all of the sofas were revolting and that it was time to buy new ones. We'd ditch our past and look to the future – whilst sitting on new, handsome armchairs in our pretty little home. ■

MOVE IT

1 The perfect house doesn't mean the perfect life. 2 Be grateful for having a nice house, but don't expect it to make you happy. 3 Before putting your furniture in storage, buy a few new pieces – it'll make a nice surprise when you're unpacking. 4 Get to the bottom of what your argument is about – it's usually not about the sofa.