



My First Home: Kunle Barker



by Oliver StallwoodPublished May 13, 2019

KUNLE BARKER is a property expert, journalist and TV presenter on ITV's *Love Your Home And Garden with Alan Titchmarsh* and *Renovate Don't Relocate* with Sarah Beeny.



How old were you when you bought your first home?

I bought my first place in Woodhouse in Leeds as a student aged 25 in 1998. It was a five-bed Victorian townhouse in a student area. I lived on one of the floors and rented the rest out.

Was it a nice property?

It was a student area, so not in a prime location. There was a lot of social and student housing. It was a fun area, though.

How did you end up owning a five-bedroom home at that age?

Quite luckily, my bank manager called me while I was at uni. They had a graduate scheme and offered me a 100 per cent mortgage. Even back then, London was expensive but in Leeds I managed to get the house for £69,000.

Did it feel grown up to buy a house?

It felt quite risky signing up for a mortgage as I didn't have a job. It was dependent on letting the rooms out to other students. It was easier than I thought. At uni, they had an organisation finding houses for students and you could register your house. I rented the house by end of the day.

Did you buy it as a project?

I couldn't afford to get the builders in and thought about what could I do myself cosmetically. I sanded floors and did all the other jobs. Ikea had just opened in Leeds so I got a lot of furniture from there. A friend was a kitchen fitter and showed me what to do and he would come round every few days and check if it was OK. But I didn't do the gas, electric or plumbing: it's important to get experts in when you need to.



Were you surrounded by other students?

I had just finished a Masters in Human Resource Management [his degree was in Manufacturing Engineering] and was working in a local pub called The Faversham, so I extended my student life.

How long did you keep the property?

Five years. I sold to move back down to London and made about £20,000 on it.

What did you learn? Go with your gut. Don't try to second-guess the market. Have a plan that you believe can deliver. I could have bought a smaller house in a richer area but I wanted more rooms in a student area that would be easier to rent out.

Where did you go next?

I moved to Maida Hill in West London. Buying the first place allowed me to know what was possible. I had learnt about budgets and renovation and what works. First-time buying sets you up for what you will do with property going forward. If I had bought it, not rented it out and it was repossessed, my outlook would have been very different.

Would you encourage other potential buyers to do it?

It's risky but if you're smart and there are deals available to you, then yes. I did it because of the 100 per cent mortgage but overstretched myself in theory. But if I looked at price of the property and the potential gain, it was worth it, plus I could have probably just about covered the mortgage on my own if needed.

Top tips for renovating?

Do as much of the work as you can. Go into other houses and see what they've done. And don't feel you have to do everything in one go. Get one room nice and then move on to the next, or an extension. Before making structural changes, live in it for a bit. The house will tell you what it needs.

■ Kunle will be at the Ideal Home Show Scotland from May 24-27 at the SEC, Glasgow, idealhomeshowscotland.co.uk