

# Stolen hearts

This UK family can barely stay away from their Auckland waterfront holiday home



WORDS  
BRIDIE CHETWIN-KELLY  
PHOTOGRAPHS  
JANE USSHER

**THIS PAGE** The Jacobs family holiday home in Devonport, Auckland; the weatherboards were painted in Resene 'Double Concrete' to allow the period features to stand out in white.

**OPPOSITE** The living room was a winner in this year's Interior of the Year awards; existing panelling in the living room was painted Resene 'Half Sea Fog' with the wall above in Resene 'Quarter Foggy Grey'; the sofa is from David Shaw and the side table and lamps are from Trenzseater.



**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from left) The hall rug was custom-made by SF Design to have a waterfall effect; the footstools are from Trenzseater. Helen Jacobs was thrilled to have the previous owner tell her: "It was a good house but you've made it a great house." The circular art is made from recycled beehives by Claudia Alderink; the light is Lens Flair from ECC. **OPPOSITE** The media room has a moodier feel with Resene 'Half Foggy Grey' walls and art by Jane Mason; the unusual Kartell lamp is from Backhouse.

PORTRAIT: SARA PORTER



Long enamoured of New Zealand, Englishwoman Helen Jacobs spent a lot of time singing its praises to her son and husband before they finally agreed to visit. Her husband now calls it the most beautiful place in the world.

The connection began when Helen befriended a Kiwi at her first job after university in England, and in 1995 made her first trip to the land she now calls her second home.

It was during one visit to that same friend, while they were power walking along the beach in Devonport, that they happened upon a 1915 transitional villa for sale. Helen and her husband had no intention of buying in New Zealand but quickly realised they couldn't say no to this rare find. "We couldn't pass up the house. It had so many things we liked about it and the location ticked so many boxes, we would have been foolish not to," says Helen.

The home had a large garden that had already been landscaped and included a pool. That gave Helen a head start on a renovation she would conduct from the other side of the world, working around the 12-hour time difference to liaise with designers and tradespeople. "Once the structural parts of the renovation were in place, I found Trinity Interior Design who had the vision to see an end result of how I wanted the house to look. They did amazing planning work on fixtures and fittings and colour schemes, which really enabled things to move along at a great pace." >



**THIS PAGE** Designed by Wim de Bruin of Avéora, the kitchen is contemporary but signals the house's heritage by using honed marble and brass.

**OPPOSITE** (from top) Inspired by a bach the family stayed at in Russell, Helen wanted "a minimal kitchen with everything in the butler's pantry". Nestled next to another character building, the rear garden makes the most of its long dimensions; the home's flow from the seaviews out front, through the dining room to the garden earned a finalist spot in the Interior of the Year awards indoor/outdoor section.

The couple bought the house two years ago. Previous owners had run it as an upmarket bed and breakfast while living in a separate apartment on the upper floor. The house was in good condition but, as Helen says: "What we really wanted was for the house to be a family home for us."

It was important to the couple that they use local businesses for the renovation, employing architectural designer Fraser Gillies as well as Trinity Interior Design. Helen says she has never seen a team of people work so hard.

As with many renovations, there was more work than anticipated. "A lot of the issues were hidden. In the end we were actually very glad. We wanted to renovate the whole property from top to bottom to a high standard and we didn't want any issues in the future."

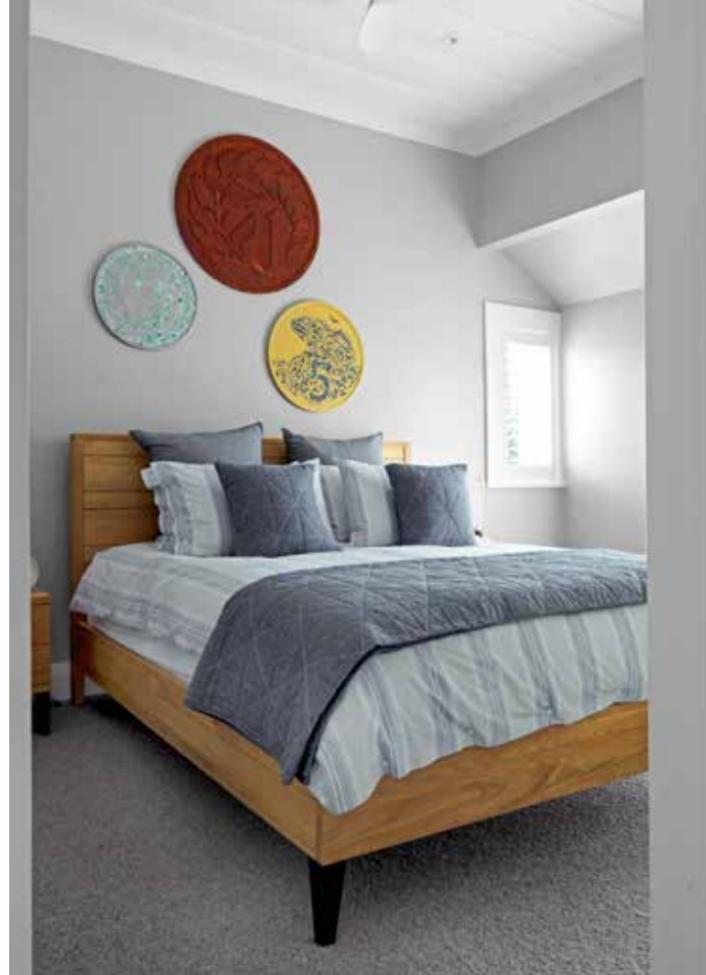
One major problem was that a rear extension had been built in the 1990s without consent, so it had to be redesigned by Fraser, new consents sought and then rebuilt.

Helen was also aghast at the laundry. "I was pretty horrified by the toilet next to the washing machine." It was swiftly replaced with a powder room and separate laundry. >



*'WE WANTED TO  
RENOVATE THE  
WHOLE PROPERTY  
FROM TOP TO  
BOTTOM TO A  
HIGH STANDARD'*





**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from top) While Helen bought bedding from England for the main bedroom, her intention is to buy locally from now on; the lamps are Longchamp from Trenzseater. Art made from porcelain pieces by Jane Mason hangs in the pool-side bedroom. The dressing table was designed by Philippa Whitaker from Trinity and made by Woodrights.

**OPPOSITE** (from left) Son James' room was reconfigured to include a small window to frame a view of the Sky Tower; the Manhattan bed is from Harvey Norman. The main bathroom vanity is oak; the tiles are from European Ceramics.



The main part of the house was in good condition. The apartment was decommissioned by replacing the kitchen with a bathroom and reconfiguring rooms to incorporate the spaces into the main house.

Helen was pleased that many of the fittings removed from the house didn't go to landfill. "We recycled a lot of what we had already in the house, donated what we couldn't use and sold the two kitchens."

After the time and effort spent retaining the original feel of the house, it now holds huge sentimental value for Helen despite living for half of the year on the other side of the world.

The house has parallels to the couple's home town in north-west England overlooking the Irish Sea. Both Devonport and their seaside village in the UK are similar-sized small communities, with character homes within walking distance of local restaurants. "A lot of the things we like about where we live in England we have found to be the same situation in Devonport."

When they spent their first jet-lagged night in their newly renovated home Helen says she felt amazing waking to views of a cruise liner going past the bedroom window.

As well as their secluded upstairs master bedroom, Helen loves the kitchen. "One of my favourite items is the range cooker. So many Christmas Day traumas involve not having enough space to cook everything, you can't get a ham and turkey and potatoes all in. But this Christmas, I got it all in."

The family spend as much time as they can in New Zealand and are looking forward to skiing this winter. With their son still in high school, they have no immediate plans to permanently relocate here. But is it a future plan? It most certainly is. ■

## Q&A

**Best seat in the house:** On the upstairs verandah overlooking the harbour. There is always something to see.

**Best decorating tip:** Check the paintwork with the lights on, especially uplights.

**Best budget tip:** Don't even contemplate it unless you have the budget. These old houses are always going to reveal hidden nasties.

**Best labour-saving device:** To achieve a renovation like this, there could be no labour-saving devices.

**Biggest renovation regret:** None. I always took the advice of the experts.

**Worst moment in the garden:** When my husband sliced through the watering system while planting some beautiful hydrangea plants I'd been gifted.

**What I want to change next around the house:** The wall at the front of the house, which is not in keeping. But we need to give our lovely neighbours a break.

**Favourite local restaurant:** Corelli's for breakfast.

**Best place for coffee:** Vondel.

**Favourite local shop:** Nest on Vauxhall Road.

*Helen Jacobs*

The floor was a bit touch and go at times, they put this wooden floor and they still worked around it.

The while house has being so overwhelming for us, e had signed everything off, did all the furniture. It was more than my wildest dream

ECC dining room table and light

All of the art was supplied by a local artist

Local art, designers, builders etc were a bit focus for Helen. This is super important.

Husband biggest concern, english football on the tv and a desk he could work at.

The shutters were a big thing

Fridge for the beer and soft drinks, own beer draws and champagne.

We are so happy, it's perfect. We might tweak the entrance exterior and gate, it isn't really authentic.

Previous owner of the house, It was a good house but you made it into a great house. It was like getting a seal of approval and that all foreigners coming in and just ruining the area and understanding of the community, mirror the history which was really important.