



HANDMADE

If you're going to tackle a major renovation it helps to be a carpenter – especially one married to a housing portfolio manager.

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Photography **Larnie Nicolson**





NESTLED IN A FOREST OF NEW ZEALAND NATIVES, a duck-egg blue mid-century home pops out of the foliage. A single glance at this West Auckland property is enough to glean that it is not just an ordinary house on an ordinary street, but a thoughtfully renovated retreat from the hectic buzz of city life to be found just a few kilometres away.

The home's owners, Marianne and Sean Falconer, were both Waikato born and raised, but had been living overseas for years before returning to New Zealand in 2011. Auckland was the obvious choice for Marianne's marketing career, but Sean was reluctant to live the city lifestyle. The leafy suburb of Titirangi was a beautiful compromise.

After many weekends spent scouring open homes, they knew they'd found the place for them when they stumbled across an untouched 1958 abode tucked away on a private street.

It was everything they wanted: space, privacy and tranquility. Floor-to-ceiling windows on the elevated front facade framed the property's extensive bush views; an established garden provided a screen from the neighbours and the location offered wild West Coast beaches for surfing and bush tracks for hiking. Plus, a bonus for Sean, there was a good shed with space for all of his building projects, and ample room to restore his GB400 motorbike. They wasted no time – the deed was soon in their name.

Still, as exciting as their purchase was, they clearly had a do-up on their hands. The house was dark and dingy, with retro wallpaper and well-trodden carpet. Luckily they had some serious in-house skills to call on. Owner of Falcon Builders, and with 14 years' experience as a carpenter, Sean was more than fit for the task. And knowledge garnered from Marianne's work with the Housing Portfolio at Westpac would help them add value to the property.



As the house was largely liveable, adding an extra bedroom and living area was the first priority. “We wanted to add value,” Marianne says, “but we also wanted to create space so our out-of-town friends and family could come and stay.”

That space was found in the ‘dungeon’ downstairs. Successfully transforming the uninhabitable space into a second living room with a spare bedroom and ensuite gives guests their own space to relax downstairs – and provides a man cave for Sean to use the rest of the time.

This area is one of his favourite spots to relax after a busy day project-managing builds. It is also a place to display his favourite possessions; including his grandfather’s staghead, antique skis and a steering wheel from his old racing car.

But the most exciting part came in tearing this room apart rather than putting it together. “We discovered beautiful >

FAR LEFT The Falconers and their dog Moscow enjoy the peace and quiet of the surrounding forest. **CENTRE LEFT** The concrete benchtop and macrocarpa panelling were handcrafted by Sean – as were the pantry shelves. **ABOVE LEFT** Scandinavian design inspired the kitchen style. The colour scheme was also guided by natural materials, with the grey of steel and concrete and the warm tones of timber. **ABOVE RIGHT** Moscow demonstrates that the lounge is one of the cosiest spots in the house.

LIVING ROOM The hallway was pushed out to create a wide open space for the lounge area. Sean designed and built a timber fireplace surround to conceal the old-fashioned clinker brick, with Scandinavian-style open shelving to soften the stark white walls. He also laid macrocarpa flooring, before blanding it.





Punctuality
is the
Virtue of
the Bored



DOWNSTAIRS Wanting to preserve the original joinery, the couple added character with their own design elements. A case in point is the dramatic floor-to-ceiling black balustrade framing a unique black-stained ply staircase.





Oregon timber beams with herringbone bracing in the ceiling structure,” Marianne says. “So we cleaned them up and kept them exposed to keep a point of interest in the room.”

Then it was time to move the renovation upstairs, starting with the kitchen. Careful planning and inventive handiwork were needed to make the small space more usable. “We pushed out the hallway, so we could add in the kitchen island,” Marianne says. “This was a must, because we love cooking.”

The macrocarpa kitchen island with concrete benchtop, both crafted by the talented Sean, gives extra bench space – and looks gorgeous too. “We love macrocarpa as it has a great smell and is naturally durable without the need for nasty chemical treatments, and we wanted to tie in natural materials wherever possible.”

The end result is an open-plan living space, merging the kitchen, dining and lounge. The area is light and spacious, and

with outdoor living flowing from both the front and back, it is perfect for entertaining.

And guests are bound to be impressed. With Scandinavian elements, mid-century features and curious contemporary edges, this home does eclectic to perfection – piles of character having been added to its strong bones.

Reflecting on the couple’s teamwork, Marianne says: “If I have a vision, Sean knows how to execute it. His craftsmanship goes beyond building work, to metalwork and more – he really can make anything. Typically I bring the soft furnishings and colour to the table, and Sean has the structural ideas and carpentry detailing.”

When you walk around this stunning home, the quality of workmanship, quirky design features and seamless flow is indeed evidence of the marrying of two talents. ■



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BATHROOM French doors were added to the bathroom, allowing a restorative view of an ancient 200-year-old kauri tree from the claw-foot bath. “We used bevelled tiles and mosaics to create texture, with black grout and hexagonal tiles creating contrast. Sean restored the enamel bath, and hand-crafted the copper tapware as well.” **EXTERIOR** The house is painted in Karen Walker by Resene Powder Blue, to highlight the original cladding.



AT A GLANCE

The project: Marianne and Sean Falconer renovated a mid-century home in West Auckland, turning it into an eclectic and cosy haven.

How long did the renovation process take? Three years – we overhauled the whole house. Let’s just say we are loving our weekends off the tools at the moment!

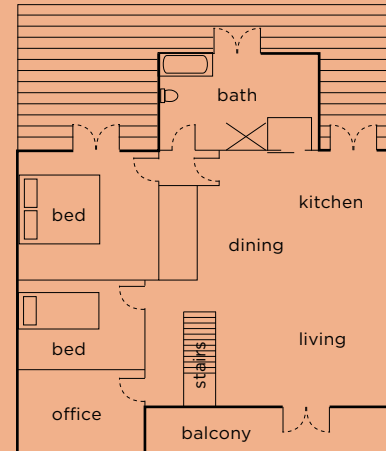
What is your favourite room in the house? Our bathroom. We approached the renovation by opening everything up, to create space and flow. We also wanted to make the most of the morning sun and the surrounding nature so we added French doors, which means you can sit in the claw-foot bath and look up at the kauri trees in the back yard, which is a great way to unwind after a day in the city.

What has influenced your design style? Our travels have definitely inspired our design and aesthetic taste. I have lived in France so there’s a bit of a French flavour

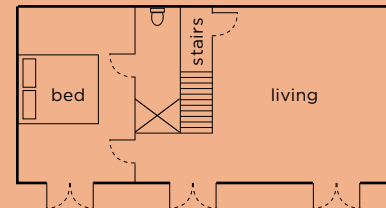
to the master bedroom, particularly in the colour scheme and the use of linen. We have also spent quite a bit of time in Japan, which is where the Japanese art comes from – and the appreciation for Asian styling, which inspired the black balustrades. I’m also quite sentimental, so a lot of our décor has been passed down by grandparents and given to me over time. I can never throw a gift away and love to find ways to incorporate them into my home. Another source of inspiration, admittedly, is Pinterest.

Did you get any outside help during the renovation? Sean’s sister, Sommer Cook, is an interior designer. She helped us to decide on paint colours for the interior and exterior, advising on soft furnishings to complement the home and sourcing 100 percent linen drapery. Sticking with a naturally inspired palette, we used Resene Quarter White Pointer for the interior walls to allow the design features throughout the house to speak for themselves.

Top floor



Ground floor



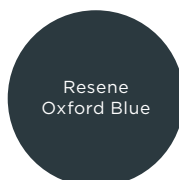
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DESIGN DETAILS

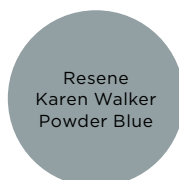
Marianne and Sean have put their stamp on their mid-century home with handcrafted furniture and eclectic trinkets collected over the years.



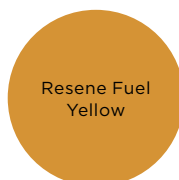
ABOVE Natural timbers and building materials have been carefully sourced and selected by the couple throughout the renovation process, with a view to avoiding any environmentally harmful products.



Resene Oxford Blue



Resene Karen Walker Powder Blue



Resene Fuel Yellow



Resene Quarter Alabaster



Usine pendant, \$499, boconcept.com



Tealight holders, \$19 each, boconcept.com



Retro Lynn swan, starting at \$49, perchhomewares.co.nz



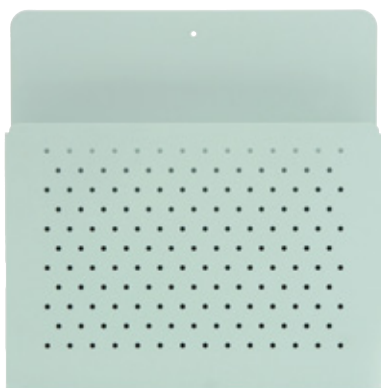
Porto vessel, \$49.95, freedomfurniture.co.nz



Retro Hotel jug, \$44.90, ikoiko.co.nz



Summer cushions, \$89 each, juliettehogan.com



Storyboard magazine rack by Jed Hooker, \$195, mrbigglesworthy.co.nz



Ib Kofod-Larsen reclining armchair for Selig, \$2250, mrbigglesworthy.co.nz