

DINING The dining chairs are from Cult Auckland and are super practical when you have young grandchildren. The recycled matai dining table was made by a former neighbour in Cambridge and holds many cherished memories for Gaelene and Howard Falconer. The replica Moooi Heracleum round series suspension light looks stunning above the table.

An elevated section in the Bay of Plenty's Te Puna hills, with its distant views to the sea, was the perfect spot for a spacious new build

FALCONERS' NEST

Text **Holly Jean Brooker** Photography **Alice Veysey**



Meet & greet
Gaelene (facilitator for Look Good Feel Better), and Howard Falconer (commercial property developer).



For ex-farmers, Gaelene and Howard Falconer, a move to Tauranga in 2014 was a lifestyle change the hard-working couple was ready for. After many years farming, then more recently owning a large lifestyle block and property in Cambridge, they were ready to downsize and refocus their energies on building something new.

Their priorities for a section were clear. “We weren’t used to having neighbours close to our home, so having space and elevation with a good view was important. We were used to seeing cows, not houses,” says Gaelene.

The hunt begins

While the hunt was on for the perfect piece of land, the adventurous couple took a few months off to go sightseeing and skiing in Europe, which offered plenty of time to gain perspective about this next phase of life. It took six months to find the magic spot – an elevated section in the Te Puna hills looking out over Tauranga with views to Whakaari/White Island and Slipper Island, while being close enough to their four children and eight grandchildren. The steep section had enough land for gardens, without being too much space to maintain.

But first, a tiny home

While they built this new home, Howard turned his hand to transforming a couple of 12 metre shipping containers into a two-bedroom semi-permanent home to live in. “We’d been renting while land hunting and decided to save rental costs during the build by living in a tiny house on the site. We planned to live there for a year, but it turned into three,” Gaelene explains.

While the best-laid plans don’t always pan out, there’s always a silver lining. Howard reflects: “The area is prone to slips, and the geotech (ground engineering) was a lengthy process. It took a good year to get started on the build due to the consent process, then a further two years to build.”

“The mud and dirt and mess was pretty crazy,” chips in Gaelene. “But we both loved this season in our life, it was genuinely a learning experience. We’d always lived in lovely, comfortable homes, and during this build we were



ENTERTAINER’S DREAM The walk-in pantry features open shelving to display Gaelene’s crockery collection and cookbooks. **LIGHT AND EASY** (opposite) The dowel pendant lights above the kitchen island are by Tim Webber. The benchtop is Silestone Calacatta Gold engineered stone.





MADE BY HAND Large concrete blocks feature throughout the house and look particularly striking in the main entrance with the antique storage box, which was bought 30 years ago. "Howard made one block each day, then we rusticated them to get them a little rougher to suit our style," says Gaelene. **TV ROOM** (opposite) This cosy area off the main family room was built with the grandchildren in mind, but it has become a space the couple also enjoy using in the evenings to unwind.

jumping around living in different rental properties, and then a tiny little space. It was hard at times, especially when we were looking after grandkids in a small space. But we all got to love it. Our kids always say, 'Home is where Mum and Dad are?'

The design

The vision for the design was for a Black Barn-like, family-friendly contemporary home, focused around four gabled pod sections. The three-bedroom, three-bathroom house is connected with flat sections, with cedar cladding and shingles used on the exterior. Facing north towards the distant ocean views, an elevated driveway would create a dramatic entrance and outlook.

With architectural plans by designer Tane Cox from Red Architecture and motivation in spades, the Falconers got stuck in

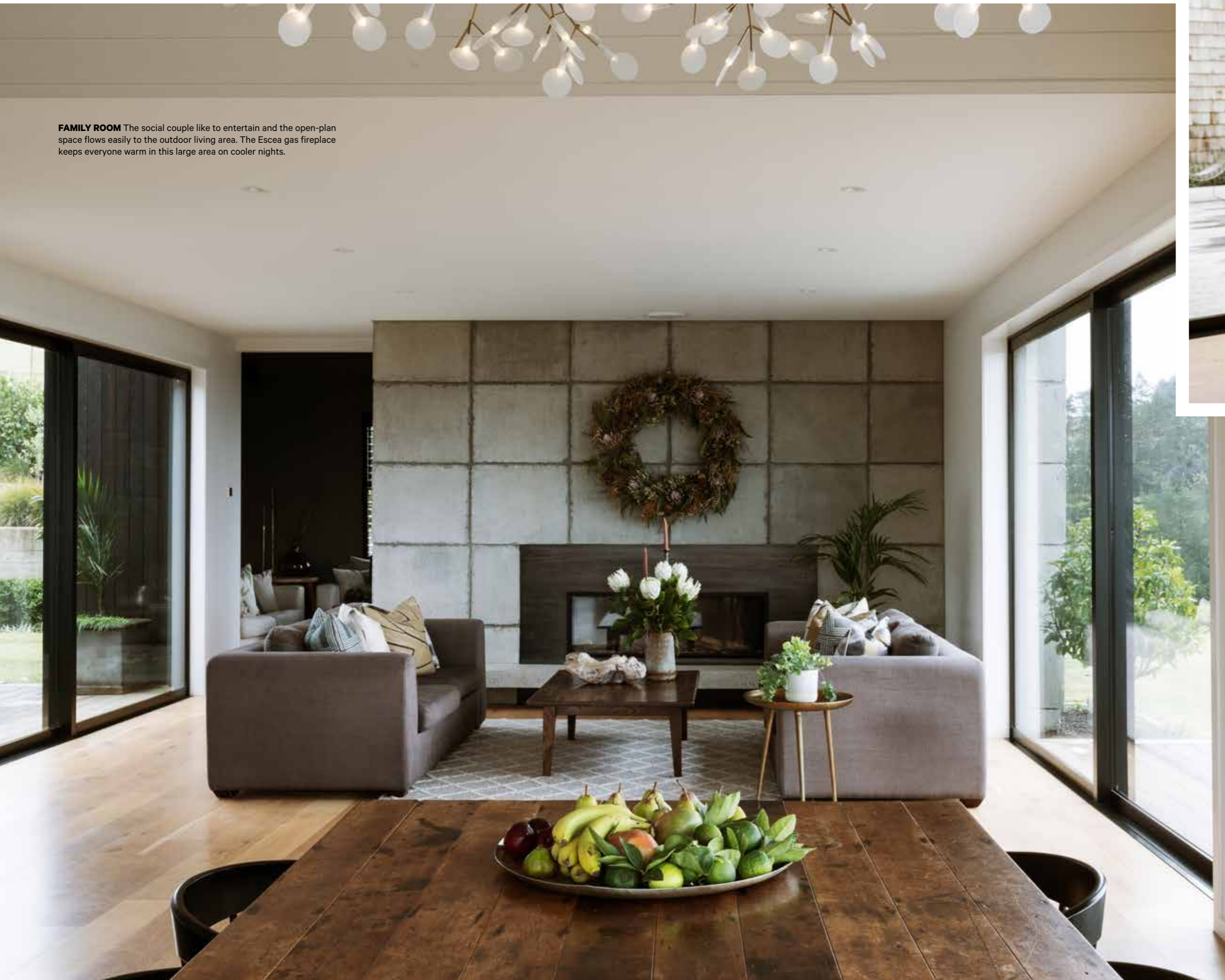
using Howard's practical skills to build the house himself. Having trained as an aircraft electrical engineer before moving into farming when the couple got married, his practical, get-it-done mentality meant he was ideally suited to the project.

"I remember him at 22, building the dairy shed on his dad's farm," recalls Gaelene. "He has always renovated our houses, and lately, he's developed commercial properties. Howard has to make everything. In fact, it's a running joke in our family that whenever the kids want something, they say, 'Dad will make it?'"

But it certainly wasn't a solo effort. Gaelene was just as much on the tools as Howard. "Yes, I was his lackey. I would be on the roof with him lifting the iron into place and helping carry Gib board. Admittedly, I would get very sore shoulders from the hard labour," she says.



FAMILY ROOM The social couple like to entertain and the open-plan space flows easily to the outdoor living area. The Escea gas fireplace keeps everyone warm in this large area on cooler nights.



The layout

The main bedroom and bathroom, kitchen and dining is to the right of the home and the hallway in the central section connects the two gabled sections. The left side of the home contains the guest wing, with the TV room at the back.

The open-plan kitchen, dining and family room is located at the back of the property and overlooks Te Puna, with extensive views of the coastal region of Tauranga harbour and Mount Maunganui. In this entertaining space, the flooring features French oak, contrasted above with cathedral-like height in the white tongue-and-groove ceilings. “The large triangle-shaped window wasn’t in the plans, the architect had designed a flat ceiling. But Howard wanted expanse and I wanted big beams, so we compromised and got a coved ceiling,” says Gaelene.

The kitchen features black oak timber panelling for the cabinetry, which is a stunning contrast to the white-panelled ceilings above and the timber floor below. In this space, Gaelene worked closely with The Kitchen Business to design a functional space in a simple, classic style that was built to last.

The adjoining family living area features an Escea gas fireplace, nestled into rough concrete block work. Every block was made by Howard prior to the floor going down. “Howard made one block each day, then we rusticated them to get them little rougher to suit our style.” The block work also features in the entrance at the front.

For the social couple, the inviting dining space flows out to outdoor living, which suits their lifestyle. A separate media room offers a quieter



Tip When mixing metals in the bathroom stick to two types – and use each metal more than once.

BEDROOMS Much of the artwork in the house, such as these skateboards made by graphic designer daughter Sally for a final exam, was created by the Falconer children. The bunk beds were built in the office, near the main bedroom, and each of the guest rooms has its own ensuite.



“We wanted our home to feel homely, and although the house is new, we wanted our past to be honoured.”

GAELENE FALCONER



EXTERIOR Concrete blocks to match the interior were also used outside. The front door is made of mill steel panels, an old timber door covered in steel in three places.



space to sneak away to when there are lots of people. “We built this TV room off the main family room with the children in mind. But it’s a room we use ourselves in the evenings to unwind. If we have a big family dinner here someone will end up lying on the couch in the TV room because it’s so relaxing,” says Gaelene.

“We built bunks for the younger children in the office next to our main bedroom for when they stay, so they’re close to us,” she says.

Green fingers

Living on site during the build meant keen gardener Gaelene had time to establish the landscaping. “I love formal gardens, structure and repeat planting. Now they are established, it’s not too much work.”

With the house positioned on a hill to optimise the views, the couple also invested in a lot of native planting. At the front of the house, Podocarpus totara ‘Matapouri Blue’ hedging helps to screen the new neighbouring house below them.

The styling

For Gaelene, homemaking and beautiful interiors is a passion that flows into her volunteer work at the Look Good, Feel Better charity. She’s been involved for nearly 30 years facilitating the workshops, which offers a free makeover for cancer patients dealing with the visual side effects of treatment.

Many of Gaelene’s pieces hold special meaning and history, her sentimental nature flowing through her home, along with a minimalist approach. “We wanted our home to feel homely, and although the house is new, we wanted our past to be honoured. We sold a lot



FINAL FLOURISHES Beautiful interiors are a passion for homemaker Gaelene and her attention to detail can be seen in every room, such as this fruit bowl arrangement. The couple splurged on cedar cladding and shingles, with Gaelene oiling every piece used on the couple’s pretty garden shed (below).



of our antique furniture as it didn’t suit our new home, but kept a few special pieces.”

Sofas and chairs were recovered, apart from the couches in the family room because Gaelene likes the lived-in look. “I love the memories many of our older pieces hold, like our dining table, which our neighbour in Cambridge built. The kids did their school assignments on that table and I remember [son] Sean reloading his rifle bullets on it. It’s made from recycled matai, which was popular 35 years ago. Sean’s a clever craftsman and is about to build us a replica-sized table.”

Dream team

With 40-plus years of marriage under the belt, the couple know how to keep fun at the centre of everything they do. “It was a fabulous journey and a fun project to do together. Living on site was great, we both got stuck in, We’d be exhausted after a hard day’s labour, but it was great for our relationship. It’s been a wonderful whirlwind time.” ●