



Double vision

Friends and colleagues Toni Brandso and Olivia Patience have recently put their ideas into practice at their own places.

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AWARD-WINNING INTERIOR design studio Material Creative is led by passionate businesswomen and great mates Toni Brandso and Olivia Patience. The pair met at Victoria University, bonded during late nights completing projects for their Bachelor of Design in interior architecture, and after graduating both migrated to Auckland to develop their careers in architecture practices.

In 2008, they found themselves at a ski resort in the French Alps, working and living with mutual friends. The topic of starting a business popped up from time to time, and Toni recalls

that their first strategy session was over fresh baguettes.

“I’d often end up helping Liv out in her chalet and we’d talk about working for ourselves. I clearly remember buttering a baguette while we chatted about business names one day after the breakfast service – but at that stage it just was a dream.”

Fast forward to today and that dream is their reality. On top of running their thriving business based on Auckland’s K Road, both Toni and Liv have recently bought their own homes and undertaken renovation projects that reflect their individual styles. We stopped by to have a look around. ▷



AT HOME WITH TONI

Toni took her time finding a dream home to invest in, sticking to a tight budget and a strict list of criteria to be ticked off. But when her real estate agent took her to visit a 50m², two-bedroom unit in Sandringham, she knew it was the one as soon as she walked in the door. On the top floor of a block of 1970s units, with lots of windows letting in light and giving a great view right through to the Sky Tower, it was private, spacious and filled with possibility.

Given the keys the day before she went north for Christmas, Toni returned in early January 2017 ready to roll. Rallying her parents and a bunch of friends for an intense working bee, they sanded, stripped, ripped up carpet, sprayed mould, painted, bogged up rotten bits and fixed up leaks.

She says she found renovating her own home quite different to working on client briefs, especially as she was working to a tight schedule. "I had two weeks to turn around the main decisions on curtains, flooring and paint colours. It wasn't like a typical design project as I had to make snap decisions, so I based them on what I knew had worked on other projects."

A favourite design feature is the polished concrete flooring. "On my first visit to the house, I pulled back the carpet and discovered rough concrete. I was so excited I quietly put the carpet back down and didn't say a word – it was like finding gold. Having one >



TOP LEFT Toni at the pretty pink front door of her revamped home. The bronze Woodpecker door knocker is from Anthropologie – Toni had a friend bring it with her from the US when she came back to New Zealand for her annual summer holiday. **ABOVE** A table from Backhouse sits on the Vitex deck with secondhand chairs from Instagram store @thegoodswefound. **LEFT** This antique walnut side table is home to timber bowls made by Toni's grandfather and a collection of pottery that includes pieces she made herself.

LIVING Toni used Resene Wan White on the walls throughout the house and Resene Alabaster on the ceiling. The items she chooses to put on show all have special significance, like the Crown Lynn swan that was once her mum's. "My advice is to display what makes you happy," she says. "It brings me joy to look at my things as they all remind me of people and places."



KITCHEN To make this a multipurpose kitchen/dining/work space, Toni extended the kitchen bench to include an integrated table using a marble cylinder she found on Trade Me and a curved extension made by her joiners. The stools were another Trade Me find, just \$40 for the pair “and already the perfect blush pink.”



ABOVE & RIGHT The bamboo lattice pendant lights in the main bedroom (above) and guest room (right) are part of Ilse Crawford’s Sinnerlig range for Ikea. “Liv and I spotted them while on an inspiration trip to Melbourne the year before I bought my house, and I lugged them back as oversized luggage,” says Toni. She made the curtains in her room from Mokum’s Magnolia fabric and opted for Venetian blinds in the petite guest room as they fit cleanly within the window frame. **TOP RIGHT** The kitchen’s retro Tomado modular shelving system from Mr Bigglesworthy has visual appeal and creates extra storage space. A Tosca under-shelf tool hanger by Yamazaki from Father Rabbit is a nifty addition.



finish throughout the living and dining area creates continuity, which I prefer to disjointed areas of carpet and vinyl or wood.”

The flooring was a job Toni left to the experts, along with the patio decking, which was undertaken by Liv’s builder husband, Dave. But she saved money on labour by doing most of the alterations herself, which balanced out the expense of some big-ticket updates: replacing the roof, insulating, and installing a new hot water cylinder and a heat pump.

“Although they’re not aesthetically beneficial changes, they make a major difference to my enjoyment of the home,” says Toni. “I saved money where I could – my mum and I sewed linen curtains for the entire house, and to save on replacing the kitchen, I used Resene Waterborne Smooth Surface Sealer to cover the dated Melteca cabinetry.”

As a housewarming gift, Liv’s brother Tim Harper and his wife Tali gave Toni a pot of Resene Blanched Pink paint, which she used to paint her front door, the final flourish on a home that’s now distinctly hers. “I don’t buy things that are on trend, and I know what I like,” she says of her style. “When I see something I love, I buy it and treasure it for a long time. I’d had some of my light fittings stored away for years while I was flatting, waiting for the day when I could use them in my own home.”

All that hard work was well worth it in the end. “I love getting home after a long day and seeing the last of the evening sun streaming into my lounge,” says Toni. “There’s nothing quite as satisfying as knowing this is mine and I did it myself.” >



AT HOME WITH LIV

Three years ago, Liv and Dave Patience left the hospital with their first child – and a new home. “I’d just given birth to our son Archie and had surgery due to post-labour complications, and hours later Dave shot off to an auction with my dad to buy our first home!” recalls Liv. “He was obviously pretty keen on it.”

The large weatherboard house on a full site in the leafy suburb of Titirangi was in its original condition, with good bones and huge potential. The family lived in it for a year while they worked out exactly what they wanted, then began an overhaul. Once again, circumstances were less than ideal.

“We began renovating when I was pregnant with baby number two, and I was so sick with hyperemesis gravidarum [severe morning sickness] that I don’t even remember the design process,” says Liv. “We completed the renovation when Sylvie was eight weeks old.”

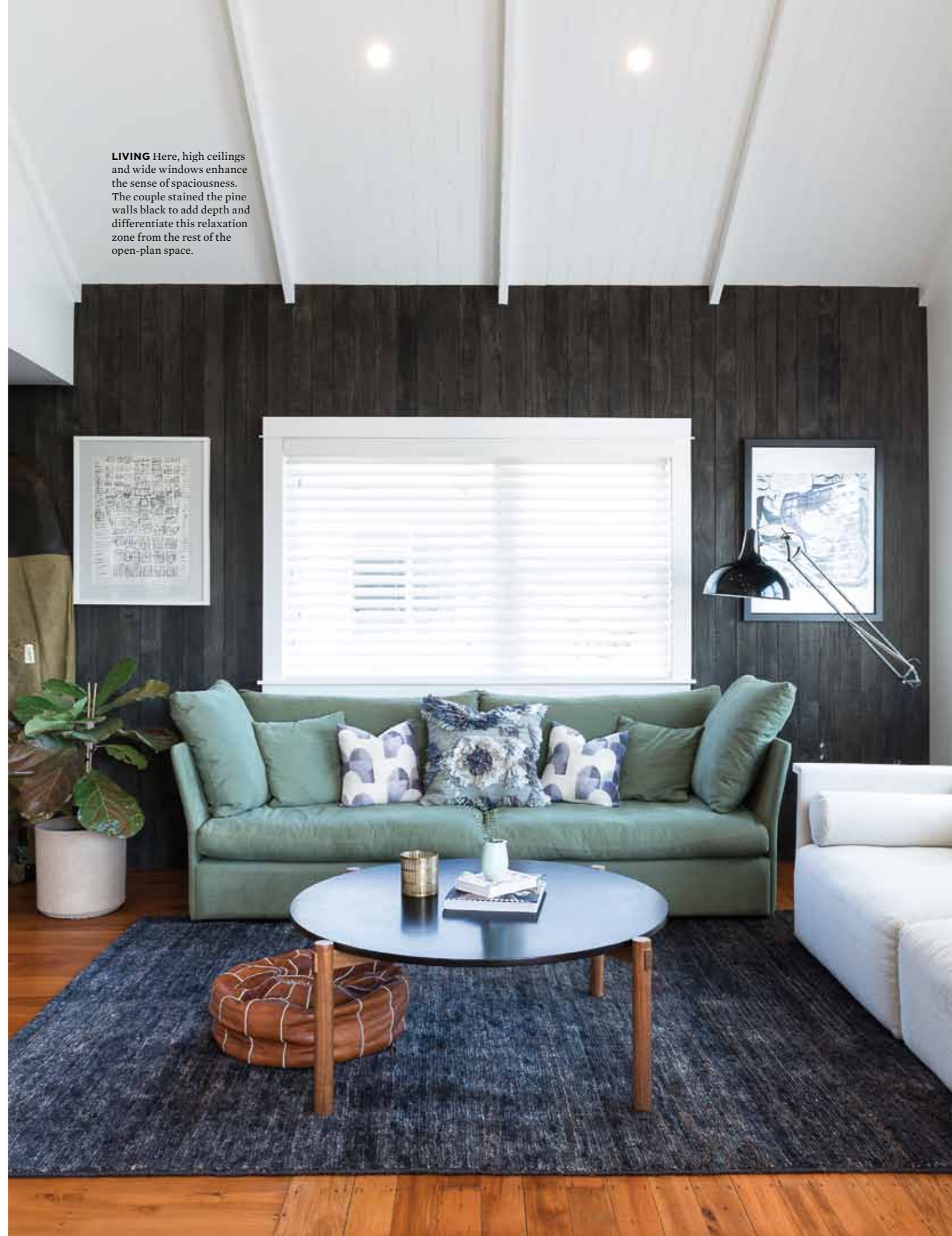
Both Liv and Dave are experienced renovators. Dave, a builder and owner of DP Construction, has built and renovated homes for more than a decade and says their insider knowledge helped them to create a dwelling they truly love.

“We spent a lot of time planning it out together and looking at layout options. The challenge for us was trying to fit a lot into a small footprint. We had to negotiate how to use each space, and let each other have a few wins so we both got our way.” ▷



TOP LEFT Liv, Sylvie, Archie and Dave on the Outline sofa by Simon James Design that informed their home’s colour palette. **ABOVE** New sliding doors open the dining area to the deck and offer a fantastic view of the city in the distance. An Ikea pendant light like the ones at Toni’s is the perfect match for the rimu table Dave made and cane chairs by Thonet. **LEFT** Carrara Pol Hexagon mosaic tiles from Tile Space provide subtle colour and texture in the kitchen, where Laminex Sublime Teak cabinets work beautifully with the home’s original matai flooring.

LIVING Here, high ceilings and wide windows enhance the sense of spaciousness. The couple stained the pine walls black to add depth and differentiate this relaxation zone from the rest of the open-plan space.





ABOVE Liv says she adores her and Dave's bedroom, which is painted in Dulux Madigan. "It's so calming and peaceful – you feel it the moment you walk in. It has the luxurious feel of a hotel room and is my ultimate hideaway." **RIGHT & OPPOSITE** Sylvie's room (right) is also a peaceful haven, painted in Dulux Cardrona and Resene Karen Walker Albescent White, and lit by a glittering gold Garland light by Tord Boontje for Habitat. "I carried that around with me for 10 years until I had a daughter whose room I could hang it in," says Liv. Archie's room (opposite) features the same shades, plus playful wall decals from May Time.



"I'd collected samples of everything I liked and was able to pull them out whenever I needed to make a decision or adapt to a change that had to be made," says Liv. A lover of soft, calming shades, she devised the colour palette around their olive green sofa from Simon James and the kitchen's existing mint green benchtop.

The kitchen island is a standout feature and a gamble that paid off. "I was designing a café at the time and had been researching rammed-earth techniques," says Liv. "I thought it could be a nice idea for our kitchen island – plus it would give me a chance to do a practice run at home before doing it in the café. I convinced Dave we should do it, and he suggested using concrete, so he packed it out, poured in the concrete in layers and added oxide to create different colours. We love the end result and it's as solid as a rock, so it doesn't matter if the kids ram their bikes or toys into it."

For all the couple's talent on the DIY front, there's something to be said for letting the experts do their job. "Tradies have a wealth of knowledge and expertise in their fields, and I have a renewed respect and admiration for builders," says Liv. "It's one thing to design a home, but to build it is quite another. Surface work like skimming, painting, restoring furniture, installing shelves and landscaping is relatively easy to do yourself. But it's quicker and in the long run cheaper to hire a registered builder, plumber and electrician to do what they do best."

As with any renovation, there were a few slip-ups along the way. But as Liv says, "It's these mistakes that have grown on me and created some unexpected character in the house." >

TONI SAYS...

Be bold, even in small spaces. I painted my walls white, but took risks with the large-scale floral curtains, patterned rugs and quirky features like the pink front door and the island bench.

Painting your kitchen cabinets is an easy way to upgrade on a budget. You can paint over smooth surfaces like melamine using Resene Waterborne Smooth Surface Sealer, then apply your chosen topcoat.

For comfortable living, spend money where it counts. The most impact I achieved at my place was with the new roof, hot water cylinder, insulation and heat pump.

But don't overlook the little things. I updated my wardrobe and hot water cupboard with timber handles.

Obtain multiple quotes for any job you need done by a professional. I got five quotes for my roof installation before I selected the right person for the job at the best price.

LIV SAYS...

The more items you can purchase ahead of time, the better. Not only will it mean you will have already made most of the big decisions, but the builders will be able to organise the sub-contractors knowing that when they arrive, the fixtures will already be on site so they can just get on with the job.

Be brave. People tend to renovate their homes with a view to selling them, but don't be afraid to renovate yours for you to enjoy, without worrying about how something will impact a future sale price.

Design your home around existing items or colours you love. This way, it'll feel authentically you. Take inspiration from trends, but don't bow to them too much or you may find yourself replacing items after just one season.

Get samples. From tapware, to curtain fabric, curtain rods, aluminium joinery, benchtops, tiles and carpet, product samples will help you create a cohesive look throughout the house. It'll also help to eliminate any nasty surprises when things are installed. ▲



ABOVE The pendant lights in Liv and Dave's kitchen are from The Vitrine. Liv extended the shade of the original 60s benchtop into the new cabinetry using Resene Karen Walker Half Robin Egg Blue. **BELOW** The main bathroom was designed to create a sense of escapism, with tapware from Robertson and tiles, basins and a deep bath "for full immersion" from Mitre 10. The walls are in Dulux Rangitikei River.

