



# Two's company

A dynamic mother-and-daughter team were up for the challenge when an ugly brick '70s house at the Mount needed a magical makeover

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



**Meet & greet**  
Karen (registered nurse) and Freya White (yoga teacher and studio owner).



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FREYA WHITE



**T**he old saying “Blood and business don’t mix” is advice that doesn’t ring true after listening to Freya and Karen White’s successful renovation stories. The clever mother-daughter duo, who started working together three years ago, embarked on their first project when Freya returned home after more than 10 years working overseas on super yachts. Karen, a registered nurse, became Freya’s sidekick, helping her set up yoga studio, Mahana Yoga Loft.

That project went so smoothly they decided to collaborate again, renovating and opening Gather Cafe at Papamoa Beach. They transformed an ugly, vacant space into a Mediterranean/Palm Springs-inspired cafe with rendered archways, wall niches and internal cacti gardens, a breeze-block counter, and beautiful organic fittings and furnishings sourced from all over the world.

Three months after opening, the duo were approached by someone who wanted to buy the new cafe. They realised that they loved the designing and renovation

process more than running the business, so they sold up, handed over the keys and opened themselves to a new opportunity.

**A new challenge**

No longer needed at the cafe, the two women were attracted to the idea of renovating a home, so the search for a suitable place began with good luck leading them to a dated and dark 1970s brick-clad home at the Mount. It had solid bones, was north-facing and had plenty of room for improvement. The location was ideal, with private access to the popular Mount Maunganui Golf Club and the white sand Omanu beach just a short stroll away.

By December 2020, the home was theirs and they were ready for their third project. It needed a lot of work. The carpet was dated, the walls layered in embossed wallpaper, the kitchen was small and poky, and the outdoors had potential yet to be realised.

All in all, it was the type of challenge the Whites were up for. Transforming a rundown home with blood, sweat and tears is no small feat, but Freya explains, “We have always been very creative and driven. Mum’s very much a DIYer and I am a go-getter, and thankfully, Mum is easily convinced to come along for the ride.”



**KITCHEN** Karen and Freya splurged on the stone benchtop but made an accidental error with the kitchen sink measurement after the counter was installed. Luckily, it was easily rectified but it did mean the sink was top mounted rather than below, which they’d originally wanted.

**LIVING** (opposite) The sofa is from Freedom and occasional chairs from Boheme Home. Some of the cushions and the Moroccan rug was sourced from Bohzali.



Karen agrees. “Being from different generations and having had different past experiences, we both bring different skills and insights to our projects, which we feel is an asset to our partnership.”

### Getting down to business

But taking possession during the summer and Christmas break meant shutdowns in the construction industry, and the serial DIYers were unable to book a tradie until February 2021. Freya explains, “We did as much DIY as possible, as we love to get our hands dirty; and it’s always better for the budget.”

The mother-daughter team kept the interior layout close to the original, apart from removing a non load-bearing wall, which was done to open up and widen the kitchen and dining area, creating more flow and to bring in more light.

The brown carpet throughout the home was ripped up and replaced with modern timber-look flooring to support the Balinese-like coastal look the Whites were aiming for. It’s also a much more practical choice for those wet and sandy returns from the surf beach around the corner.

“Our biggest challenge was two solid weeks of stripping two layers of wallpaper, which was throughout the entire house,” says Freya. “Never again. We completely underestimated how much time and effort this would take. We tried every technique to help the process, such as wallpaper steamers and scrapers, but nothing seemed to work. The top layer of wallpaper was an oil-based painted embossed pattern, which meant not a lot could permeate the surface.”

Eventually, the walls were stripped and ready to paint, but it was an arduous job.

### The great outdoors

The pair got stuck into painting inside and out but the exterior clinker bricks posed another massive and unexpected challenge; they sucked up a lot of paint very quickly.

Karen reflects, “It was like throwing buckets of paint at the wall because we used so much. As it was clinker, it meant the surface had to be painted with a brush rather than a large, extra-fluffy roller or sprayed. This was very time consuming, but worth it, as we absolutely love the finished effect, texture and overall feel. It’s hard to believe I’m saying this, but the result was worth the pain of painting.”

In the garden, they cleared and planted everything themselves. It was back-breaking work shifting large quantities of river stone and replacing them with trailer-loads of soil followed by white stones that they moved into place. The result is a coastal-themed oasis, with the smaller outdoor living space flowing freely from indoors.

### The dream team

Although there were a few barneys along the way, which is only natural when it comes to working with family, the clever duo have produced results they are both proud of.



**DREAM SCENES** Karen and Freya are fans of beautiful linen and sourced their bedding from I Love Linen, which works in harmony with the natural rattan and wood touches used in the sleeping areas. All the lampshades are from Corcovado.



**BATHROOM** (left) The splashback tiles are from Tilemax, the vanity is bespoke and the brass tapware from Abi Interiors. **LAUNDRY** (top) This is Freya's favourite room. **OUTDOORS** (below) Creating a coastal sanctuary was something the Whites wanted to achieve from the start and this private area looks serene and charming.

Freya reflects, "Mum was a stickler for going to the dump to drop off any little bit of trash, which meant we were basically at the dump every couple of days, much to my frustration."

## The result

Admittedly it was a whirlwind few months of intense work, but the mother-daughter duo thrived on transforming this drab home into a light, bright and relaxing abode. The use of natural tonal colours and furnishings help nurture the beachy, relaxed vibe of the location, something they wanted to achieve from the outset – a coastal Mediterranean-like sanctuary.

For Karen, the bedroom is a favourite space to wake up and open the bifold doors on to the private deck to enjoy the morning sun – "It feels like we have doubled the space with the easy flow out to private seating on the deck." Freya, however, favours a different space. "The laundry is a bit of a hit. Most people who visit love the laundry too. It has to be one of the most beautiful laundries I've ever seen," she says.

With the renovation completed just over a few months ago you might think the next thing the ambitious duo would be thinking about is taking an extended holiday, or even a staycation as a reward for their hard work. Instead, they're looking high and low for project number four to tackle. ●

