

# A SLICE OF PARADISE

An Auckland family finds beauty and freedom in two architecturally adventurous homes, writes Claire McCall

The utilitarian forms of a tent and a shed are the antithesis of the colonial splendour and filigreed finery of a Victorian villa. So what would the original owners of this 1.4ha Titirangi property have thought if you'd told them these were the structures that inspired this new family home?

No doubt, turn-of-the-century locals would have been amused. They'd have pointed towards the bottom paddock and invited you to stake a claim.

Contrariness is in the nature of the project. This duo of compact dwellings, designed by architect Tim Dorrington of DAA, has humble roots, but aims to exalt the spirit. And although two generations live here companionably side by side, the homes acknowledge the value of privacy.

Mark and Susie Easterbrook bought the land, and the forlorn, burned-out villa that was the second house to stand sentry alongside the creek here, at auction. With two young boys (Hunter, 10, and Jake, 5, who has been diagnosed on the autism spectrum), they were looking to simplify life — and were pleased that Susie's mother and step-father were keen to make the move to this property. "It was our place to be calm," says Mark. A creative director at boutique advertising agency Goodfolk, Easterbrook originally studied architecture at university before a C+ average convinced him there were "people more talented". Still, he had exciting ideas, "although I didn't try to be too prescriptive in the brief".

Dorrington was asked to design two dwellings, cousins in aesthetic, but sited for sun and seclusion.

"We wanted to create a tension between the two forms," he says.

For the main home, Dorrington conceptualised one long, barn-like pavilion with the bedrooms for adults and kids at opposite ends. A canopy-like roof strung between them "like a tarpaulin" created the glass-walled living, dining and kitchen. The smaller house, affectionately named "the mini-me", is only 2.5m away, but echoes this specific planning with its solid bookends and transparent core.

Arriving at this property is a journey of faded grandeur; a crumbling rock wall and timber gate opens to a circular sweep of driveway. But, rather than a classical fountain or genteel topiary, nikau palms inhabit the central-island plant bed. The bush is an appropriate garden here.

Pushed back from the house by a concrete patio and a stretch of lawn, it's a living backdrop that washes the rooms in greenery.

Visitors initially see only the short end of this rectangular house — the square end of a board-and-batten container for living in.

"That was deliberate," says Dorrington. "It's a very small form on approach."

Although there is land enough, the main house is a modest 120sq m.

"We didn't want more space for more stuff," says Easterbrook. Its slender footprint is 4m wide.

"That's generally enough space for most

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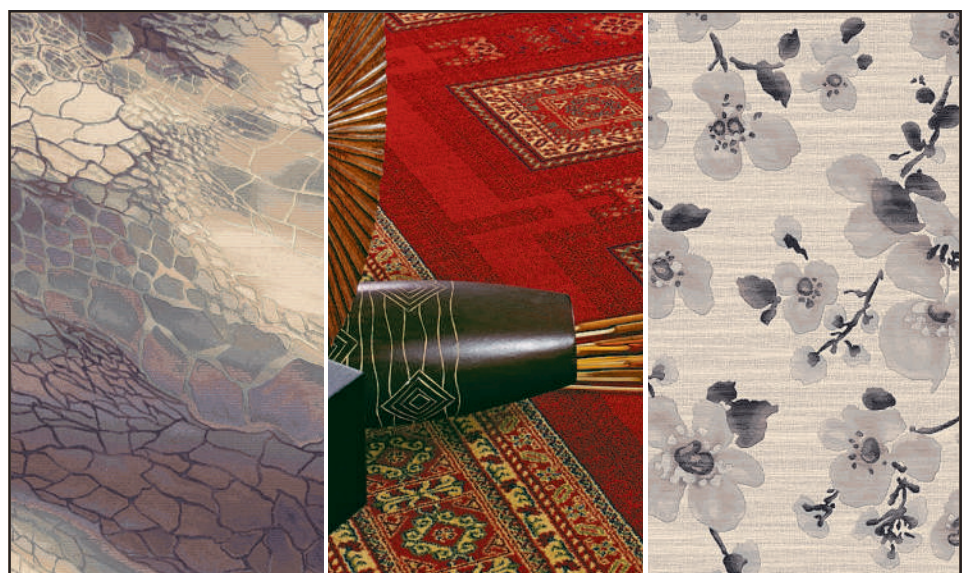
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