

This photo Izzy sits at the base of the staircase that connects the former state house with its modern extension. A batted balustrade adds a sculptural element to the utilitarian feature. **Opposite** Visitors always comment favourably on the kitchen with its bench wrapped in black subway-style tiles. Tim Webber custom designed the dining table and bench seats. When entertaining, the couple move the table parallel to the island so it better serves the courtyard leading off the kitchen

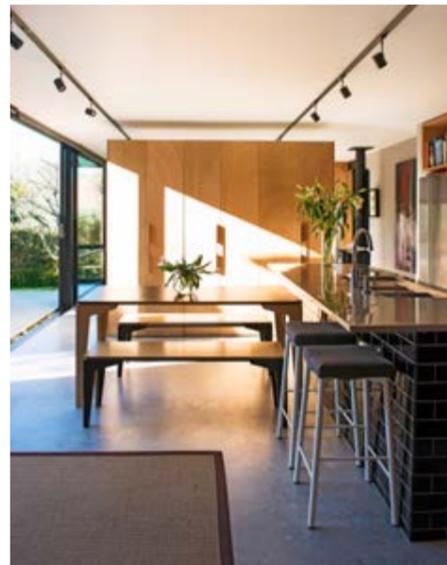
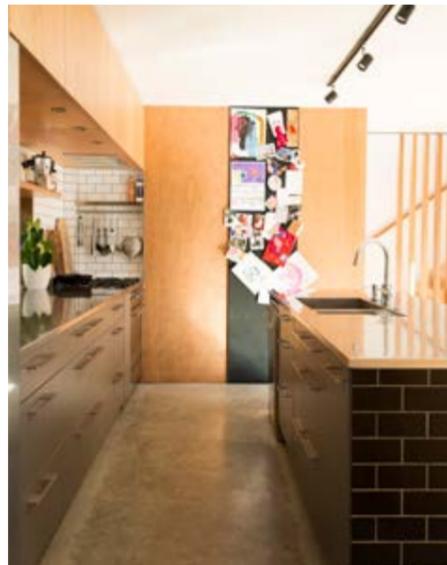


FOR KEEPS

When a little state house is kitted out with a modern addition, it's a yin and yang arrangement that suits this young family perfectly

Text by **Claire McCall**. Photography by **Helen Bankers**.





IN A NUTSHELL

WHO LIVES HERE? Gus Roberts (executive creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi), Victoria Roberts (marketing mum), Louie, 8, Isla, 6, Izzy, 3 and Tiggy the cat. **VICTORIA, HOW DOES THE HOUSE FUNCTION WITH THREE YOUNG CHILDREN?** I love all the bullet-proof surfaces – the concrete floors and the stainless-steel benches. The kids sometimes come in here with their trikes and they can't wreck the place. Plus I don't feel like I need to run around polishing everything all the time.

GUS, WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE AREA OF THE HOME? The built-in window seat in the living area is a great place to read the Sunday morning papers.



KITCHEN, DINING & LIVING The material palette of pale timber and black joinery in the new living zone is contemporary yet welcoming. A double-sided storage unit separates the kitchen from the TV room beyond. The structured linearity of the layout is softened by the furnishings and shots of colour that make this a haven for a busy, young family. Window seating comes with plenty of storage, which is a handy addition.

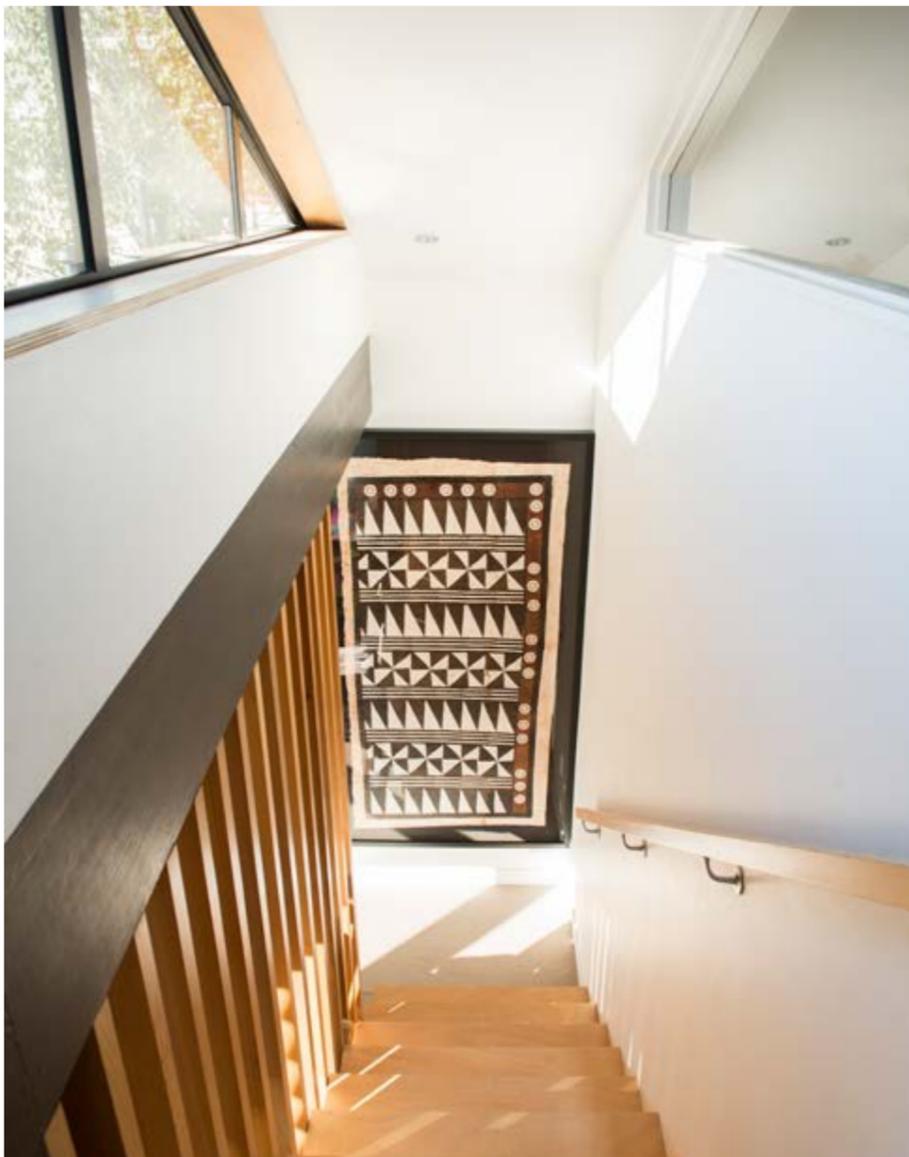
You know it's for keeps when you invest in a stone wall together. When Gus met Victoria, he was already well down the track of looking to buy his first pad. The pair had only been dating a few months when he invited her to an open home at this former state house, on the market as a deceased estate. "Gus did ask me if I could see myself living here," says Victoria. But it was when they went 50/50 in the stone wall that she knew his intentions were honourable.

That was 10 years ago. Now married with three young children, the couple are a well-versed team whose romance has survived major alterations to this Westmere property. Built in the 1930s, the original two-bedroomed dwelling had strong, simple lines and a compact footprint of 80 square metres. With lemon-coloured weatherboards and a red corrugated-iron

roof, it presided over a valley that was once planted with grapevines. From the front porch, the view stretched down to the mangroves of Meola Reef. "When we walked in the door, the walls were filthy and the lawn looked like a rubbish tip, but you could still smell the sea air," says Gus.

Although they roped in a few mates to help install bi-folds and a deck street-side, for many years the Roberts managed in cramped quarters. The tiny kitchen came complete with a meat safe but there was no pantry and very little storage. When baby number two came along, "we had to tiptoe through the area we used as her room to get to the master bedroom," remembers Victoria.

Something had to give. They thought of selling, but realised they could never afford a bigger completed house in such a sought-after spot. A makeover to celebrate the location was on the menu and they



WORKING WITH AN ARCHITECT

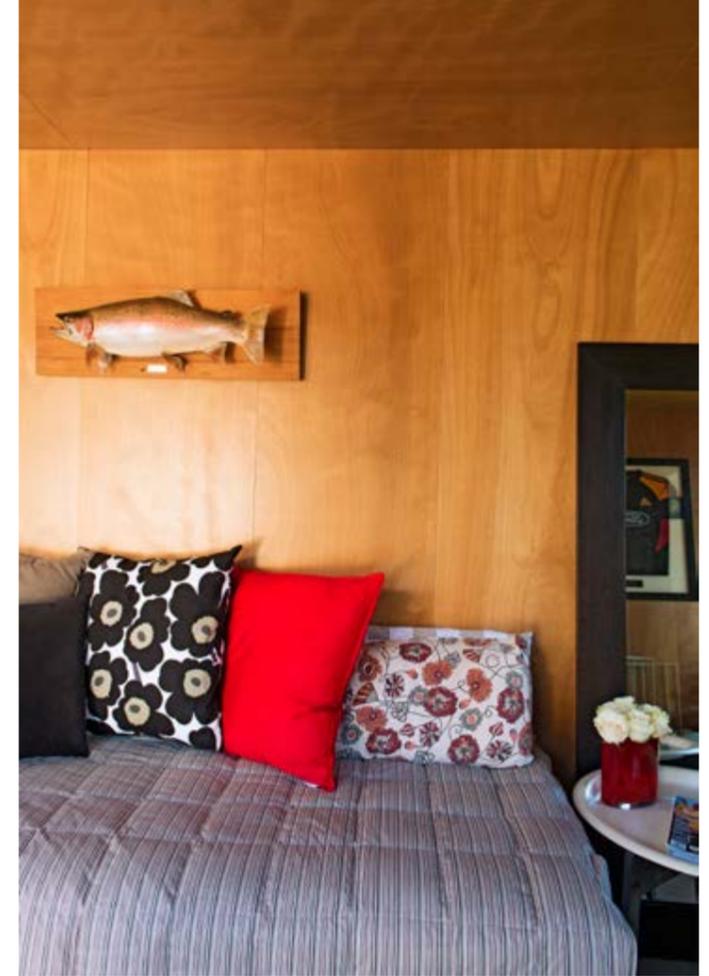
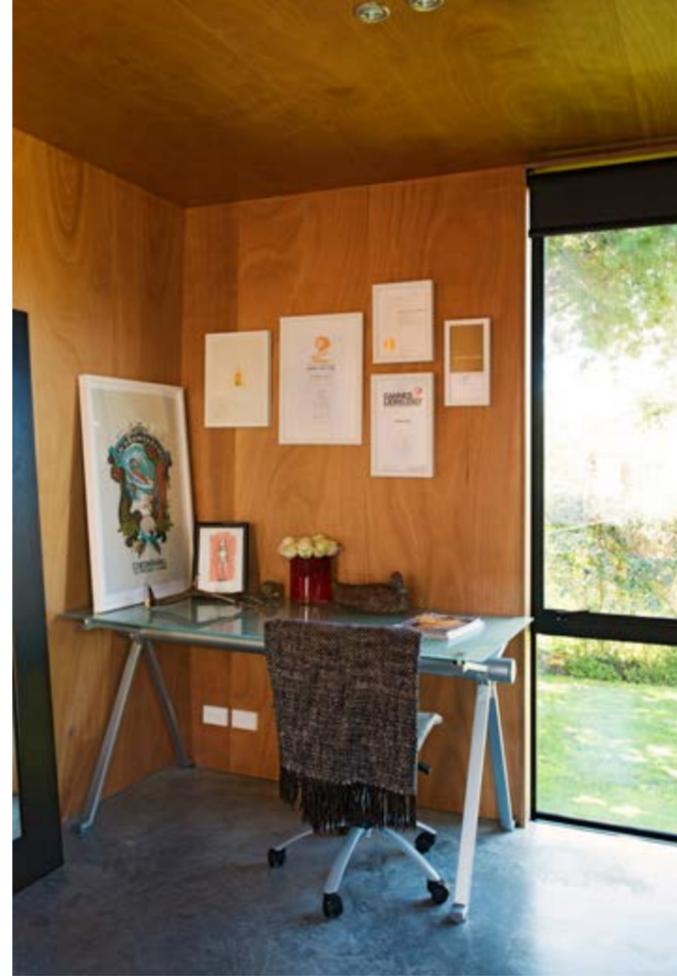
➤ **Choose someone who** understands your lifestyle, someone you can discuss ideas with over a beer. This is a fairly close relationship that will in all likelihood go on for over a year and breaks the boundaries of professional into a more personal one.

➤ **Look for an architect** who has a good relationship with a builder that you also respect. If they work well together, chances are the process will run more smoothly.

➤ **Get ready for a journey**, a collaboration where your ideas will be tested! If the relationship between architect and owner is a good one, the end result will be better than you could have imagined.

➤ **Rather than focussing** on how many rooms you want – or how many square metres you think you need – instead have a good understanding of how you need the house to function. Any architect worth their salt will be able to maximise spaces (and functionality) by efficient planning, and weave together a cohesive whole.

➤ **Prepare cuttings or web images** to show the architect what you do like, and what you don't. This can be as specific as a material or as ephemeral as a feeling.



OFFICE, ENTRY The flexi-room (this page) has myriad functions and operates as an office, playroom, guest quarters and sometimes as a storage place for outdoor furniture. Gus displays his prized possession on the wall here. It's a 12.25 pound rainbow trout he caught in Lake Aniwhenua. In the older part of the home, built-in bench seating in the entry foyer creates a second living room. "We love this space that leads off the bedrooms," says Victoria. The cat painting, by Daryl File, was bought on a surfing trip to Gisborne.

called in a friend, architect Tim Dorrington of DAA, to help refine their ideas.

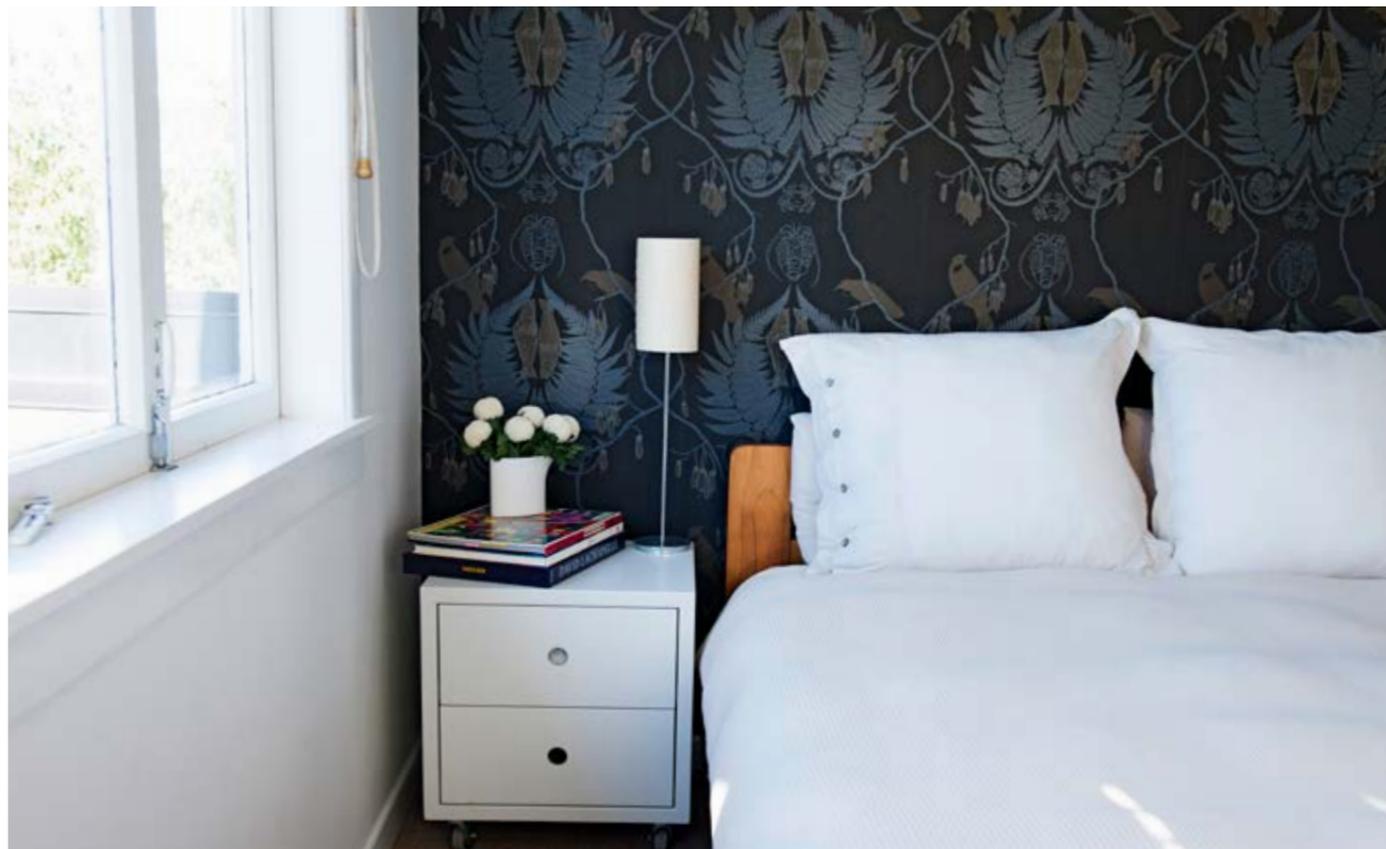
Their plan was to double the size of the home in three ways: re-shape the layout of the static, craft an extension for the living, dining and kitchen space and re-purpose the quaint but unusable garage. Tim's vision went against the Zeitgeist of the time. Instead of mimicking the look of the original, he was adamant the addition should be clearly modern.

The result is a yin-and-yang arrangement of structures that work together, yet retain their own personality. From the street, the home gels with its neighbours to give a humble weatherboard welcome to visitors. Even inside the front door, all is not revealed in a rush. Yet, beyond the stairwell, there's a coquettish hint of 'something more' to come. The Roberts are thrilled with how the rooms in the house have been transformed from make-shift to maximised. That walk-through nursery is now a walk-through

wardrobe with floor-to-ceiling storage. And then there's the unexpected bonus of a central meeting area. "Tim turned what was leftover space into a foyer and second sitting room," says Victoria. Kitted out with built-in L-shaped seats and shelving to hold the TV, it's a natural gathering point in the mornings before school.

Down the set of stairs, the journey of discovery continues. This natural level change defines the separation between old and new, a concept that is reinforced by a black beam that squares off the cube-like addition as an element in its own right. Black plywood cladding was used as a contemporary counterpart to those neutral weatherboards, and the rectangular geometry adds a modernist mood. Concrete floors continue into a courtyard which links to the repurposed garage, now known as the 'flexi room'.

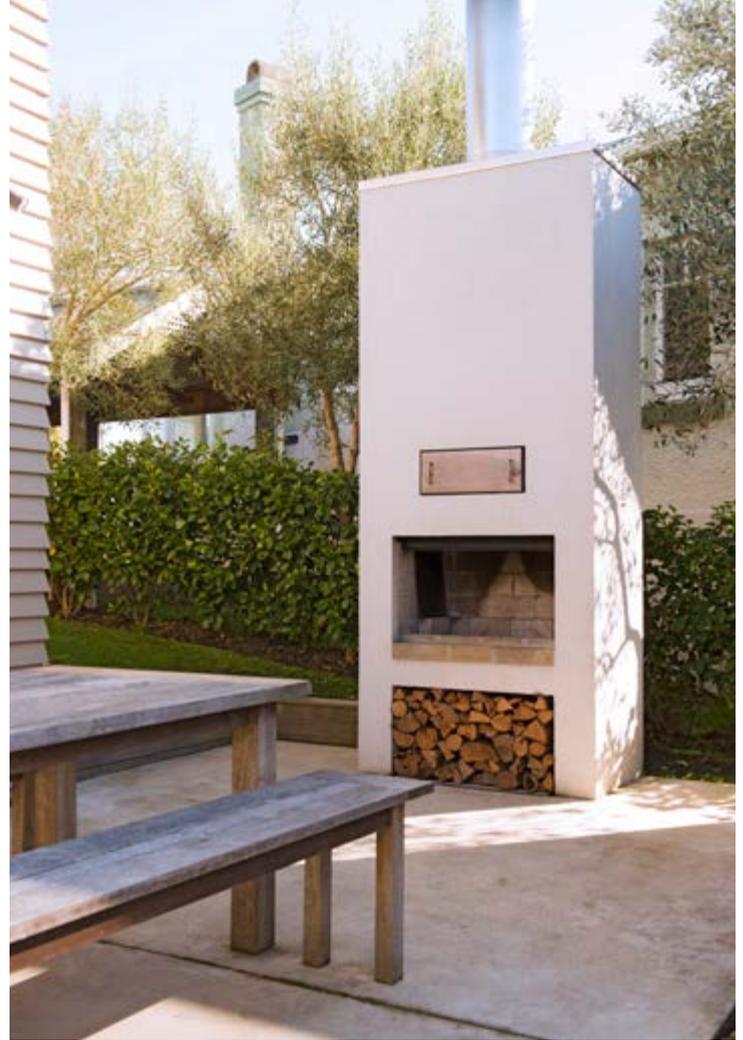
This trio of buildings grouped around a central point has proved both enchanting "like a Tuscan villa" – and practical. From



BEDROOMS

On the upper level, in the original part of the home, there are enough bedrooms for each child to enjoy their own space. The hand-printed wallpaper in the master bedroom was designed and made by Martinborough-based company, PaperHands, and inspired by our native fauna and flora.





EXTERIOR A pizza oven and outdoor fireplace are much used in the north-facing courtyard which is sheltered on three sides by buildings. The children genuinely enjoy helping Gus in the vege garden. The family like the thought that in some small way, they are picking up on the history of this area which was once filled with market gardens. Old plum trees and a feijoa hedge on the section are still prolific.

the kitchen there's an unimpeded view to the 'flexi' room where the children, Louie, Isla and Izzy, often play with Lego. "When grandparents come to stay, we convert it to a bedroom so they can have a sleep-in in the mornings," says Victoria. This studio is also designed with teenagers in mind – and will no doubt be a welcome retreat (for parents or kids) in years to come.

Long-term thinking aside, there are many moments of architectural magic that elevate the experience in the everyday.

A clever, double-sided room divider is a masterpiece of multi-tasking that provides a cubicle for a computer desk on the kitchen side and room for a TV on the other. It does not stretch to the ceiling but nevertheless lends intimacy to this open-plan area, while allowing the children to watch TV without disturbing the olds. Pedantic window placement is another example of design nous. One frames the verticality of a textural cabbage-tree trunk; another triangular-shaped one above the stairwell gives a

glimpse of treetops in the valley.

The star of this show, though, is the cafe-style kitchen. "We get so many comments on it," says Victoria. Again bucking a trend, the Roberts opted for subway-style tiles in black (rather than white) for the front of the island bench. It was a brave decision but complements the black joinery of the full-height sliders which provide a seamless connection to the courtyard.

In springtime, the courtyard is a delightful place to relax. Sunday afternoon tradition is to invite friends for lunch. That's when Gus will fire up the alfresco pizza oven and the family will gather at the outdoor table or the kitchen bench. For this home with an 80-year history, there are still many memories to come. ●

→ Find out how they got the look on **PAGE 194**.

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