

# HOOK LINE AND SINKER

When a visionary dad couldn't finish a fish factory apartment conversion, the family stepped in

Words SHARON STEPHENSON  
Photographs PAUL MCCREDIE

THESE PAGES 3.2m-tall sliding doors from APL's Architectural Series connect the living room to the courtyard at Polly Larkman's Petone apartment; an Ergofocus suspended fire from Oblica in Australia rotates to heat both inside and out; the black chair is from BoConcept and the timber used on the stairs is Victorian ash.





**P**icture an old fish factory in an industrial area and “light” and “stylish” aren’t the first words that come to mind. But businessman Paul Larkman could see beyond the grime and fishy aroma of this Petone, Wellington warehouse.

“Dad had a vision for a cool New York-style loft apartment which must have taken a lot of imagination,” laughs his daughter Polly Larkman.

The warehouse was built in 1939 as a dry ice factory. “It was basically one big open space with years of fishing nets and rubbish piled all over the place.”

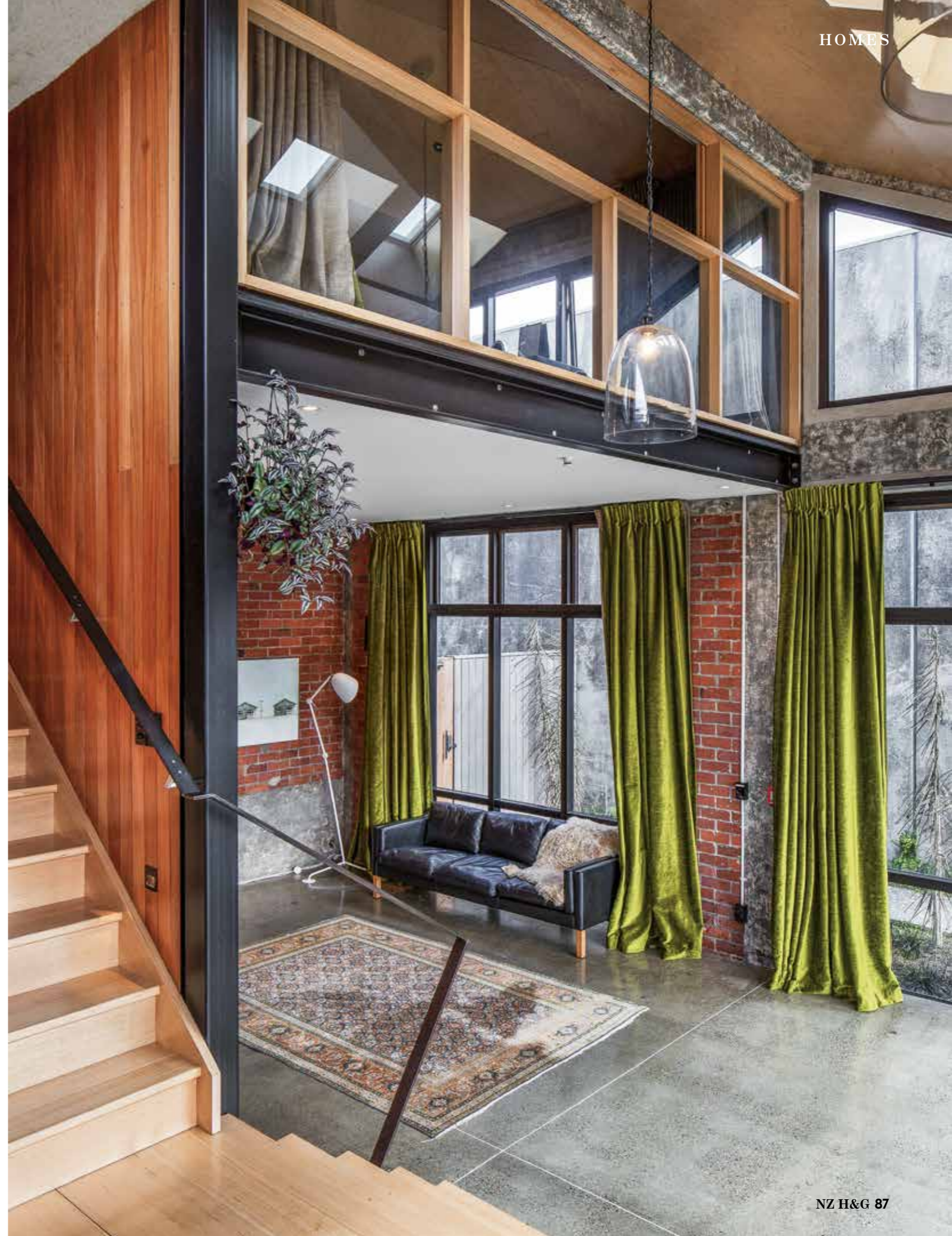
Sadly, Paul passed away in 2017, a month into the renovation, but his wife, Sally Rowe, and daughter continued with his vision.

That included carving a mezzanine floor and internal staircase, two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a deck out of the down-at-heel space. Not to mention replacing windows, cleaning original bricks and polishing a concrete floor.

At the time Polly, a commercial leasing manager, was based in London, where she’d lived for four years. She admits it wasn’t easy coordinating the renovation from 18,000km away.

“Luckily our architect John Mills discussed Dad’s

**THESE PAGES** (from left) Polly and fiancé Antony D’Esposito with recent addition Pat; the couple moved from London once they realised how great the apartment would be. The corten steel screen provides privacy for the master bedroom and roof terrace without blocking the view; it was designed to fit with the industrial context of the apartment; the indoor dining table was custom-made by Industrial Fusion Furniture/Josh Timmins Design and the Stressless chair gives a pop of colour.



**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from top) Architect John Mills had to convince Polly to have a red kitchen. New industrial-look window joinery contrasts with luxurious green velvet curtains; outside a lancewood grove greets visitors by the entranceway path. The green felt seat squabs and cushions were made locally in Petone to fit the built-in seating. **OPPOSITE** The original concrete floors (now polished) and brickwork honour the home's heritage; the building was re-strengthened as part of the refurbishment.



‘This was one of the drawcards to come home’

vision with both myself and Mum and sent us both plans and options by email so we could tweak things, or not, as required.”

Says John: “Paul wanted to make this a unique and special place for his family to enjoy. He wanted to maintain and develop the essence of the warehouse’s materiality, its patina and generous sense of space. I think we’ve achieved that”.

When Polly realised “how great it was going to be,” she persuaded her fiancé, accountant Antony D’Esposito, to move back to New Zealand. They took up residence in the converted building in early 2019.

“This was one of the drawcards to come home, because we loved our life in London. The other reason was to get a dog and we got Pat, our Pomapoo [Pomeranian/poodle], a few months ago.”

Tucked between a supermarket and a fast food joint, most people have no idea that a 170sqm dwelling sits behind the large gates. It’s the only residential building in a sea of industrial and retail outlets.

Access is through a side entrance, via what Polly calls the lancewood forest, thanks to the sculptural lancewood trees which make a strong statement and separate the home from the surrounding industrial area.

That takes you to the front deck, where years of fishing detritus had to be removed, allowing Polly to landscape and add steps to create different zones.

The original space was extended by 20sqm to



**THIS PAGE** (from top) The layout was planned around the central staircase, giving a fluid and sculptural sense of space. The bathrooms are discreetly tucked out of view; the birch plywood vanity was designed by John Mills, and the Catalano Zero basins and Progetto Como taps are from Plumbline.

**OPPOSITE** (from top) Two bedrooms occupy the former loft storage spaces. The vertical timber walls are made from recycled wood.



**THESE PAGES** Large windows are augmented by internal glazing and skylights punched into the plywood ceilings in this loft bedroom; a tall radiator is tucked into the corner behind a shaggy butterfly chair and is part of a central heating system; at the desk is one of the rimu dining chairs from downstairs which were found by Polly's father, Paul, in a charity shop.

'I like to mix old with new and low-cost with expensive'

**THIS PAGE** The window is framed by lancewoods which attract tūi, pōpokotea and kererū, even in this industrial part of town. **OPPOSITE** (from top) The use of concrete, brick and plywood ensure this ex-industrial building's origins aren't lost. The courtyard is cleverly designed for privacy and was built by Horton Landscapes; lemon and lime trees supply ingredients for alfresco G&Ts.



create a library/chill out zone where John decorated the eucalyptus seating with green fabric to match the velvet drapes. The striking suspended fireplace can rotate, so it works as both an indoor fire and, when the 3.2m-high doors are flung open, an outdoor heater.

To honour the building's heritage, the windows were designed to replicate an industrial look. In the downstairs living room, they flood the space with light which bounces off the wall of eucalyptus planks Polly's father found years ago.

Go up a few steps and you're in the spacious kitchen and dining room. Although Polly wasn't keen on red cabinetry, John managed to persuade her. "He said it would create a wow factor and although I was initially sceptical, it really does."

Both Polly and Antony are keen cooks and love their spacious kitchen, especially after living in cramped English flats for so long. "We're used to tiny flats with no storage. To go from that to oodles of space is fantastic."

They especially love the 3.2m-long granite benchtop which was made as one piece and presented a challenge to manoeuvre into place.

Polly commissioned the industrial-style dining table which was made in Eketahuna, while the dining chairs were a bargain from a local charity shop. They contrast with the Stressless chair that sits in a corner of the dining room. "I like to mix old with new and low-cost with expensive," says Polly.

The Dick Frizzell artwork above it, advertising dog roll, has special significance as Polly's family part-owns a pet food company. The large kitchen artwork came from the original fish factory – Polly admits the builders thought she was mad preserving it.

Upstairs are two bedrooms, including a guest bedroom which doubles as a study, and the main bedroom which leads to a deck that Polly says is ideal for people watching. "John suggested we add a metal privacy screen so people can't see us."

A year down the track, the couple are enjoying their new home. "It's such an easy house to live in and it's perfect for entertaining. We hosted around 70 people for our engagement party last year and are always having dinner parties. Dad would be so pleased with how it's worked out." ■

## Q&A

### Is there anything you wish you'd done differently:

We love living here and we wouldn't make any major changes. Something we might look to add in the future is more bedroom and bathroom storage. We're still working through the living room interior design and are looking for a retro drinks trolley.

**Favourite part of the house:** In front of the fireplace on a rainy afternoon.

**What would you save in a fire:** Pat the dog. If he somehow managed to escape by himself, I'd grab some of the artwork.

**Favourite local cafes:** Origin on Jackson St does a great vegetarian-style breakfast and is pet friendly. Seashore Cabaret overlooking Petone Beach is also a great spot. My favourite dish there is the mascarpone and berry pancakes. Go early to try and beat the queues.

*Polly Larkman*

