

THESE PAGES Debbie and Stephen Summers admit the family often feel as though they live in a goldfish bowl, thanks to their home's floor-to-ceiling windows, but the house is in a quiet cul-de-sac and having such an open design means they are connected to what's going on in the community; the house has undergone a major renovation, but its footprint remains the same; the front door is painted in Resene 'Livewire' and the exterior in Resene 'Calypso'.

BESIDE THE SEASIDE

A sunny 1960s classic defies the Wellington weather

WORDS SHARON STEPHENSON / PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MCCREDIE



Wellington might have its winter coat on, but at Lowry Bay you'd never know it.

Follow the motorway out of the capital, curve around the harbour towards where the city fades into the Eastbourne hills and there you'll find the small suburb famously depicted in Katherine Mansfield's short story *At the Bay*.

As the harbour glints 200m away, Debbie Summers throws open the floor-to-ceiling doors of the 1960s home she and her husband Stephen bought in 2007. "It can get too hot in here, which isn't a problem you'd normally associate with Wellington," she says with a laugh.

Having returned from Auckland where Stephen's job as a sales manager had taken them, the couple moved to Normandale, Lower Hutt, into a house Debbie had built before they married and had children - Harry, now 16, and Chelsea, 13.

But it didn't work so well for a growing family. Most importantly, it was a long way from the sea. >

THIS PAGE (from top) Post-renovation, the living room is better connected to the rest of the home; many of the family's keepsakes were picked up on holidays, including the green ceramic turtle from Turtle Bay in Hawaii; the living room wall is painted in Resene 'Fahrenheit' and the schist is original. Debbie and Stephen Summers - the couple love the floors, which were covered in a drab green carpet.

OPPOSITE The living room steps down from the kitchen/dining area, which features the original deep brown cabinetry with chrome handles; the super-comfortable couches are from Kovacs - the colour was chosen to work with the schist.





“We’re a sporty family. We love kayaking, paddleboarding and being outside,” says Debbie, a contracts manager. “My brother lives in Lowry Bay and we’d visit him and get really jealous.”

They started casting around for their own seaside dream and although this 240sqm house was far from that, it was on the flat, close to the water and bathed in all-day sun.

The couple was also won over by its history: the land was once part of the Taumaruru Homestead, built by Francis Bell (of Bell Gully law firm fame), and used as a convalescent home for injured Kiwi soldiers from 1916-19, as well as housing maternity patients affected by Napier’s 1931 earthquake. Sadly, the original homestead was demolished in 1963, two years after the Summers’ house was built.

Little had been done to the house since then. “It was boxy and dark and the rooms had no connection to each other,” says Debbie.

Worse, the basement was basically a dirt floor that flooded when it rained. “After two years in the house, one morning we awoke to a virtual lake in the basement and had to have it pumped out.”

It was their cue to make renovation plans. As luck would have it, Stephen played touch rugby with local architect John Mills, who helped turn the space into a light, airy family home that takes advantage of its coastal setting and bushy backdrop.

First to go were four walls in the lower level, to open up the space. The kitchen was relocated from the back of the house to a more central position, and a fourth bedroom was turned into a stairwell to provide the internal access Debbie wanted. >

THESE PAGES (clockwise from far left)

An orange window in the stairwell was suggested by architect John Mills and adds an invigorating pop of colour; the dining space, formerly the house’s hallway, gives the family another entertaining area. The generous benchtop is a favourite spot for Chelsea to do her homework; Debbie is glad she opted for extra-deep sinks, which hide a multitude of dirty dishes when entertaining and the benchtop was built slightly higher to accommodate Stephen and son Harry’s height. The couple’s desire to keep as many original features of their home as possible extends to the classic white light above their bed. Chelsea picked Resene ‘Lolly Scramble’ for the feature wall in her bedroom based more on the name than the actual shade.





Q&A

What I love about Lowry Bay: We have the best of both worlds - the sea and the bush surrounds, as well as the activity and tranquillity they bring. But at the same time, we're not too far from the hustle and bustle of the city. *(Debbie)*

My decorating style: I prefer to keep it simple and minimalist, with a mix of contemporary and classic features. Clutter is my worst enemy. *(Debbie)*

Best renovation advice: Good communication. We had weekly on-site meetings with the architect and builder. This helped ensure we were all on the same page and any issues were clarified and dealt with efficiently. *(Debbie)*

Closely control your expenses, and expect things to cost more than initially quoted. *(Stephen)*

Debbie and Stephen Summers

THIS PAGE (from top) Chelsea shoots hoops in front of the coloured windows which Debbie was initially hesitant about but now loves. Pāua shells collected by the children have been nailed to the fence to create a classic Kiwiana feature; it's an ongoing family challenge to add to the wall.

OPPOSITE Being a surfer's stroke from the beach at Lowry Bay means the family get to enjoy the water but aren't exposed to the notorious winds which can sweep in.

The master bedroom also borrowed from that fourth bedroom for its walk-in wardrobe, and an odd, unsafe balcony was closed in to become the couple's en suite. Downstairs, the troublesome basement was excavated and converted into a guest room, bathroom and office.

Although the aim was to modernise the house, Debbie wanted the integrity of the 1961 build to be retained. "The house had good bones so we were able to keep features such as the original windows in the living room and the schist fireplace. I'm keen on being as sustainable as possible, which extended to re-using many of the materials."

John Mills is known for his love of colour and although Debbie originally wanted an all-white space, she's glad John convinced her that splashes of colour on the interior walls could work. When it came to furnishings the couple went for a mix of contemporary and retro pieces.

Previously, the sun-drenched backyard was unusable, thanks to a hulking great concrete shed that former owners had used as a pottery studio. It took some doing to remove it, but once it was gone the couple added a generous deck and landscaped the garden so the family can make the most of the Lowry Bay weather.

"In the summer we lie on the deck on beanbags and watch the sun go down," says Debbie. ■



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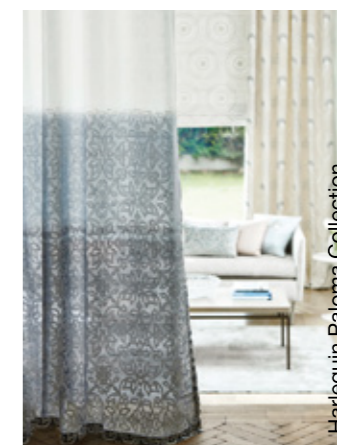
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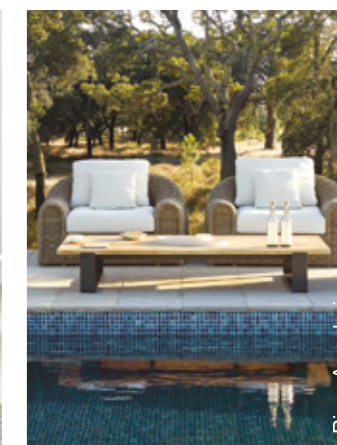
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