



Shades of play

Interior designer Andrew Cox and son Ishka live in a Wellington villa that's flavoured with fun

WORDS JANICE MARRIOTT / PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL McCREDIE



THIS PAGE This view of the kitchen takes in Andrew's unique storage cabinets, which feature a cut-out circle pattern; around the antique oak table are classic French Tolix metal stools.

OPPOSITE Ishka bikes through the light-filled house with Andrew in the background; the large photograph of poppies on the wall is by Californian photographer Carol Henry.



THIS PAGE Andrew's "de Kooning" mosaic mural dominates this corner of the kitchen, with cut-out formica shapes adding interest to the pantry doors; the wooden joinery is heart rimu.

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left) Ishka jumps on the giant beanbag in the sitting room; behind him is Pat Hanly's *New Age Woman* and Toss Woollaston's *Lyttelton Harbour*. The large painting behind the couch is by Robbie Porritt. Andrew's "Matisse" hi-fi cabinet with his organic fibreglass forms above. A much-loved leather chair sits in front of part of Andrew's art collection, including a Raymond Ching (left) and a Peter Siddell (centre).

ANDREW COX'S HOUSE is full of surprises. Hidden behind a two-metre-high wooden fence, the turn-of-the-19th-century villa feels private, yet it has unimpeded views over Wellington. The whole house is wired for TV and internet, yet the windows are old sash-style and many doors are unpainted rimu. The house has a narrow footprint but it displays an eclectic mix of art and furniture without seeming crowded. It's filled with light and colour and, like its owner, is a mixture of the restrained and the flamboyant.

Andrew has travelled widely. His mother, Philippa Brandon, was from Wellington but Andrew was brought up in England. He came to Wellington as an adult, aware that his great-great-grandfather had arrived there in 1841, and that Brandon Street was named after him. But there was a big surprise in store when he saw the house's certificate of title. There on the document was the name Alfred de Bathe

Brandon, a previous owner and Andrew's great-grandfather. He had certainly come home.

An interior designer, Andrew runs his practice from the ground floor offices of his home. He got involved in Wellington and the work has increased from there. He describes his style as energetic, relaxing and positive, influenced by Jean Arp, a French artist and sculptor popular in the 1930s.

When Andrew bought the house, there was a cottage garden with a brick path and wisteria growing over a traditional verandah. He'd initially wanted a very different exterior look – minimalist with clean detailing – but he was won over by the home's high ceilings and the views, sun and privacy offered by the site, tucked under the Truby King house on the Melrose hill above Wellington Zoo. It took a year of living in the house before he discovered how to make it work for him. >





THIS PAGE Above Andrew's bed are two of his photographs of silhouetted trees; Andrew also designed the folded aluminium side tables. The green basins in the bathroom rest on a granite bench; Ishka's toys decorate the bath.

OPPOSITE The much-used courtyard is full of pots; wood for the woodburner is stored underneath the garage. Andrew made this mask, which he says reminds him of a cousin!

At the front of the house, the verandah was removed and the front door relocated; two original windows were retained, to be used in the kitchen extension. In order to establish easy movement through the house, Andrew moved the old staircase, adding a sash window to the new corner staircase's wall to make a light well that brightens his office space downstairs.

Andrew's favourite colour of the moment is red. The garage outside is painted red and it flows through the house as the signature colour. It also plays a crucial role in the new kitchen extension. Andrew has retained the traditional detailing around the doors and windows and given the room a utilitarian look, with plain wooden cabinets and a bench of reconstituted stone. The pantry is hidden behind white cupboard doors but the doors have laser-cut formica shapes scattered over them: a joyful, 3-D effect that epitomises Andrew's approach.

The kitchen wall space is dominated by a mosaic interpretation of a painting by the 20th century abstract impressionist Willem de Kooning. Andrew created the mosaic himself, working with Middle Earth Tiles in Auckland,

who were able to supply tiles in all the colours he needed. Andrew broke the tiles, filed down all the edges, cut cement board to size, drew the de Kooning pattern on the board, then stuck the tiles on. "If I do it again I'll probably employ students!" he says.

The mosaic and the playful cut-outs don't prevent the kitchen from working as a practical and homely environment for Andrew, a single parent, and his two-year-old son, Ishka. There's a small round table and chairs by a window for Ishka to sit in while his father cooks. From this table there's a view of the hill and the sky. Ishka can also look further into the house and see part of the dining room and a wall decorated with a mask made by Andrew out of such unlikely objects as a dustpan, driftwood, an old yard brush, part of a buoy and heart pendants. This is a house that's fun to live in.

Bringing colour into a room is a must. Andrew believes New Zealanders tend to go for grey monochromes and are afraid to use bright colour. There's no such timidity in the bold sage-green bathroom. He made the choice after finding two green handbasins, then matching

the wall paint to them. The room is finished off with a pair of quirky old mirrors, which he chose not to have resilvered.

The house is well placed to get the sun in the master bedroom. Andrew likes the clean lines of this simply designed room, with its high ceilings and Roman blinds, and his favourite bright red appears in the bedside tables. The sound effects in this room can also be colourful. The night after he moved in, Andrew was woken by monkeys shrieking in nearby Wellington Zoo.

The sitting room has a long chunky red shelf on which Andrew displays an eclectic art collection, including works by Raymond Ching, Peter Siddell, Pat Hanly, Douglas MacDiarmid and Toss Woollaston. It's a narrow room that Andrew wishes was a metre and a half wider but his clever arrangement of furniture, including a Noguchi table and an enormous orange beanbag, makes it comfortable and fun. When Ishka has friends over, they love to jump all over the beanbag.

On the wall above the large flat-screen TV is an interesting sculptural grouping of curving tubes made of fibreglass and MDF – one of Andrew's student projects from art school days. The rimu hi-fi cabinet, also his own design, is decorated with a pattern inspired by Matisse's paper cut-outs. Other quirky light-hearted touches can be found throughout the room, right down to the colourful plastic boxes for Ishka's toys.

The sitting room has a fine three-bow window with a view down the hill, over the zoo and across Wellington. Outside the bow window is another surprise – a deck running along the back of the house. Generous grey curtains made of a mixture of hemp and linen drape the windows and the pelmet features richly embroidered fabric found in London – the embroidery is, of course, red.

"Finding the right fabric can be a problem," says Andrew, "but I knew this one was right as soon as I saw it. When I'm designing a room I like to look at the whole house in context so I also like to do the soft furnishings as part of the whole picture."

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I love this part of New Zealand because: Of the dramatic Wellington geography, with the hills and sea encompassing the city.

In the next five or 10 years I'd like to: Design and build a home by the sea.

The best time of the week for me is: Any morning when I can head to one of the great cafes we have in this town and drink coffee.

The happiest day in this house: Was when all the contractors we had working on the renovations finally left and we had the place to ourselves.

The worst day in this house: Was in the middle of the building project. Managing your own renovation project is always stressful, no matter who you are.

This weekend I will be: Heading down to the beach at Houghton Bay with Ishka. He is the most important thing in my life.

Andrew Cox

