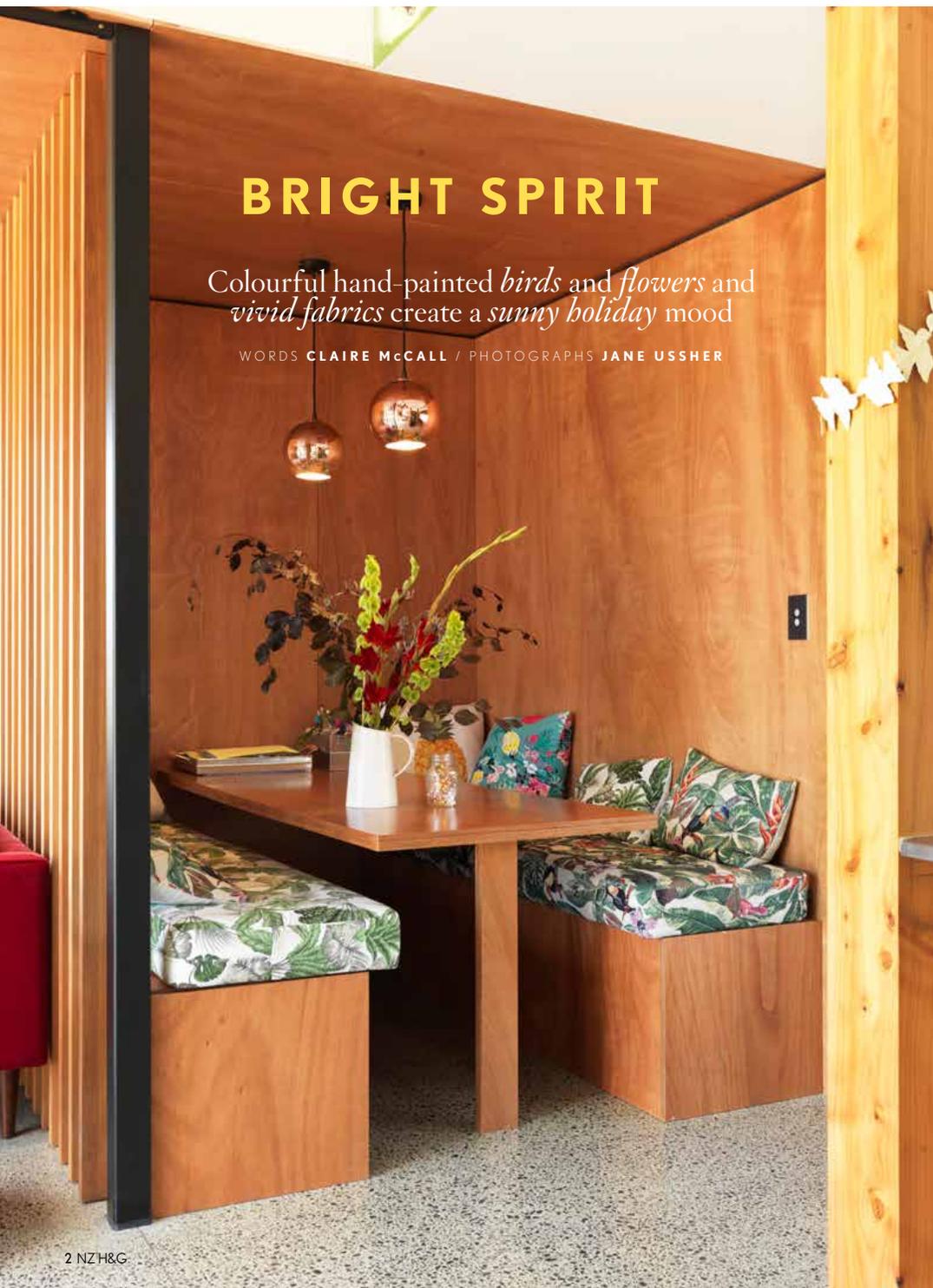


# BRIGHT SPIRIT

Colourful hand-painted *birds* and *flowers* and *vivid fabrics* create a *sunny holiday* mood

WORDS **CLAIRE MCCALL** / PHOTOGRAPHS **JANE USSHER**



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**T**HE JOYFUL SPIRIT woven into the decorative palette of this new home at Omaha would indicate that the owners had something more significant than a successful house build to celebrate. And they did. Their second daughter, Daisy, was born five months after the house was completed. She came into the world at 23 weeks and two days – just over the survival threshold.

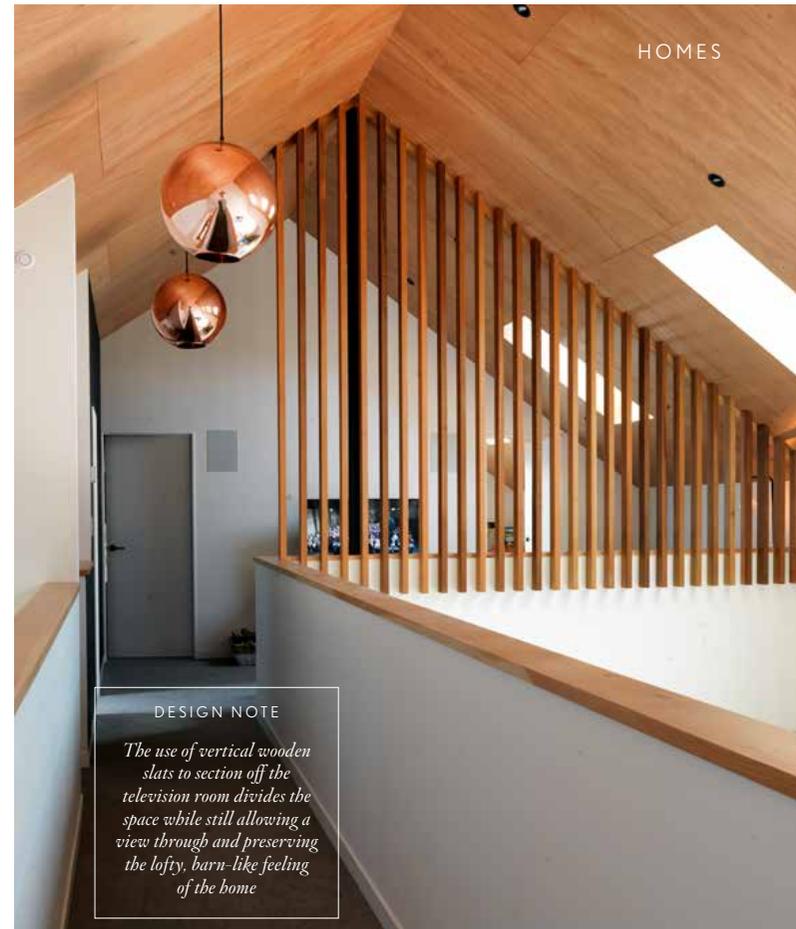
Neil and Katie Salter's first daughter Ila, now five, had arrived early and with everything pointing towards an even earlier delivery from 16 weeks, Katie put herself on six weeks' bedrest before Daisy was born. "Having the new house to think about was a good distraction during that time," she says. "I wanted to add warmth, fun and colour."

Katie is a sun and sea girl who grew up on Sydney's northern beaches and Neil is a commercial property investor, so when they saw this site where you "didn't have to cross a road to get to the beach", it ticked both pragmatic and emotional boxes.

The couple knew they wanted an architect-designed home, but not an eye-watering price tag, so they approached Auckland design-and-build company Box. At first their hearts were set on a U-shaped plan around a courtyard. When architect Tim Dorrington explained that was going to mean a big home and cost a lot, they settled on Plan B: a double-storey contemporary barn with a steep gable. "The gable was a challenging concept for the Omaha Residents Society at first," Katie explains, "but we altered the angle by about 10 per cent and it got sign off." >



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DESIGN NOTE

*The use of vertical wooden slats to section off the television room divides the space while still allowing a view through and preserving the lofty, barn-like feeling of the home*



From the street, the home's clean, simple shape gives little away. That pitched roof runs seamlessly into the walls (there are no overhangs) and two narrow black slot windows puncture the vertical cedar facade. The cherry colour of the cladding will weather naturally in the salt air and need minimal maintenance.

Once inside, the plan stretches into a long rectangle. The living is at ground level with a full-height double space in the centre. The master bedroom and the children's rooms and playroom are at opposite ends of the upstairs zone, linked by a "bridge".

Although the downstairs floors are bulletproof concrete so sandy feet and exuberant scootering through the house are no problem, their industrial presence is softened by many timber features. Gaboon-ply ceilings and kitchen cabinetry has a pretty pinkish grain, battens on the playroom balcony bring texture, and two chunky macrocarpa posts at the end of the island bench hark back to the barn.

Surprising elements keep the design innovative. At one end of the living zone, a built-in bed folds down from the wall and concertina doors can be closed off to create a separate guest

room. Another example is the dining nook that leads off the kitchen. The low ceiling and timber lining make this an intimate space with built-in bench seats and a table. "We got the idea from the meeting booth they have at the offices of Box, so Tim incorporated something similar here. Kids love it because it feels secure and cosy," says Katie.

Once the structure was coming together, Katie got stuck into choosing fittings. She shopped online for pendant lighting and tapware, choosing black when black was not yet the new chrome, and sourced used pallets and beer crates which were spray-painted to become a base for the master mattress and bedside tables.

What really brings the pep of personality to this family retreat, though, are the colourful touches. Katie, determined to step away from the monochromatic monotony of so much city living, has expressed herself with colours that instantly make this a happy place. There's a yellow, yes yellow, sink in the kitchen, red and blue couches, green bathroom tiling, tropical fabrics with pineapples in the dining nook and bright orange, blue and yellow beanbags to plump into on the deck.



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*“Our favourite way to entertain is with long, lazy lunches outdoors on the deck.”*



Q&A

**OUR FAVOURITE WAY TO ENTERTAIN IS:** With long, lazy lunches outdoors on the deck. We have an outdoor kitchen with a Kamado Joe, which is a charcoal barbecue. It’s a great slow cooker in that you can put a leg of lamb in and just walk away and leave it for four hours or you can crank it up and make pizzas on it

**A BEACH HOUSE IS ALL ABOUT:** Enjoyment and not perfection. We aren’t great gardeners. We planted grass in January but we didn’t get up all winter as Daisy was in neonatal intensive care, so we’re never going to have the perfect lawn.

**OUR LATEST ADDITION:** Is electronically operated drop-down screens that, together with the retractable roof, turn the deck and outdoor cooking area into a “room” with direct access to the spa pool.

**WE LOVE THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY BECAUSE:**  
**ON NEW YEAR’S EVE WE’LL BE:**  
**IF YOU VISIT THIS AREA IN SUMMER YOU SHOULD GO TO:**

By far the zenith of this cheerful quest is the spray-painted mural that runs the length of the bridge to become an eye-catching focal point of the living zone. The couple first noticed the work of aerosol and stencil artist Flox on TV show *The Block*. “I love that it is so Kiwi and so bright,” says Katie. Flox personalised the artwork here by including robins, in recognition of Katie’s mum\*\*, and fantails, a bird that has significance for Neil the year his dad passed away. “Flox came along to the house and worked on scaffolding to complete the work in a day.”

Now, if the wind drives the adults from gathering with friends at the beach, or it’s too wet for the kids to jump on the trampoline or entertaining in the outdoor room, the family and their friends can retreat inside to be at one with the nature on the walls. ■