

TOITŪ KĀINGA, TOITŪ MĀRA

NZHOUSE & GARDEN

JULY 2023

TOP TIPS
TO RENOVATE & BUILD

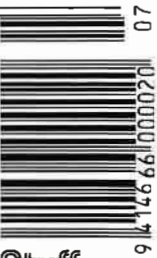
Cosy up

Celebrating
unique
homes

CURRIES
*A feast to
beat the cold*



NZ \$10.60 INCL GST
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**ON THE
COVER**
*Exquisite
Nelson
mansion*

Stuff

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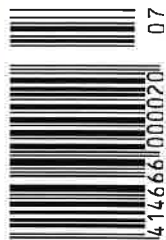
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STEP BY STEP



An award-winning house that cascades down the hill gives a Waikato couple everything they dreamed of

WORDS DENISE IRVINE
PHOTOGRAPHS JANE USSHER
IMAGE AT LEFT, AMANDA AITKEN

LEFT Michelle and John Keeley's multi-pod house keeps a low profile in the foothills of Maungakawa mountain, near Cambridge – it starts at the top with their main bedroom suite, steps down to an office, then the living pod, and a guest wing on the lower level, with Mt Maungatautari peeping above.



ABOVE The handsome front entrance opens directly to the guest wing, on the lowest level, and to stairs at right that lead to the living pod; a statement corten steel panel, framed by a vertical cedar shiplap wall, has horizontal patterned cut-outs for subtle lighting effects, day and night. **RIGHT** A polished concrete floor, high ceiling and the muted tones of furnishings chosen by Michelle and John complement the spectacular farmland tapestry beyond the deck; the dining table is from Olio Design in Cambridge while the dining chairs and cane outdoor suite are from Hus, also in Cambridge.



In the beginning, Michelle and John Keeley climbed up the steep ridge of a rural Cambridge property that was for sale; they didn't think it was for them but the real estate agent suggested they have a look anyway. They got to the top, saw the green contours of Waikato rolled out before them like a patchwork quilt, and that was it. "We took one look at the view and it sold it for us," says Michelle.

That was five years ago, and Michelle and John now wake up to that magical outlook every morning from their bedroom eyrie on the ridge.

Their award-winning concrete and cedar home is in the foothills of Maungakawa Scenic Reserve, a bush-covered landmark a little northeast of Cambridge township. Michelle and John were dairy farmers at nearby Karāpiro for nearly three decades and when they sold the farm they wanted a block of land close to town where John could run a few beefies and Michelle, a

TOP LEFT The enclosed American oak stairs sweep up to the front door, with the corten steel panel throwing playful light.

LEFT Internal stairs in the lower-level guest wing mirror the main entrance staircase. **ABOVE** Michelle loves the sturdy American oak breakfast bar which is a favourite place to perch – its golden tones harmonise with materials inside and out.

RIGHT The living room landing is flanked by striking black pots from Leven in Cambridge and a modular couch from King.



florist, would have an easy commute to Ivy Florist, the business she co-owns in Cambridge.

They moved in three years after they bought the property, their building programme delayed by the Covid pandemic. Son Matt shares the house with them and their other son, Sean, and partner Morgan live nearby. Various friends and family members have had the pleasure of occupying the guest bedroom with wraparound glass doors, a floating deck, and more views.

Michelle's vision was always for a contemporary industrial look and she and John had previously admired a house in this style designed by Cambridge firm Turner Road Architecture. So they brought Turner Road director and head architectural designer Lee Turner on board.

At that point Michelle and John thought they'd locate the house further down the hill. But Michelle says Lee had the idea of starting at the top and stepping the house down the ridge, following the lie of the land in four low-slung, connected pods. They were sold, again. "We loved his plans; I don't think we made any changes to them."

Lee says he envisaged a house that would meld into the landscape, not detract from the mountain at its back, and the low-slung design would be suited to the exposed site. The pods begin at the top, the eastern end, with Michelle and John's bedroom wing. An office, a few steps down, sets their wing apart from the north-facing living pod with the kitchen, dining and lounge, the heart of the home. This area has a 9m-long bank of glass doors that opens to a vast deck and breathtaking 270-degree views.

Matt's bedroom and the guest room are in the pod on the lower, western end. The garage has its own pod, the fourth one, on another level on the south side, and everything is connected by internal American oak staircases and external decking.

Michelle's vision for an industrial aesthetic was realised with tilt-slab concrete walls and floors, vertical shiplap cedar cladding,

TOP LEFT Cedar slats screen the stairwell from the living room; the black pot is from Michelle's Ivy Florist store and the antique coal box originally belonged to John's grandmother. **LEFT** Dark cabinetry contrasts with the American oak breakfast bar and shelving in the kitchen where the scullery at the rear can be concealed by a sliding door. **RIGHT** The heat pump, television and gas fire are encased in corten steel; the earthenware urn is from Fox & Co in Cambridge and the coffee table is an old favourite from The Design Depot that Michelle says has followed them everywhere.





LEFT Cambridge company Designmarked used Laminex in Pitch Black for most of the kitchen cabinetry, providing bold contrast to the quieter colours of the flooring, walls and furniture; the oak shelving unit at right is from The Design Depot; the stairs lead to the office and main bedroom while the entrance foyer is to the right, where a corridor accesses the laundry, powder room and stairs to the garage.



ABOVE: A feature wall in the main bedroom has wallpaper from Resene; the pendant light is from Lighting Direct and the bed linen is by Città; the entire house interior is painted in Resene Black White.
RIGHT: Michelle and John's bathroom has great rural views; the vanity and basins are from Plumbing World in Hamilton, the pendant lights are from Mr Ralph and the mirrors are from Ned Collections.





LEFT A guest bedroom has retracting corner stacker doors opening to a floating deck that cantilevers beyond the slope of the land. **BOTTOM LEFT** Another view of the main en suite with Metaline Iron tiles from Cambridge Tiles; the massive bath, from Plumbing World, was delivered to the site by a tractor with a front-end loader. **RIGHT** The Liverpool armchair in the main bedroom is from Le Forge in Auckland, and the bold black and white artwork is one of a pair from The Design Depot. **BOTTOM RIGHT** The wood-topped console table and substantial wood-framed mirror in the entranceway are both from Hus.



black steel and rusty coloured corten steel; these materials also provide texture and warmth and are a natural fit with the rugged environment. Concrete, cedar and corten are used indoors as well, and the Keeleys found simple, understated furniture and artwork to suit the various spaces but not dominate them. Painted walls are kept quiet in Resene's Black White.

"It's all about the view," says Michelle, as she gives a guided tour of local landmarks: south to Maungatautari, west to the mountains of Pirongia and Kakepuku, and north to rural Fencourt and Te Miro, and beyond them the Hakarimata Range. At night, they see the lights of Cambridge and Hamilton, and John says the sunsets are a spectacular feature. "I've got 1000 photos of them on my phone," he says, producing images of fiery pink skies.

They've planted the grounds with native grasses and shrubbery, encouraging visits from tui and kererū, and there are pheasants nesting in swathes of *Carex virgata*.

Michelle and John say it wasn't an easy project for Cambridge firm Rob May Builders. The site required extensive excavation and retaining, and the clay soil was hard as nail in summer and wet and slippery in winter. A crane became a familiar sight on the hill and the 460kg black concrete bath for their en suite had to be delivered to its position by a tractor with a front end loader.

The effort was rewarded by accolades for Turner Road Architecture with the house named the Waikato regional winner for new homes over 300sqm at the 2022 ADNZ Resene Architectural Design Awards. It also won the regional Resene Colour in Design Award, and was a national finalist in both categories.

These days there is a long driveway up the ridge that Michelle and John clambered over five years ago with a real estate agent, an imposing staircase leads to a weathered steel front door, and beyond it is their lovely family home that knows its place in the rich green landscape.

'We took one look at that view and it was sold for us'

Q&A

with John & Michelle Keeley

THE BEST DECISION WE MADE: Was building higher up the ridge to capture the views. *(Michelle)*

BEST TIME OF THE DAY: Sunsets at dusk. *(John)*

MOST FREQUENT COMMENT FROM VISITORS: What a stunning outlook. *(John)*

ANYTHING YOU'D DO DIFFERENTLY: Not really – we love how it is. *(Michelle)*

LOW POINT OF THE BUILD: The hold-up caused by the Covid pandemic. *(John)*

FAVOURITE LOCAL DESIGN STORE: Hus – we love our dining chairs, kitchen stools and the console table in the entranceway. We've also had some great pieces from The Design Depot in Hamilton and they did all our curtains. *(Michelle)*

BEST COFFEE SPOT: Homebrew Coffee has great takeaway coffee just a stone's throw from work. *(Michelle)*

AT THE WEEKEND YOU'LL FIND US: Pottering around the home or at the beach, at Whangapoua, on the Coromandel where we have had a beach house for 14 years. We fish, swim, and relax with family and friends. *(John)*

A RECOMMENDED LOCAL WALK: From Gaslight Theatre in Alpha St, Cambridge, along the Te Awa River Ride to the Velodrome (3.5km) and maybe coffee at The Bikery Cafe. *(Michelle)*

TELL US ABOUT THE BIRDS: We have them in abundance – pūkeko, kererū, tui, pheasants and a noisy flock of wild peacocks that has taken up residence in this area. *(John)*

