



## IN VINTAGE FORM

A Wellington textile artist discovered her dream home in a 1970s New Zealand design classic

WORDS SARAH LANG / PHOTOGRAPHS JANE USSHER



**THIS PAGE** In the living room of Katherine and Campbell Morrison's Silverstream, Upper Hutt home, visitors sometimes mistake the text from Reuben Friend's (*Kiwi* series as Katherine's initials; two part-ceramic, part-fabric dolls, made by artist Juliet Novena Sorrel, sit in an ancient Irish mixing bowl. **OPPOSITE** Marking time in the living room is a 1930s Friedrich Mauthe grandfather clock inherited from Katherine's great-uncle; Katherine used old blankets to make the cushions with crosses and to re-cover the 1970s Danish armchairs; Campbell suspends toy planes in the ceiling so they can fly at a safe distance from young fingers.



**THIS PAGE** The sculptural work resembling giant white chess pieces is by potter Anneke Borren; the black and white photo of Katherine's grandparents captures a moment in 1936 Holland; to its left is a signed poster of a painting by renowned Swiss artist Jean Tinguely. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) Katherine says the Crown Lynn swans filled with fake roses are "so ugly that they're beautiful"; Katherine Morrison and her cat Fiona, who often curls up on Katherine's giant blanket pile like the title character from *The Princess and the Pea*. Katherine spends hours hand-quilting on this comfortable chair in the den; the nude is by Lisa Munnelly.



**N**O, SHE'S NOT RUNNING a homeless shelter, nor does she feel the cold terribly. However, Katherine Morrison can explain the enormous pile of woollen blankets – literally hundreds of blankets – stacked up almost to the ceiling and hidden behind a screen in her Silverstream, Upper Hutt home. "I'm basically a quilt-maker and I love it."

The award-winning, internationally exhibited textile artist transforms pre-loved woollen blankets into art (after a good wash, of course). Think wall hangings, quilts and coats, many with decorative lines, crosses and old labels stitched on to draw the eye. And, yes, the woman nicknamed the Blanket Queen takes full responsibility for Wellington's shortage of second-hand blankets. "I've just about cleared them out of the op shops," says Katherine, who has a quick, dry sense of humour.

The former nurse had no artistic ambitions back in 1980 when she and husband Campbell, who works in IT, moved to Blue Mountains Road, where Silverstream suburbia meets the countryside. Their red cottage, originally built in 1976, is a Roger Walker Vintage Home.

In the 1970s, Walker, a prominent and unconventional Kiwi architect, pioneered a brave new style that reacted against modernist architecture. He envisioned buildings that would work with nature and their surroundings and enhance everyday life. He also wanted to put architecturally designed houses within the financial grasp of more than just five per cent of home buyers. Enter his standardised drawings for a design known as the Vintage Home, with pitched metal roofs, dormer windows and timber frames fashioned from 1.2m-wide modules that allow flexibility of layout.

Once deemed a modern interpretation of New Zealand's early pioneer style, the 100-odd Vintage Homes built from Whangarei to Christchurch are today considered traditional Kiwi cottages. >





The Morrison house is a classic early example, with its extensive use of wood, curves, colour and light, its variety of materials, arched windows and architectural features that create interesting, unusual spaces. "It's not hip any more to have so much wood," says Katherine, "but we love its warmth."

They also love the fact that Vintage Homes are easy to extend. Over the 1980s, children Susan, Jon and Hamish filled up the two-bedroom house, but their parents were too attached to it to consider trading up. So their neighbour, Jon Craig of Craig Craig Moller Architects, designed four extensions sympathetic to the original building, adding two bedrooms, a second bathroom, a deck, a basement study and garage, and a larger living room.

The house is furnished in a mix of antique, contemporary and retro styles. To honour the decade the house was built in, splashes of retro include a Fanta-orange Kadima couch, two sets of Desalto Sand chairs from Matisse and two Mandy Wilson rugs made from floral carpet, one shaped as a tiki, one as a bird. But a fondness for retro doesn't overwhelm Katherine's design philosophy: "Form and function, simplicity and honesty. I don't like pretension. I don't like matchy-matchy. I like eclecticism."

Luckily, the couple's tastes largely mesh. "Because I'm in charge!" Katherine says with a cheeky grin. "No, not really. We discuss things. We have to agree on the big things." Such as new acquisitions for their extensive gallery of New Zealand art, which hang or sit alongside op shop finds, family heirlooms and unusual artefacts brought back from overseas travels.

Although they use blankets as rugs and chair covers, only one of Katherine's artworks is on display here. "I work from home and, when you're working with blankets all day, you don't want to see them all evening."

Now in her 50s, Katherine took up art when her children were small, starting with School Certificate and Sixth Form Certificate art by correspondence. These days she's winning awards, giving talks, taking up international residencies and staging exhibitions of her work. >

**THIS PAGE** Katherine would rather look at her kitchen implements than hide them away in drawers: "I like a kitchen to look like cooking happens here."

**OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) Matisse chairs surround the dining table, which was made for Katherine's parents in the 1950s; she bought the wire rabbit at a craft fair and the pink print is by Rachael Garland. Among the books in the den is an upcycled tin plate doll made by Campbell. The entry foyer's staircase once had childproof gates top and bottom; the Regan Gentry sculpture *Made to Measure* upsets expectations, with no window behind the blind.





“I can say, ‘I want to have an exhibition with everything floating from the ceiling’ and Campbell will design a device and trial it. Campbell’s brilliant – inventiveness is in his genetics. It saves a fortune!”

Often found in his basement study (aka man shed), the IBM service delivery manager has also designed and built a motorbike, small decks and a woodshed, and is currently designing a living room lighting system. Recently, he mastered the art of espresso coffee-making on his beloved Rocket machine, with Katherine and friends roped in as (increasingly jittery) critics.

The pair may “live in the kitchen”, where sun streams onto a well-used wooden table, but another favourite space is the giant back deck, which the kids once pretended was a pirate ship. It overlooks the native bush – rimu, manuka, five-finger, fern, honeysuckle – clinging to their sloping quarter-acre section. Katherine often stands here, watching the light dance through a garden that’s perfect for the non-gardener.

“We sometimes prune and thin it a bit, but that’s it. How can you beat that?” She gazes up at a beech tree as the unique song of the tui (its windpipe splits in two so it can duet with itself) forms a chorus with the squeals of kids from a nearby primary school.

Back inside the “treehouse” and up the stairs, three small bedrooms – with windows resembling portholes and walls painted in perky colours – haven’t changed much since their teenage occupants left. “The kids loved growing up in this house and love coming back to their rooms, but they needn’t worry, we’re not leaving. As soon as I walked in here, I said to Campbell, ‘This is my dream home. This is it.’ It was the whole package: the naturalness of the wood inside, the bush outside. It was just the feeling it gave me – we immediately clicked.” ■



## Q&A

**Favourite kitchen tool:** A sharp knife. Blunt knives drive me crazy!

**Renovation low point:** In 1989 when the front of the house was removed, leaving tarpaulins flapping for a week in mid-winter.

**Home improvement that caused the most debate:** Campbell’s study – an extra cost on an already big extension.

**Favourite local restaurant:** Bansuri, a new Indian restaurant in Silverstream. The food is good and the people are lovely.

**I’m enjoy working with blankets because:** It connects me to the past. The more I work with blankets the more fascinated I have become with the function of the blanket, its place in history and its ancient connection to domesticity.

**I got the nickname Blanket Queen because:** A friend addressed some mail to me as “The Blanket Queen”. Now Blanket Queen is part of my email address. It’s just a bit of fun.

*Katherine Morrison*



**THIS PAGE** (from top) The deck multitasks as an outdoor entertaining space, playroom and clothes line area. “It’s so lovely in the summer with all the doors opening from the living area onto the deck, which just feels like another room without a ceiling,” says Katherine. **OPPOSITE** (from top) In the master bedroom “the oval objects on the tea trolley are tin hot-water bottles and the rattle was one my children chewed on.” When the master bedroom was added in 1980 the stained-glass windows were sourced from a recycling centre. Sliding doors connect the dining space with the deck.

