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# EXOTIC EYE

Minimalism wasn't an option for the owners of this nine-level Paremata cliff house overflowing with unexpected treasures

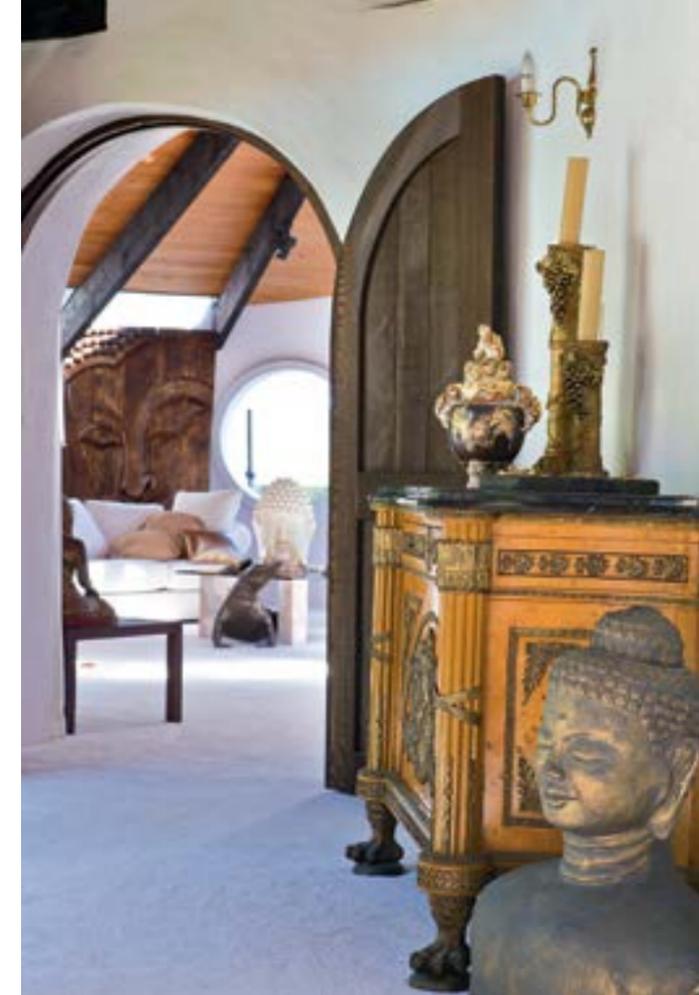
WORDS SARAH LANG / PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MCCREDIE

**THESE PAGES** There's no shortage of talking points for dinner guests in the formal lounge/dining room of Gloria and Ian Welch's home on Golden Gate Peninsula in Paremata, north of Wellington; the giant skylight at the apex of the dome is surrounded by a tongue-and-groove rimu ceiling and birds sometimes fly down the showpiece chimney; the large wooden alligator was hand-carved in Indonesia.





**THESE PAGES** (clockwise from left) In the formal lounge/dining room, a wooden bull carved in the Philippines eyeballs visitors: “My birth sign is Taurus,” says Gloria. “I’d like to get rid of it now but my husband loves it”; the three wooden Chinese statues represent longevity, wisdom and fertility. A reproduction of a 15th-century French cabinet takes pride of place in the sunlit gallery; Gloria paid \$4900 for it and later discovered that an identical one in Italy is worth \$30,000; she bought the Indonesian wooden Buddha plaque in the background from Blue Moon Collection in Havelock North. Gloria and Ian Welch; given the many striking pieces, most of the walls and carpets in their home are neutrally white, with gold accents and lots of natural wood.



**E**XPLORING IAN AND GLORIA Welch’s labyrinth of a house, I feel like Alice in Wonderland: as though I’ve fallen down the rabbit hole, drunk the potion, shrunk and can’t quite get my bearings in a world that’s as unusual as it is unfamiliar.

Just like Alice, I get lost in Wonderland. Every time I think I’ve seen all of this Paremata house, with its nine split levels and multiple staircases, I find another door. And every time I enter a new room, something striking and unexpected catches my eye – an Indian throne, an African tribal mask, a Mexican table covered in cowhide.

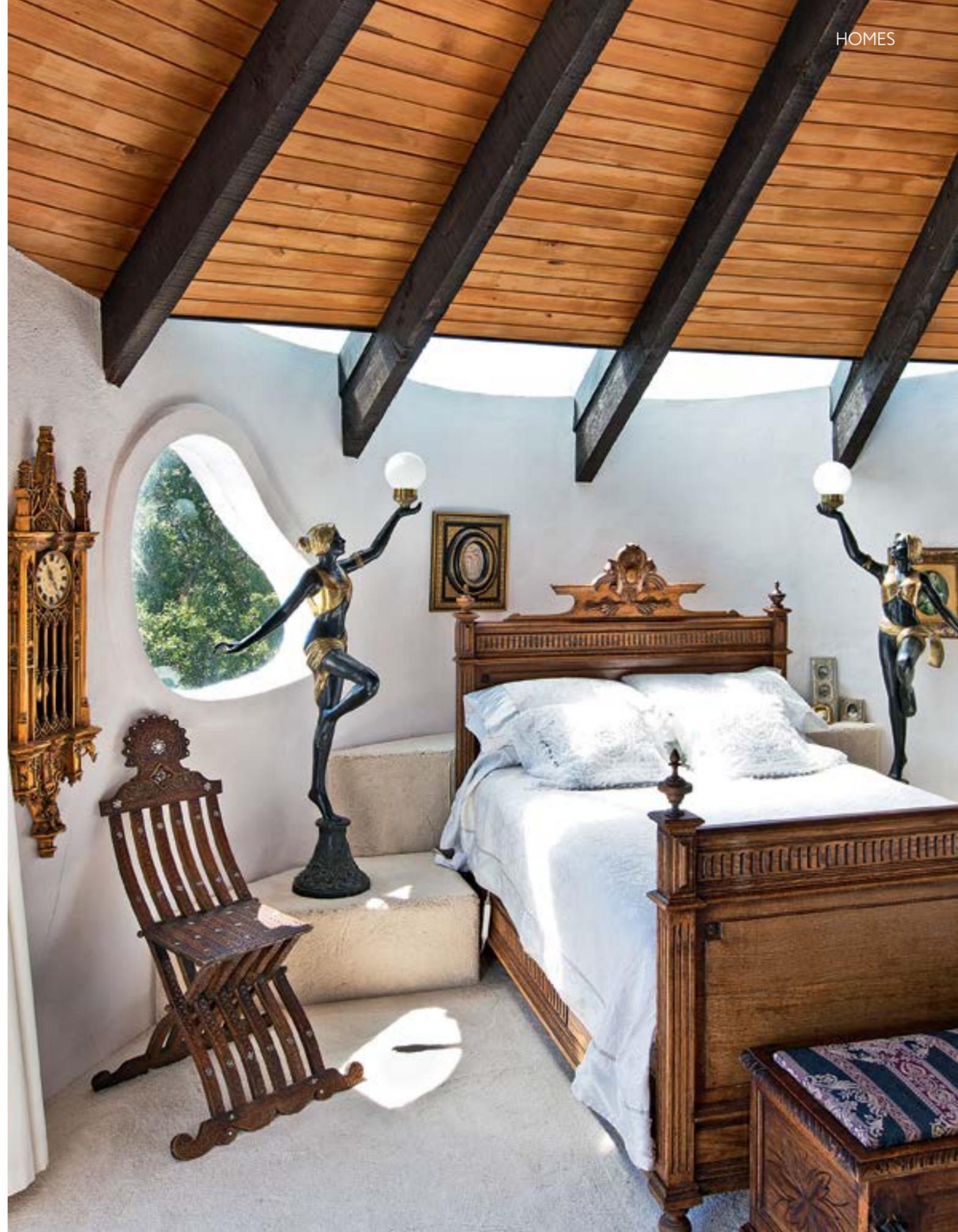
Many of the pieces, from Papua New Guinea, Mexico, Indonesia, China, India and various African nations, represent different cultures and religions. There are so many Buddha busts and figurines, they could fill their own temple.

“I’m not religious, but I’m drawn to them. I’m not sure why,” says Gloria pensively. “I’m not a big animal person either.” She’s referring to the statues of a bull, an alligator and a cheetah that look, respectively, as if they’re about to charge, bite and pounce.

Unsurprisingly, visitors are surprised when they walk into the house for the first time. “They all say ‘wow’ at the view,” says Gloria, “but some of them like the furnishings and some of

them don’t. I like things that are a bit different. A bit eclectic.”

She used to own a gift and antiques shop, you see, and when she shut Exotic Stuff in central Wellington in 2001, after 17 years’ trading, the delivery van brought a large load home. Since then, she has continued to pick up pieces from antiques shops (particularly Whales Tale Antique Gallery in Port Ahuriri, Napier) and from antiques dealers (particularly Michael Nalder when he lived in Greytown). Most pieces were bought in New Zealand, as it’s too difficult to bring big things home from overseas travels. “I don’t think I’ll be buying any more actually,” says Gloria. “I’ve got stuff stored everywhere.” >



Luckily, there's lots of storage space in this house on Golden Gate Peninsula in Paremata, which is lined with lavish homes and known as Porirua's Golden Mile. The peninsula, a narrow finger of land that points north-east, ends in a cliff-edge fingernail with virtually no flat land. Back in the 1980s, it proved a tricky site to build on. "We drove 100 iron railway tracks six metres down into the rocks so if there was an earthquake supposedly it would keep standing," says Gloria, showing me photographs of the work-in-progress before they moved in in 1989.

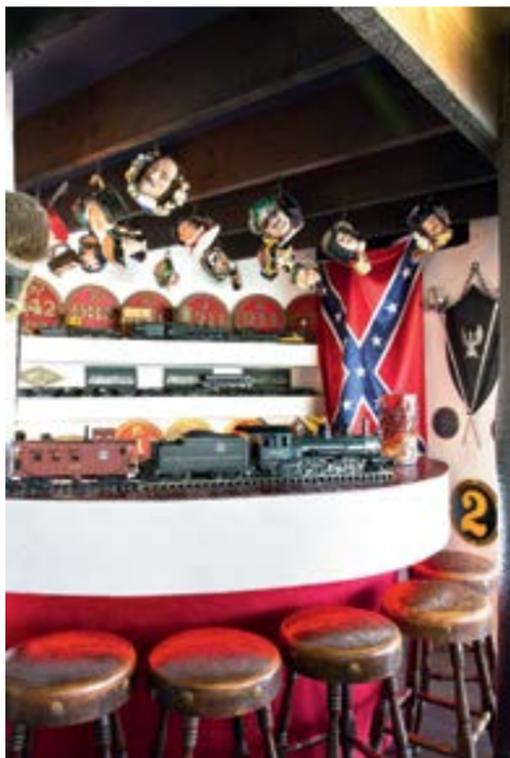
Orewa-based architect Ian Burrow was up for the challenge of designing a large house on a tiny sliver of land. Inspired by cliff houses in Portugal, he went for sculptural curves rather than straight lines. The couple were delighted with the curves, the cocooned rooms, the light open spaces, the sheltered outdoor living and the views.

"The house is a kind of sculpture and the architect is an artist," says Gloria. "His designs are timeless. Sometimes I think the place should be minimalist because all my things draw the eye away from the amazing architecture. But I don't like minimalism. [Husband] Ian's more minimalist than me actually." >

**THIS PAGE** Dressed in her favourite colour, Gloria descends the staircase in the entrance hall; the mask behind her is from Papua New Guinea and she has always loved chandeliers. In one of three bathrooms, the shower doubles as a bath and the window looks like a painting (in another bathroom, the towels hang off the fingertips of a bronze Buddha). **OPPOSITE** The art deco reading lamps and antique wall clock in this guest bedroom are both from Gloria's favourite haunt, Whales Tale Antique Gallery in Napier: "They treat me like a long-lost friend"; the oak Jacobean bed came from Wakefield Antiques, which has since moved from Wellington to Greytown.

THESE PAGES Ian spends a lot of time in the snug, particularly when his mates stop by; the plaques and crests are from England's pre-war private railway companies; below the shelves are copies of brass plates from New Zealand steam locomotives, most of which Ian owns – he may have the largest mainline steam train collection in the world; Gloria mosaicked the mirror frame seen on the wall of the conservatory at right. >





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**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from top left) When Gloria’s collection of Toby jugs outgrew the kitchen, they moved to the bar of the snug, alongside Ian’s model trains. From the kitchen Gloria, who does all the cooking, can glimpse Ian at work in his office. Another miniature bull from Gloria’s former gift shop overlooks the breakfast bar. **OPPOSITE** Ian insisted on the sloping windows in the family room and some of Gloria’s antiques have faded in the sun, but it’s worth it for the views. Gloria reads in the conservatory; she sometimes drapes hand washing on the candleholders and leadlight hangings to dry quickly.



They’ve raised four children and have seven grandchildren but this husband and wife have very different tastes. “When Ian likes something, I don’t and vice versa. We’ve always sparred about it. I have to battle. I have to sneak things in,” she confides with a laugh, as I try to imagine her creeping into the house with a Buddha that’s bigger than her. And when he notices the new additions? “I remind him that he has a few steam engines.”

Indeed. The entrepreneur – who runs Nelson Stud Welding NZ Ltd (the leading global manufacturer/distributor of stud welding equipment) and Tray-dec NZ Ltd (which installs metal composite floors) – also heads Mainline Steam Tours, which restores historic locomotives and runs railway excursions throughout New Zealand and also Australia.

“Ian’s got probably the largest mainline steam train collection in the world,” says Gloria. “Besides the trains that were in use on railways, he has the smaller ones that kids ride in parks and a large collection of small model trains representing New Zealand and US prototypes.”

Although most of them are housed at his company’s various depots, the couple’s carport and garage is Central Station for five of the kid-sized trains and many more model trains. “I don’t mess with the garage or try to clean it,” says Gloria. >



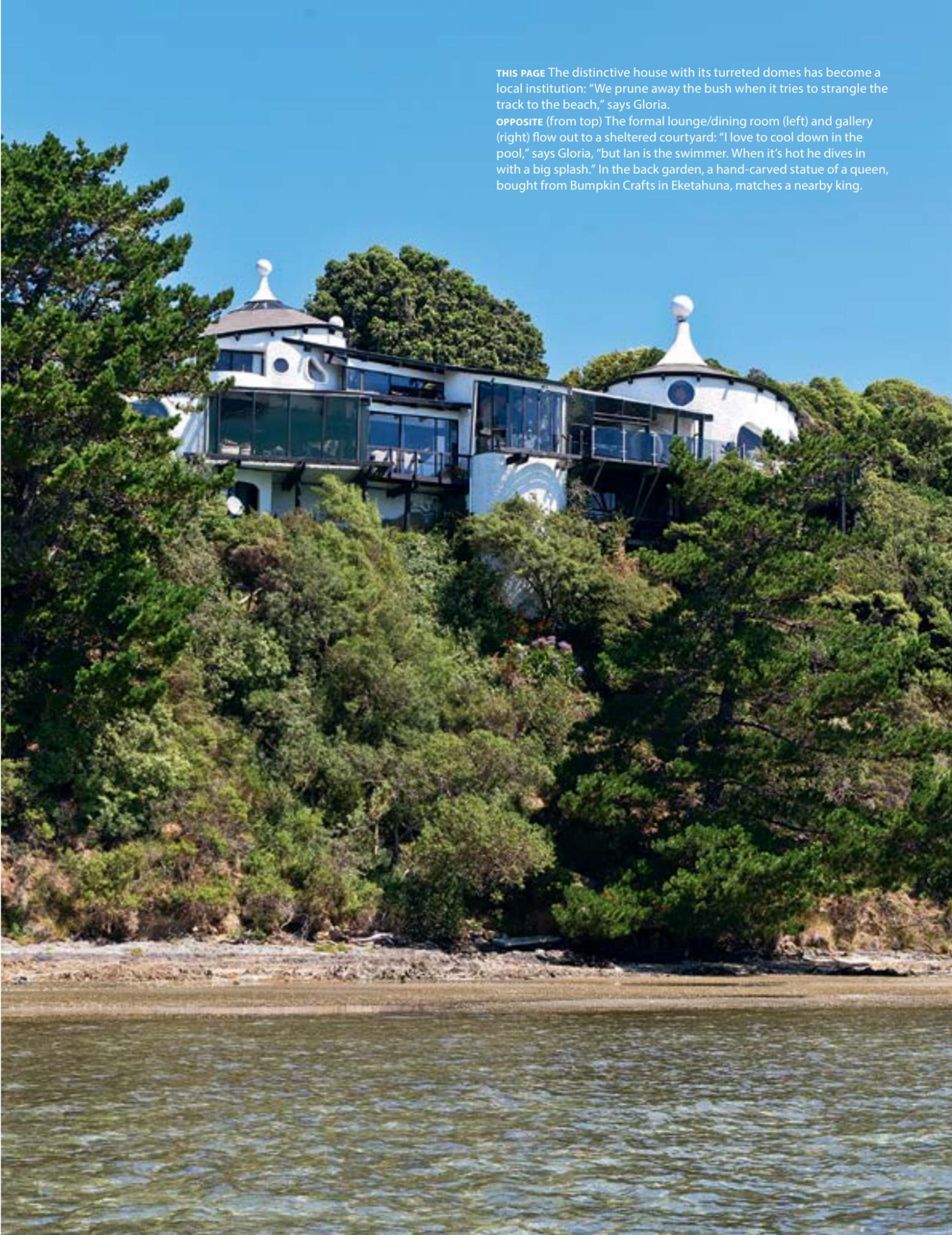


“The garage is his man cave. But I have my own girl cave down here.” She leads me into yet another room, with countless containers, jars and drawers full of crystal, china and beads. Gloria, who was once a real estate agent, took up mosaicking after selling Exotic Stuff and works mostly from her studio and half a day a week at Te Omanga hospice op shop in Petone.

She sells her creations – mainly mirrors, candleholders and crosses – through Pataka Art + Museum’s shop in Porirua (where she recently won two prizes as part of an Australasian group exhibition) and Groundup Cafe in nearby Pauatahanui Village. Others pepper the house.

Working in her studio, Gloria draws inspiration from views of the precious estuarine wetland and the wildlife of the Pauatahanui Inlet. “I see tui, seals, shags, stingrays, black swans. It’s another world down there.”

As a birthday present, Ian finished a previously aborted private track through the bush down to the beach and it’s well used. They also love sitting out on the deck on summer evenings, drinking in the views and a glass of something cool. “Ian says, ‘Why go to the Mediterranean? We’ve got it right here.’” ■



**THIS PAGE** The distinctive house with its turreted domes has become a local institution: “We prune away the bush when it tries to strangle the track to the beach,” says Gloria.

**OPPOSITE** (from top) The formal lounge/dining room (left) and gallery (right) flow out to a sheltered courtyard: “I love to cool down in the pool,” says Gloria, “but Ian is the swimmer. When it’s hot he dives in with a big splash.” In the back garden, a hand-carved statue of a queen, bought from Bumpkin Crafts in Eketahuna, matches a nearby king.



## Q&A

**Favourite piece of kitchen equipment:** The dishwasher – couldn’t do without it. *(Gloria)*

**Renovation high point:** Moving the spa pool outside. *(Both)*

**I can always count on:** Ian’s reaction when I sneak new pieces into the house, as lots of women do. *(Gloria)*

**If there was one thing I could do differently, it would be:** Combine the family room with the kitchen. *(Gloria)*

**My best moments in the garden are:** When I’m creating something new and looking at the white climbing clematis and roses. And in the evening, with all the outdoor lighting – it’s a picture. *(Gloria)*

**My least favourite household chore is:** Cleaning windows. *(Ian)*

**This weekend I will be:** Mosaicking in my studio. *(Gloria)*

**Where can you get a fabulous coffee?** Groundup Cafe in Pauatahanui village. *(Gloria)*

*Gloria and Ian Welch*