

THESE PAGES In the kitchen/lounge area of Anna Stichbury and Andy Carruthers' Northland, Wellington home, one of Anna's Little Peta Rabbit silkscreened prints sits above daughter Rose's orange self-portrait, done at age six; Anna spotted the *Whipping Girl* painting at Matt Gauldie's first exhibition: "My mother and my mother-in-law weren't particularly impressed, but Mum said, 'Because you're an artist you can get away with it.' I don't see it as being sexy or seductive – I just see it as being kick-arse."

MAKER'S MARK

Art, colour and vintage treasures draw the eye in a Wellington family home designed with inspiration in mind

WORDS SARAH LANG / PHOTOGRAPHS JANE USSHER



THESE PAGES (clockwise from left) Standing sentry over the lounge is Anna's portrait of her mum Allison: "Babysitters sometimes freak out when they spot the figure in their peripheral vision"; the two planes by Michele Bryant have a map of Wellington on them. Anna tracked down the Think Outside the Box print after seeing it on pinterest.com. Lila, Ruba and Anna in the renovated kitchen: "We spend a lot of our time here, eating, talking, making and doing," says Anna. A much-loved Gretchen Albrecht lithograph, *Iron Sands*, hangs in the lounge. Anna and Andy added bay doors and a deck to the lounge; they like to sit at the "happy table" for a cup of tea or a wine, turning the restored vintage chairs to admire the view.



LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD, aka four-year-old Lila, darts out the front door of Anna Stichbury's home in Northland, Wellington. She is dressed all in red and carrying a basket of fruit to take to "Grandma's house in the woods" (well, her mother's art studio in the garden). Rose, eight, and Ruba, 10, are across the road at Northland School, alma mater of their grandmother and great-grandmother.

Joking that Lila should watch out for wolves, Anna welcomes me into her newly renovated kitchen for tea and cake served on vintage china. She's wearing flowers in her hair, orange and pink earrings and one of her own Little Peta Rabbit Tees, screenprinted with a bunny sporting a fly on its nose. Not every woman can sum

up her personal style in two words, but Anna can. "Rock'n'roll nana. I like old china, cups of tea, baking and vintage frocks." And there's more than a bit of rock'n'roll nana in her home.

Anna and husband Andy Carruthers, who runs a design agency, bought the 1920s weatherboard house in 2002, drawn to its friendly feel and potential as a family home. "We put an offer in from the car about five minutes later and that was that." As their family grew, the couple renovated in stages, adding a bathroom, a deck, two bedrooms and Anna's painting studio.

Anna, who makes her own dresses from vintage fabrics, also makes many a thing for and with the girls, from bunting for their walls to fabric covers for their doorknobs. >

THIS PAGE Anna's concept for the sunny parlour was boutique-hotel lobby; the gold and silver leaf butterfly painting is from Anna's *Weeping Wings* series and the wallpaper is Hicks Hexagon by Cole & Son; on the salvaged wood table is a stuffed rabbit called Peta – a birthday present to Anna from her family.

OPPOSITE "I used to sit on the red velvet chair in my Grandma Stichbury's 'good lounge'. I'll always have a spot for it," says Anna; the table was a gift from the same grandma on Anna's eighth birthday. Anna has painted animals and words onto stray bits of old china brought home over the years. Circle paintings hanging in Anna's studio: "They feel satisfying and complete." Having a detached studio works well for Anna: "That way you don't try and half-parent, half-work – you wouldn't do a great job of either."



Anna has always been a maker. "I'm compelled to do it. I can't not do it." At age seven, she started selling pet rocks with painted faces and woollen hair down the road from her Eastbourne home, solemnly telling customers that the rocks were house-trained so they wouldn't pee on the carpet. She got hooked on painting while finishing a design degree majoring in textiles. "Painting's like icing a cake, but it stays there, and it's limitless."

Twenty years on, Anna has made a name for herself and her paintings on paper and canvas, with their vibrant colours and layered textures. She often returns to a theme again and again, such as circles, butterflies, maps and rabbits. Although she does exhibit in solo and (more often) group shows, Anna mainly sells her pieces and takes commissions through her online gallery (annastichbury.co.nz).

She's also an avid collector of art, mainly by Wellington contemporaries. Often they swap work. "Other people's art and things I collect often feed an idea or nourish me creatively." Enlivening the kitchen, for instance, is a huge (unnamed) painting of central Wellington's Felix Cafe by Ben Bocock, with all its classic Wellington characters sipping coffee, reading the paper, immersed in their own worlds.

A black and white colour scheme is the ideal backdrop for the eye-catching art and many splashes of colour. "I'm so moved by colour that I can't commit to one for any length of time. At the moment I'm feeling yellow. In my painting, too, I'm fairly committed to a couple of colours. Then I'll go off and have an affair with turquoise. I don't tell red!"

As well as art, the house is full of family heirlooms, including the deer antlers and the old filing cabinet (now used as bathroom drawers) from her grandparents' farm near Blenheim. "In a fire, I'd have to take my great-granddad's snow dome and my cabinet full of miniatures. Each piece holds such rich and fond visual memories of my childhood, my grandparents and their homes."

Few things are bought new. "I prefer to buy something that's been made once and used five times. That's where the stories are. I'm always telling my kids the stories of pieces and I think that's more valuable than something brand new and on trend." >





THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) Ruba, who loves nature, chose the bird decals for her room, and the red and blue colour scheme. The “spooky forest” master bedroom feature wall doubles as a wardrobe door and matches the 1972 Avis Higgs ink on paper that also hung in Anna’s dining room as a child. Ruba loves the blue lanterns strung across her window, next to one of Anna’s painted plates. A vintage reclining chair in the office.

OPPOSITE Ruba holds Fluffa, one of the family’s two guinea pigs. The view from Anna’s art studio, with the kitchen doors open.

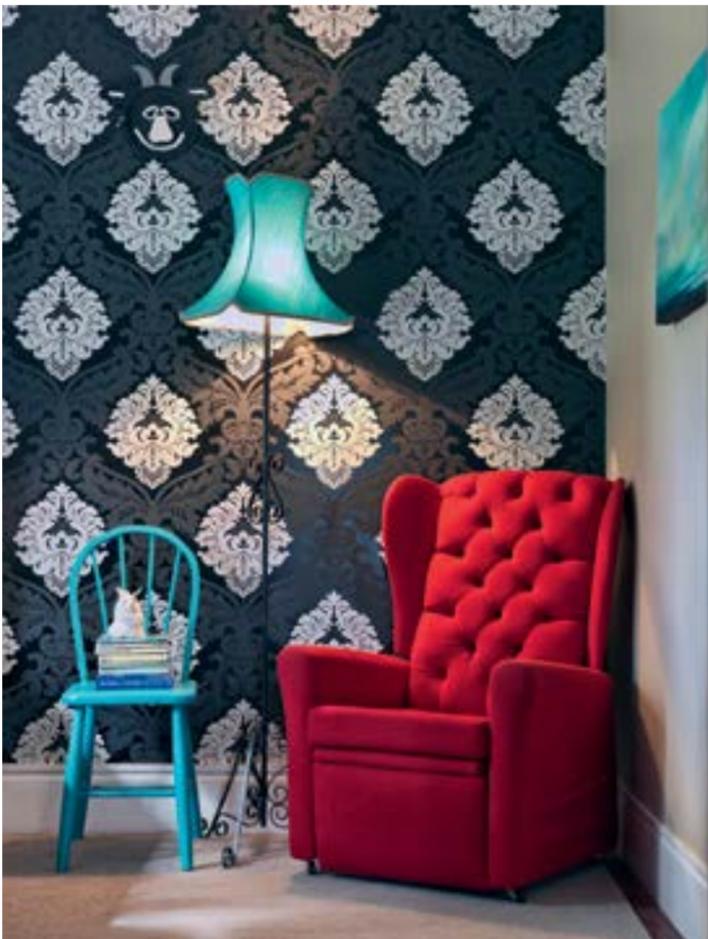


Scouring junkyards, op shops, garage sales and Trade Me, Anna has made many a vintage find. She also salvages and restores old furniture, such as the parlour table. “It’s a wooden cable reel that I threw in my boot when passing an old train yard, with permission from the lovely old chap in charge.”

A rule of thumb prevents too much squirrelling: “The best piece of advice I ever got was, ‘Is it meaningful, functional or beautiful? If not, don’t have it in your home because it’s just clutter.’ Unfortunately I find lots of things meaningful or beautiful! I see beauty where others might see rubbish.”

Amusingly, Andy actually leans toward minimalism. “But he’s learning to live with stuff. He calls stuff junk, but isn’t stuff just junk you want?” The couple do have a litmus test for whether something stays. “If someone loves something more than the other person hates it, we keep it and vice versa. Though a few art pieces he really likes somehow keep moving towards the periphery of the house...”

As the girls get older, the house continues to evolve, with the playroom gradually becoming a parlour. “The kids have a say in how our home runs now too. The house is an organic thing and I really like that. It would be just so boring, wouldn’t it, if things stayed the same?” ■



Q&A

Favourite power tool or kitchen appliance: My dropsaw and bread-maker. Both make great things, most of the time. *(Andy)*

Best money spent: Insulating the house, top to bottom. *(Andy)*

If I could do one thing differently with the house it would be: Invest in quality joinery. Sadly, sometimes you really do get what you pay for. Lesson learned! *(Andy)*

Favourite part of the house: Our brand new kitchen designed by Charlotte Minty. It’s so clean! Just wait a few months. *(Anna)*

A quote I often use is: “Never eat more than you can carry” – Miss Piggy. *(Anna)*

A well-kept secret about this area: The awesome running and mountain-biking tracks at our back door. *(Andy)*

One thing you must see when you visit: The Karori Bird Sanctuary [Zealandia] at dusk. *(Both)*

Favourite local restaurant: Cosa Nostra on Tinakori Road. Casual, friendly and yummy. *(Both)*

Favourite local shop: Magnolia Trading Company in the city – like Christmas morning every time you walk through the door. Closer to home it’s Marsden Books. *(Anna)*

Anna Stichbury and Andy Carruthers



Photo 2: In the renovated kitchen, Lila, four, is choosing which headband to borrow from Ruba, 10. "The kitchen is where we spend a lot of our time: eating, talking, making and doing," says Anna. "That way we are never too far from cake!"

