

**THESE PAGES** Framed for the lounge wall of the Oppenhuis bach, black and white photographs taken by Kate Oppenhuis have frozen precious moments in time: the kids clambering over rocks at the river, boogie boarding in the ocean, son Fred's footprint in the sand: "Maybe I'll be a photographer in another life," says Kate; to the left, the framed "sight test" print with its wise words ("You can rarely see what's right in front of you") caught Kate's eye in an Amsterdam art shop; the Christchurch sign was a gift after the earthquake, as Kate and her husband Dean grew up there.



# THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Open by name and open by nature, the Oppenhuis family love to share the charms of their bach on Waikanae Beach

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**I**N APRIL 2008, Wellington lawyer Dean Oppenhuis got a perplexing phone call from his wife Kate. "I've found a bach in Waikanae!" she cried. "A bach?" he replied. "We're not looking for a bach. And where's Waikanae?"

That last part was a joke – they did know where Waikanae was – but the parents of three young children had never even thought about, let alone talked about, buying a bach. However, earlier that day Kate, an interior stylist who loves her home magazines, had been flicking through a property paper when a photo in an ad caught her eye.

"A little dark bach. Tiny and cute, with lots of old trees and a big front lawn. It reminded me of carefree summer days, of a crib in Arrowtown that my dad built, where so many of my childhood memories were formed." Kate wanted to give her sons and daughter those experiences – those memories – of golden days at a bach by the beach, paddling in the sea and playing swingball. "I really wanted that for them – that real Kiwi-kid stuff that they might not otherwise get."

But back to that unexpected phone call. Dean, perhaps still in shock, gave Kate the go-ahead to take a look. >



**THIS PAGE** Looking into the kitchen/dining space from the main lounge, you can glimpse the kids' playroom to the right; the *Apple of My Eye* artwork is by Kate's close friend Anna Stichbury; Kate wanted to keep the kitchen as simple, crisp and easy to use as possible, with no pantry, no microwave – just the basic fittings: "I've always loved subway tiles, so having them on the kitchen wall was a no-brainer for that industrial, vintage look."

**OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) The main lounge is for playing Monopoly on a rainy day or relaxing when the kids are in bed; at home Kate has flowers everywhere, "but at the bach I just cut greenery and branches from our trees and put them in old jars". Fred draws on the blackboard in the corridor. An Eames Hang-It-All coat rack tidies things up in the kids' playroom; the French sign is from Zinc+ in Wellington and the hessian stool is from Lovely Living in Waikanae, where the owner recycles old fabrics.





So Kate drove little Fred, then nine months, the 50 minutes from their Wellington home to the bach in Waikanae Beach, the old part of town. And the next day Dean and daughter Maddy, then four, followed suit and wandered the 200m from the bach to the long, wide stretch of beach. Says Kate: "He saw Maddy cartwheeling so happily and he came home and said, 'Yip, let's put an offer on it'. Within three days we owned a bach. It was just one of those random, meant-to-be moments."

They didn't do a lot to the place at first – stripping out carpets and curtains, painting the chipboard floor white – but by 2010 cabin fever had set in and they decided that 80sqm wasn't quite enough space. "We only wanted a little more room, not a lot," says Kate. "Being small and cute is part of the charm of this place."

Apart from a new exterior coat of grey paint, the bach would show the same face to the world. Out back, however, a rectangular extension of two small bedrooms and a verandah went up. Inside, two walls were demolished to create a lounge, whitewashed oak floorboards replaced the chipboard, tiles replaced the bathroom lino and a simple new kitchen went in. Throughout the renovation, simplicity was the guiding principle. In Maddy's room, for instance, there's literally only a bunk bed, a chair and some clothes hooks – no drawers, no wardrobe.

The family comes up regularly for a few weeks in January, most school holidays and a weekend about once a month. >

**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from top left) In the master bedroom Kate threw a sheepskin over a junk shop chair. Maddy's bedroom and the bathroom were the final two rooms of the original house; the extension is out of sight to the right; the Zinc+ letters spell WASH on the bathroom wall "in case anyone forgets what to do in there," jokes Kate. For sleepovers, Maddy claims the top bunk and friend Phoebe-Jane Bostrovos prefers the bottom. A feature wall in Maddy's room sports a Dutch wallpaper. **OPPOSITE** The master bedroom's E27 pendant lamps, designed by Swedish architect Mattias Stahlbom, are from Auckland's Douglas + Bec.





**THIS PAGE** From left, Fred, Willem and friend Mackenzie Preston on the front deck, which leads into the kids' playroom; Fred sometimes persuades his big brother to pull him around the section in his red wagon; flags are also strung between trees and along bedroom walls.

**OPPOSITE** Kids and friends race to the beach: "We don't cotton wool the kids – they can run around, do their own thing," says Kate.

Often it's more than a party of five. Aptly enough, given their surname, the Oppenhuis home is an open house. Family, friends and their children often come up for the day or to stay in the sleepout with its double bed, bunk beds and own bathroom. The Oppenhuis kids often invite school friends up too. "They're all outside, doing the things you want them to do growing up."

You might find Willem, 10, Maddy, eight, and Fred, five, climbing trees, playing backyard cricket, rugby or swingball, jumping on the tramp or water slide, biking down the quiet streets for an ice cream or boogie boarding in the river. Dean likes to hang out with the kids, kicking a ball in the front yard or leading an expedition to the beach: "He loves the water," says Kate.

While they do their thing, Kate likes to read magazines on the sunny deck or in a hammock strung between two of the old trees that border the fence line. "To be honest, being here is the only time I chill out."

Inside, the adults and kids each have their own little lounge – the latter a casual, fun space with splashes of colour in the coat hooks, the vintage sign, the meter box with its first-aid cross. "I wanted this room more colourful for the kids, while the rest of the house is more Scandinavian-inspired," says Kate.

Two years in the UK, and regular trips back, have fuelled Kate's fancy for the minimalist Scandinavian design style, "with lots of white, open spaces and vintage touches". Accent colours – particularly red and yellow – pop against muted black and white backgrounds.

But for this family the indoors is mainly just for the evenings and rainy days. Otherwise they're outdoors, savouring the sights, sounds and smells of summer. The crimson burst of flowering pohutukawa. The aroma of pineapple sun block. The crunch of hokey-pokey ice cream. The hum of cicadas and squelch of sand between your toes... memories that will last a lifetime. ■

## Q&A

**When I think of summer, I think of:** Bare feet and ice creams.

**Best things about summer holidays at the bach:** No alarm clocks and no lunch boxes.

**The kids' favourite things to do here:** Shooting each other with water pistols and climbing trees. They're up in those magical pohutukawa and karaka trees for hours at a time – I have no idea what they even do up there!

**Every day when we're here we:** Walk to the local dairy for the newspaper and bread.

**Favourite meal here:** Fish and chips from the local shop, eaten down at the river. Otherwise it's nearly always barbecues in summer; in winter, soup or toasties. I don't cook here!

**I can always count on:** Our builder, Waikanae local Andy Cameron. He was fabulous and made the whole extension and renovation process easy. He even put in a sandpit out the back that can be cleverly tucked away under the deck.

**Best thing we did to the place:** Install the hot-water shower outside. The beach is close enough that the kids can walk there with bare feet, then come back and hose off.

*Kate Oppenhuis*

