



THIS PAGE In Ben Sharpe and Rosanne Donaldson Sharpe's Wellington dining room a silver tea set that once belonged to Ben's parents sits on the mantelpiece – it was passed on to Ben and Rosanne when they became engaged; the Modus Essence china on the table came from Rosanne's parents; as a teenager, Rosanne painted the red-headed girl over the mantel.

OPPOSITE The dining room shelves display Rosanne's vintage china collection, including the red and black-patterned GayDay set by Palissy; Rosanne is constantly hunting for missing pieces – she even had one shipped from Guernsey.



SUNSHINE BUNGALOW

It's easy to imagine you're back in the 1930s in this suntrap perched above Wellington's Lyall Bay

WORDS SARAH LANG / PHOTOGRAPHS JANE USSHER



THIS PAGE The lounge's complement of furniture includes a drum used as a side table – a \$10 op-shop find – and a monkey stool that was a gift from a friend; the sunny window seat is a favourite tea-drinking spot. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) Ben Sharpe and Rosanne Donaldson Sharpe. The pair are looking for a third bar stool (they're French antiques) so they don't have to compete with their cat: "Leeroy loves the bar stools," says Ben. The guest room features one of their three art deco-style Kosyaire globe heaters – the best heaters they've had, they say.



NOT MANY COUPLES could work in the same tiny office day in, day out, but 3-D animators Ben Sharpe and Rosanne Donaldson Sharpe don't just manage it, they enjoy it. At 7.3sqm, the office in their Wellington home is so small, if they slid back on their computer chairs they'd collide.

Isn't it distracting when the other's talking on the phone or Skype? Surprisingly, no, they say. They are too immersed in their projects and sharing an office lets them collaborate and swap advice. Plenty of breaks and regular work trips also help to stave off cabin fever. "Though when I stand back and look at how small the room is," says Rosanne, "I think, 'Wow!'"

I think wow, too, when the just-married couple explain what they do from here. The accomplished CGI (computer-generated imagery) artists have created 3-D graphics for television coverage of the 2011 Rugby World Cup, Formula 1 races (for the BBC) and the America's Cup and Louis Vuitton Pacific Series yacht races, to name just a few projects. Currently they both work remotely for award-winning Dunedin firm Animation Research. Rosanne juggles her CGI work with freelance photography, specialising in fashion and beauty.

The pair met four years ago when both were working in London. Ben's twin brother had been Rosanne's flatmate before Ben took his room. "We started working together on little [animation] projects and got to know each other," recalls Rosanne. At the time, her day job was retouching editorial images for magazines such as *Vogue*, big-brand ad campaigns and individual photographers like the super-famous, one-name-only Rankin.

After spending almost a decade living in London, they decided to return home in 2010 to enjoy the more relaxed Kiwi lifestyle. They're both from the South Island, but artsy Wellington beckoned and Lyall Bay was the suburb of choice: sea views, not far from town and close to the beach.

Then this two-level 1930s bungalow came up for sale, high on the hill with panoramic sea views from its bay windows. "As soon as we walked in and saw the view, we were sold," says Ben. "After a few years living in central London, you just want to see the sea. Plus the house was a solid construction in really good condition. And we loved all the rimu, particularly the original floor." >





THIS PAGE (from left) On the wall of the master bedroom is a vintage-style tea dress by Karen Walker, Rosanne's favourite Kiwi designer; she uses the white head to display "all my hats, sunglasses and scarves". A 1930s wool swimsuit hangs above the bed.

OPPOSITE The lounge's bay window (pictured), the front door and the letterbox are painted Resene 'Curious Blue': "We think it gives the house a Greek island feel and is perfect for the seaside," says Ben. The couple make their near-daily pilgrimage down the beach to Maranui Cafe.



Q&A

Favourite kitchen appliance: My retro Sunbeam Mixmaster. Older is cooler. (Rosanne)

Best buy: Our motorised pepper grinder. I've become addicted to black pepper and would have developed RSI long ago if we hadn't made this purchase. (Ben)

Best time of the week: Any morning. We open the blinds and let the sun stream into the bedroom. It does make getting out of bed harder though. (Ben)

Most of our bits and pieces: Are my finds, but we make decisions together about whether or not to buy something. Apart from vintage china, that is! (Rosanne)

Favourite part of the house: The courtyard. I can sip beer with friends in one of the few sunny yet always sheltered corners of Wellington. (Ben)

We love it here: Because you can live in the North Island but also see the South Island, where we're from. (Rosanne)

Best time of the year here: Summer. We work hard over winter, when there are a lot of sporting events in the northern hemisphere. Over summer, we're rewarded with more time off for beach walks and brunches. (Ben)

Ben Sharpe and Rosanne Donaldson Sharpe

Though no renovations were needed, the pair wanted to make this modest house into a space so nice it would be no chore working from home. So they turned their creative flair to interior decorating, setting statement pieces sparingly against walls of subdued hues for a clean, uncluttered feel.

Everywhere you look, something – often something unusual and no longer used for its original purpose – draws the eye, particularly in the lounge. There, a drum and old stacked-up suitcases serve as tables. A globe heater resembles a small stool. Lawn bowls, tennis racquets and two electric guitars (both Ben and Rosanne play) are displayed like artworks.

Around the house, 18 mirrors of all shapes and sizes help to create a sense of space. "If there's a knock at the door and it's a parcel from TradeMe, it's probably a mirror," says Ben. "Rosanne loves mirrors – and she loves 1930s style, hence the 1930s house. This place is her canvas."

Adds Rosanne: "I was sick of looking at my nice bits and pieces in rentals against a mishmash of 80s curtains and 70s carpets."

Now with a home that suits her vintage pieces, or vice versa, Rosanne takes great pleasure in her art deco light fittings and the treasures on display on the wall-to-wall shelving unit beside the dining table. I spy an antique Singer sewing machine, tiny cameras, old carafes, heirloom knick-knacks, record covers and Rosanne's china collections. "I've got my one little cubicle up there," says Ben. "The rest is Rosanne's. Luckily, I like vintage!"

They lead me upstairs, past the "colour-blocky" stained-glass window on the staircase and the tongue-and-groove-lined bathroom to the spare room. When an English friend came to stay, Rosanne put up a poster of the Queen and a Union Jack flag to make her feel welcome and, before long, more royal memorabilia had crept into "The Queen's Room".

Matching art deco bedside tables grace the couple's bedroom along the hall, where cat Leeroy curls up in the sun. Though the outlook from the lounge is lovely, this red-accented room is by far the best viewing platform. Here, Ben and Rosanne watch planes taking off from and landing at Wellington airport. "We can see what people are doing in the water too," says Ben. "A surfer here, a paddleboarder there, a swimmer over there. In the morning we never turn on the light, we just open that blind and the sun streams in. We often bring breakfast up here."

The open-plan kitchen, added in 1995, is bigger and more modern than the rest of the house, but stays in 30s character with a display of old-school tins and cans, a stash of vintage aprons and a splash of primary colours. Through French doors, the courtyard is centred around a table and deckchairs, bordered by hanging flower baskets and capsicum and tomato plants. In the early evenings, you'll often find the pair out there, soaking up the sun and sheltered from the wind in their "little oasis".

One day they'll probably outgrow this house but, in the meantime, they'll enjoy every bit of their castle in the clouds. ■

NZ Walking and Cycling Tours

- Haurangi Cycle Trail
- Moana West Coast Cycle
- Otago Rail Trail
- Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail
- Takapua Canal Trail
- Malesworth Cycle Trail
- Akaia Walk
- Franz Josef Trail
- Mesopotamia High
- Country Walk
- Green Charlotte Walk
- West Coast Trail
- Kaitiaki Trail
- Kemper Trail
- ...and so much more.

What's on your bucket list this Summer?

Freephone: 0800 377 378
Level 1, 38 Mandeville Street, Christchurch

TUATARA TOURS

www.tuataratours.co.nz