

A picture in blue

A colourful Wellington villa that inspires a creative family with *four little children*... the neighbours can't wait to see their latest *beautiful window display*

WORDS SARAH LANG / PHOTOGRAPHS JANE USSHER



THIS PAGE The dining area of Charlotte and Jamie Schaefer's Wellington villa is a showcase for the couple's creativity; Charlotte is always changing the decorations - here she's used flowers but next it may be bunting and faux moss balls; Jamie made the *Not Bad* artwork, which was inspired by a favourite saying of his father's; he also designed the two tables which can be rearranged to seat up to 20 people.
OPPOSITE Matilda on the banquette, as the family calls it "just to get a little bit more French in there"; Jamie made the log side tables, the cushions are from Small Acorns and the rug is from Tea Pea.



THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) Charlotte always knows when it's time to change a display: "It stops putting a smile on my face when I enter the room and suddenly feels like unnecessary clutter." Matilda and Henriette enjoy their Royal Doulton Bunnykins collection. The house is designed to inspire creativity in the whole family.

OPPOSITE The room off the dining area is painted in Resene 'Anakiwa'; light shades are made with customised Sparkk fabric; the oil painting in the foreground is by John Badcock, a 21st gift for Charlotte from her parents; the textured artwork in the background is by Jamie.



WHEN CHARLOTTE AND JAMIE SCHAEFER brought their first baby home from the hospital, most of their house had no roof, just a sheet of ply at night. It was 2006, and the first major renovation of their century-old Wellington villa, bought four years earlier, was running way behind schedule.

"When we walked in, we heard the builder yelling about something, and Molly started screaming," Charlotte remembers. "What a welcome home! We basically lived in a capsule in our bedroom for a few weeks." But that proved so difficult they shifted out for five weeks. When they moved back, there was no bathroom and only a temporary toilet, so Charlotte went to her sister's house each morning to shower.

The parents of four – Molly, nine, George, seven, Matilda, four, and Henriette, two – met as teenagers at Victoria University hostel Weir House in 1995. In 2002, they were renting a flat in the Wellington suburb Northland when a for-sale sign went up next door. They hadn't saved enough for a deposit yet, but just had to have a nosey at the open home.

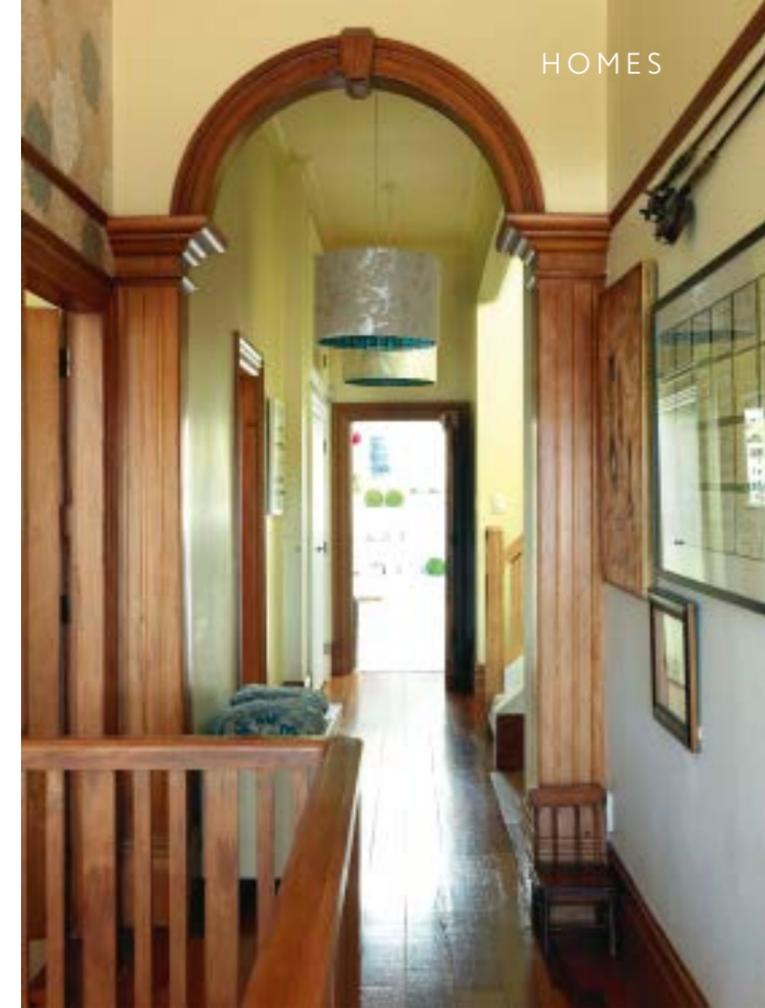
Built in 1905, the house had lost its looks. The ornate Victorian facade, captured in a 1906 photo of the street, was long gone. Once a doctor's surgery, it had more recently been rented out to students who weren't what you'd call house-proud. >

DESIGN NOTE
The built-in banquette was designed for flexibility. It uses minimal floor space, yet offers masses of storage. The dark, textured fabrics can withstand family life, and it's used for napping, watching movies and as an extra eating nook.





THIS PAGE Charlotte bought the cabinet next to the fireplace in the living room for \$11 from a church fair when she was a teenager; she never liked the wrought iron light fitting but couldn't persuade Jamie to change it, so covered the bare bulbs with individual shades made with vintage fabric; Jamie made the floral artwork using wallpaper uncovered during renovations. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) Charlotte comes from a family of book lovers. The couple are still debating whether to paint out the wood in the hallway; the walls are painted in Aalto 'Onion'. Designers Guild fabric on the master bed headboard indulges Charlotte's love of hydrangeas. A chair made for Matilda's nursery has now made its way into the lounge. "My usual obsession with fairy lights," says Charlotte; she uses the crystal at any opportunity.



"It was in a terrible state, but it had space and potential," Charlotte says. Jamie thought the house looked haunted, but it had room for the large family they wanted, and scope for renovations. Charlotte's father lent them half of the \$13,000 deposit and they made an offer, but the agent held out and had more open homes – while Charlotte eavesdropped over the fence.

Their offer was finally accepted. One weekend, their extended family and friends helped them rip out the carpet and move next door, with six guys lugging the piano across and people sleeping in both houses. With worms coming out of the skirting boards and rats living under the toilet, the couple immediately started renovating a room at a time, often taking Fridays off work and working three days straight.

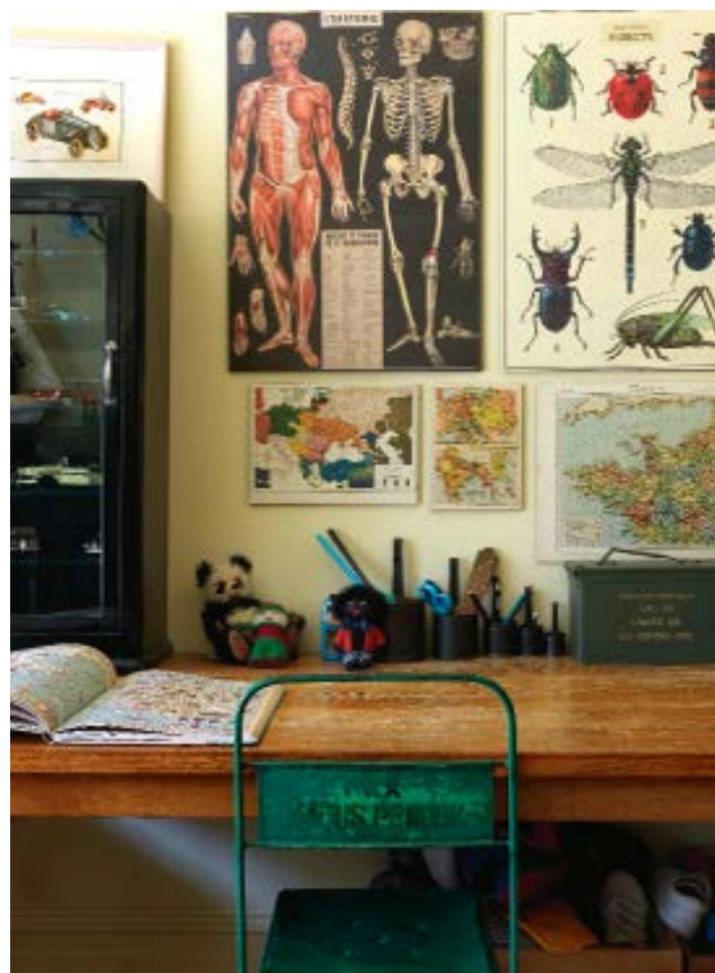
But when Charlotte was expecting Molly, it was time to call in the builders. After those tough few months with a new baby and no bathroom, it was all worth it. What had been a lean-to and conservatory out the back were replaced with a large open-plan living space: kitchen, dining room and deck. An adjacent bedroom became the family room, and the dining room became a bathroom.

Seven years later and with baby number four on the way, they added a loft level with two bedrooms, though it was tricky getting the stairs in. They also extended the front of the house, adding an office studio on the ground floor and a roof terrace above it, off the lounge. The place is still a work in progress, with landscaping and a craft room next on the list. >





THIS PAGE In George's room, an old printer's tray is lined with artificial turf and has models of boys playing football; the metal light is from Ico Traders in Christchurch; an old Swiss Army lamp has been powder-coated in white; the metal box next to his bed is from Tea Pea and holds his bedtime reading. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) Molly's room, redecorated as a surprise while she was at school. The bongo drums in George's room were a gift from his godmother. George's chair is from Country Trader in Greytown and the antique French measuring cups are from French and Sons in Bulls. Henriette in Matilda's room; Charlotte made the tent and stack of cushions; the toadstools and bunny lamp are from Tea Pea. >





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Q&A

BEST THING ABOUT THE RENOVATION: The family and friends who have helped us along the way. There are many stories and memories from our 14-year journey.

FAVOURITE APPLIANCE: Without doubt, our Rocket coffee machine. It works hard and forces us to connect at various points in the day.

BEST MONEY WE SPENT: Insulation and gas central heating. We used to live in our bedroom, only venturing out to quickly make meals or visit the bathroom.

FAVOURITE OUTDOOR SPOT: We have just replaced our lawn with a pristine artificial turf, which, together with our newly acquired vintage lawn bowls, has become a popular spot for all ages.

IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS WE'D LIKE TO: Embrace more slow living. We have made a good start recently, installing a wood-fired pizza oven and have a three-month holiday to France planned for 2017, but we have still have a long way to go.

Charlotte and Jamie Schaefer



Charlotte loves bunting, fairy lights, all things French, and a bit of whimsy. She also likes to change up the look of each and every room. “I’m a little OCD about rearranging,” she admits. But the couple share the same tastes, and sometimes have the same ideas for home improvements and redecorating.

The kids have ideas too. It was George who suggested hanging a curtain over the family room’s entrance. Open the curtain and the room becomes part of the dining and kitchen space, with the TV concealed behind the curtain. Close the curtain and you have two separate, private spaces.

The couple want their house to inspire creativity in their kids – and themselves. Jamie, a graphic designer, runs design agency Homegrown Creative from the studio. It opens into the house but has its own entrance, kitchenette, bathroom, and two full-time employees. Charlotte, whose background is in business strategy and communications, works for the agency part-time, as needed. Jamie can pop into the house between meetings and deadlines to see his wife and kids, or for coffee and banana bread.

Charlotte’s the cook. She loves decorating for and hosting events, from ice cream sundae parties at the end of the school year through to 20 people for Christmas. “I’m really into rituals.”

They’re also really into blue, inside and outside. The colour theme happened unintentionally at first, then they just went with it. Now neighbours and friends call it The Blue House, and they’ve often been asked for the name of the exterior paint, Resene ‘Cut Glass’.

Charlotte creates seasonal displays in the sunroom window for passers-by to enjoy; such as little bottles filled with flowers and suspended from the ceiling. The family often finds thank you cards and gifts in the letterbox. And two Christmases ago, when Charlotte styled a modern Christmas window display, the neighbours asked her to reinstate her traditional display of 24 stockings. Charlotte didn’t mind one jot. She just loves the fact that, at age 110, the house is still a local landmark. ■



THIS PAGE A passer-by once ran up to the house, checked the weatherboards against a colour wheel, then left a bottle of wine as a thank you - the blue is Resene ‘Cut Glass’.

OPPOSITE (from top) The cane chair reminds Charlotte of childhood holidays at a Hawke’s Bay farmstead. Jamie in the studio with staff member Siobhan Clark; the table and Big Bang pegboard shelving system are by George and Willy.

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