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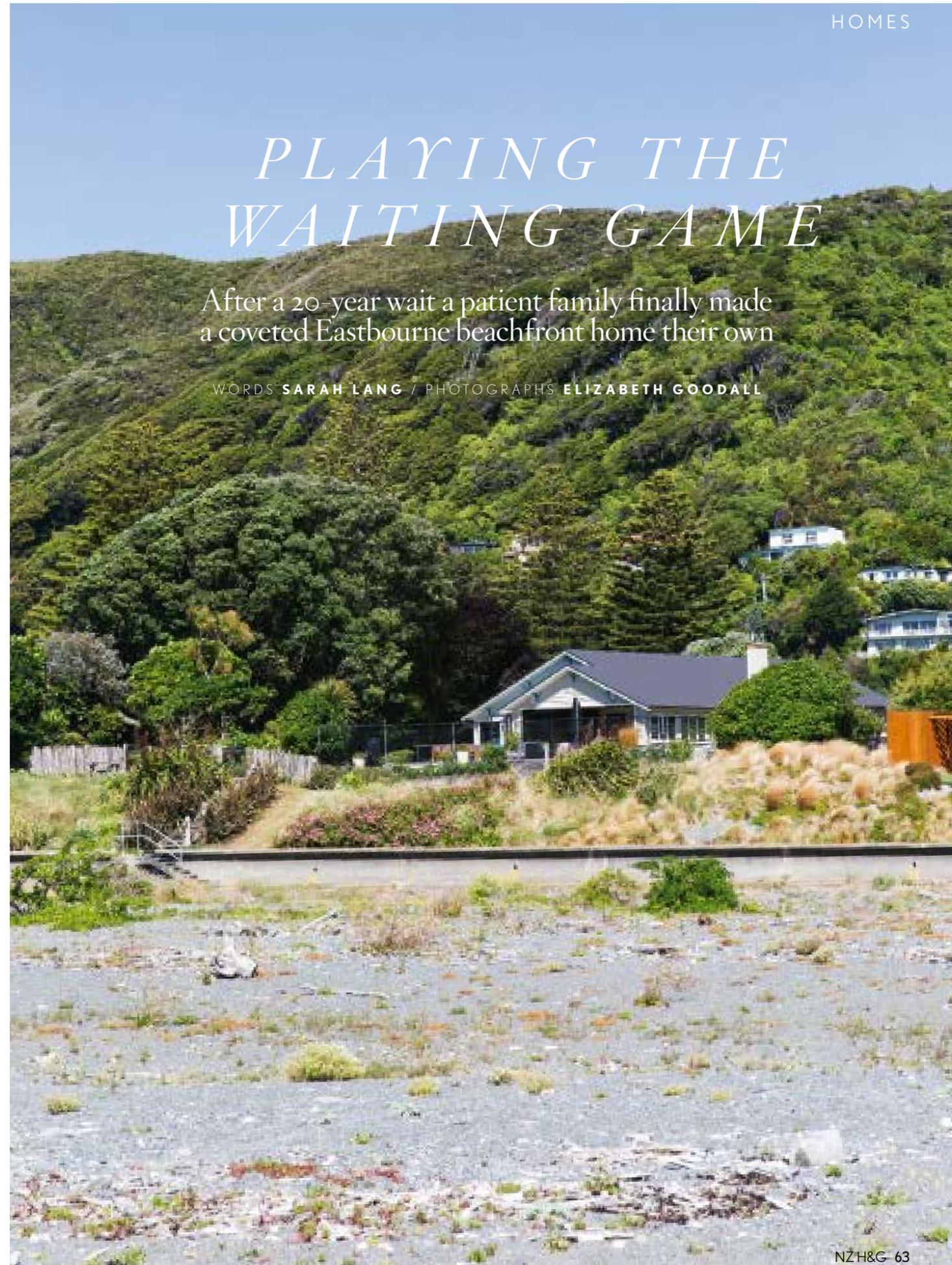


THIS PAGE Grant Dennis and Tracey Newman's home is right on the water at Eastbourne; the gate was made by Chris Dalziel of Eastbourne's Village Blacksmith; Tracey sourced the farm battens for the fence through an old friend. **OPPOSITE** The old pink rose that rambles over the bank in front of the house has "been there forever," says Tracey; the cluster of ancient pohutukawa to the left of the house provides protection from the wind.

PLAYING THE WAITING GAME

After a 20-year wait a patient family finally made a coveted Eastbourne beachfront home their own

WORDS SARAH LANG / PHOTOGRAPHS ELIZABETH GOODALL





THESE PAGES (clockwise from top left) Tracey Newman with the family's three-year-old basset-hound Elsie, who doesn't like to swim but loves sniffing around on the beach. The sunroom and dining area open onto the deck; Tracey, her sons and two of their girlfriends painted the dining room chairs with fabric paint one Friday afternoon; Tracey and son Tobias made the coffee table out of an old door; a collection of cricket cages found in Shanghai sits on the table: "It's easier to keep crickets than a dog in Shanghai," says Tracey. Grant and Tracey's youngest son, Thaddeus, on the tennis court.

IN THE LATE 1980s Grant Dennis and Tracey Newman spotted their future home while pushing their first son's pram along the beachfront walkway at Eastbourne, on the eastern shore of Wellington harbour. Though it was partially concealed up a slight bank, they liked what they could glimpse: the private beachfront site, the distinctive old English-style steel windows, the old tarsealed tennis court. Grant wanted to leave a note in the letterbox about potentially buying it, but Tracey talked him out of it, saying that might be an invasion of privacy.

Grant and Tracey went on to have three more sons and to spend six years in Singapore for Grant's work, before moving back to Eastbourne in 2006. They were planning to build a new home in the area, but all this changed when Grant was chatting with friends at a Saturday morning cricket match. He heard the house was up for sale. They saw it the next day and two days later bought it. Their initial patience had paid off. When Tracey

met the owner, it turned out she wouldn't sell to any of the many people who had left notes, as she considered that an intrusion. "I feel this place was waiting for us," says Tracey.

The home was built as a holiday house in 1920 for James Hannah, one of the seven children of Robert Hannah, founder of the Hannahs shoe empire. James and subsequent generations of the family holidayed there until the house was sold in the 1980s. The grown-ups practised their serves on the tennis court and took tea in the tiny gazebo overlooking the ocean. The children rinsed their sandy feet in a bathing shed beside the house – these days there's a shower under the pohutukawa trees.

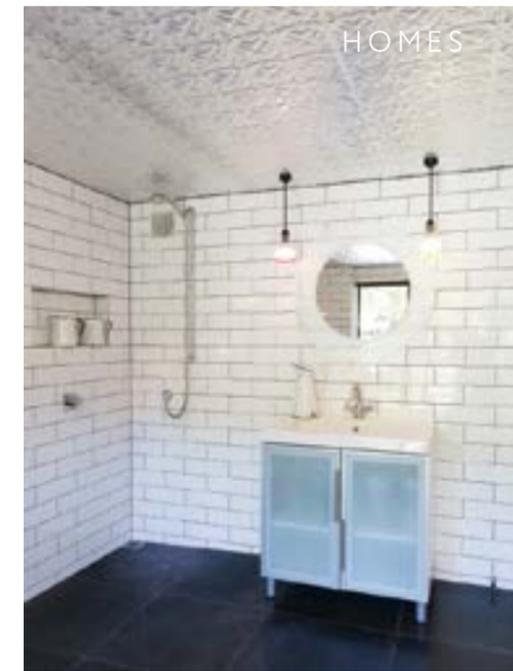
Architect HT Johns designed the house with one storey at the front and two at the back, and servants' quarters downstairs. Fifteen years later, in 1935, Johns' son Bernard Winton Johns extended the house, adding rooms with steel windows on the north-west side to better capture the sun, light and view. >



“WHEN THE LED LIGHTS ARE ON AT NIGHT, THE KITCHEN ISLAND ALMOST LOOKS LIKE A LIT-UP AQUARIUM”

THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) The mural paper in the main bathroom was a bargain from overstock.com and the flooring is recycled leather from Flooring Central. The downstairs bathroom, which has a pressed-tin ceiling, also contains the home’s laundry. The ladder in the master bedroom is draped with rice and postal sacks from Portugal and France; the lamp was bought when the family lived in Singapore; the small framed fabric items are from Portugal, handcrafted by local women for religious festivals. The large artwork in the TV room was a farewell gift to the family when they left Singapore.

OPPOSITE The kitchen island was made by Wellington artist/designer John Calvert and has LED lights under the benchtop that illuminate the watery paint effect and the sea creature-like door handles; the artwork is by Francis Salole and the walls are painted in Resene ‘Thor’.



In those days the front door was off the beach and the servants came and went through the back door (which is now the front entrance). The section is so long that four houses now fit on the same-sized strip of land next door.

In 2008, Grant and Tracey moved into a house that had barely changed since 1935. And so, in 2012, architect John Mills oversaw their first major renovation. A new kitchen was built in what had been the master bedroom, making the most of the ocean view. The heart of the home is now the colossal kitchen island. “When the LED lights are on at night, the kitchen island almost looks like a lit-up aquarium,” says Tracey.

The second major renovation, also designed by John, was finished in November 2015, revamping the main bathroom and adding a small but striking front entrance (the only extension they’ve done). The front door has rectangles of rainbow-coloured

glass that light up at night. On the entranceway floor, tiles form geometric patterns in cream, black and blue to emulate the home’s original lino and the colours of the wallpaper unearthed while widening the main hallway. The final touch was landscaping the area along the house’s right-hand side, which Tracey has been told local Maori used as a track from the hills to the beach. Now it’s a narrow garden and courtyard, with big timber steps styled as lily pads and a 7m-long fishing boat bought back from Asia by Tracey, but deemed too big for indoors.

Throughout the renovations, Tracey and Grant were determined not to strip the Hannah house of its character and history. They recycled original wood to make the bathroom vanity and commissioned wooden doors that resembled the original joinery. The Hannah family’s many keys, inherited with the house, now hang on a wall in the main hallway. >



THIS PAGE (clockwise from top) Tracey describes the rainbow-coloured glass front door as “my happy door”; the 1950s chair was found at the Turangi dump and re-covered in Sanderson Dandelion Clocks fabric; Mandy Wilson made the rug from recycled carpet. The Hannah family left behind boxes and boxes of old keys, says Tracey, who hung some of them on the wall; many have tags attached saying “hatbox key” and even “Kelburn Tennis Club”. The artwork by South African artist Madeleine Eve was bought at an auction to raise funds for Aids victims.

OPPOSITE The front entrance is a new addition designed by architect John Mills; Trevor Bowie from Right Angle Joinery made the glass-panelled front door and the lamps beside the steps.

It’s far from being the only collection here. “I can never just buy one of anything,” says Tracey. Think Singaporean wooden bowls, Thai rain drums, florists’ tins, white china, little jugs, tiny chairs, old jars, even Chinese cricket cages.

Tracey, who brought two shipping containers home from Singapore, has since picked up many more collectables from second-hand shops and recycling centres. “I’m a bargain hunter and upcycler.” Tracey and her son Tobias have turned an old door into a coffee table with wheels for the sunroom. “That pouffe and footstool beside it are from the dump,” says Tracey, “one re-stuffed, one re-covered.”

Bright abstract paintings and boldly patterned curtains show she’s not afraid of colour. “Grant pretty much leaves the decorating to me, but I always make sure he likes it.”

The former PE teacher has been a full-time mum since her children were born. The boys – Caleb, 28, Tobias, 24, Sebastian, 22, and Thaddeus, 20 – have all left home, but the house and garden still take up a lot of her time and she makes jewellery that she wears, gives away and sometimes sells.

The boys stay so often that Tracey and Grant haven’t contemplated downsizing from their 620sqm home. “I joke with the boys that I’ll live to 100, and have my friends move in,” says Tracey. She’s only half joking. “I feel this house was meant for us, but I don’t feel I’m the owner. I’m just the guardian.” ■



Q&A

I CAN ALWAYS COUNT ON: Our basset-hound Elsie being near me.

FLOWERS I COULDN’T LIVE WITHOUT: Peonies and honeywort.

WE COULDN’T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT: Richard Ulusele from East Harbour Building, Dave Devos from Dirt Landscaping and Janeen Gillies from What on Earth.

BEST PLACE TO ENTERTAIN: People congregate around the kitchen island; we throw open the sliding doors in the sunroom and people spill out onto the deck. We had my jewellery tutor’s wedding here, with tables on the tennis court.

I LOVE THIS PART OF NEW ZEALAND BECAUSE: We’re close to the city but the sea and bush are on our doorstep.

BEST WALK IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: From Eastbourne’s bus barns to Butterfly Creek, through the bush and along the ridge line.

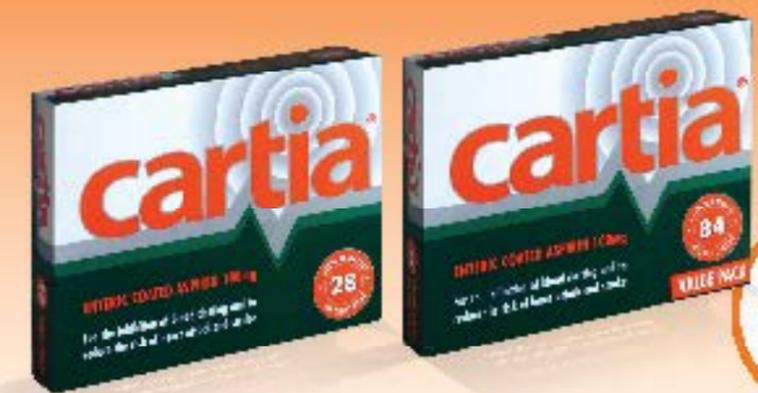
WHEN YOU VISIT EASTBOURNE: Make sure you look for the mosaics on the footpaths.

Tracey Newman



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