

A Taranaki builder couldn't resist making a home for his family in the seaside suburb where he grew up



STAMPING GROUND

WORDS VIRGINIA WINDER / PHOTOGRAPHS GINA FABISH

ABOVE Paws poised on a herringbone oak floor from VidaSpace in Auckland, Chad and Ginny Niwa's 6-year-old British bulldog Billy greets people on the passage from front door to kitchen; the photos on the wall, of life in Cuba, are from *The Virtue* in New Plymouth. **RIGHT** The Annika Rowson-designed kitchen features chocolate oak veneer cabinetry from VidaSpace and a granite-topped kitchen island, complemented by a Città black oak dining table and Hans Wegner replica Wishbone chairs from Cintesì; the indoor garden above is planted with a thriving monstera and *Philodendron scandens*.





From a 1903 villa in central New Plymouth to a Palm Springs-inspired house in the seaside suburb of Fitzroy, Chad and Ginny Niwa have found a dream lifestyle with echoes of the past.

For Chad, who built the home, the move to the quiet cul-de-sac has been like coming home. “I went to the *kōhanga* [re]o right there,” he says, pointing out the lounge window. “And then Fitzroy School.” His mum Carolyn still lives nearby.

Ginny grew up on a dairy farm at Mangatoki in South Taranaki. The couple, who have two children Indi, 4, and Bowie, 2, met at a bar in the city in 2013.

Together they have embraced the family-focused community of Fitzroy and relish living near the sea, especially Chad, who is a keen surfer. “We can chuck the kids on the bicycles or scooters and go to the beach,” says Ginny, a trained nurse who now balances the children with the administration of their business, Chad Niwa Building.

Their two-storey home was designed by Fitzroy architectural designer Kyle Ramsay of KR Architecture. “It feels like we are on holiday when we are at home,” says Chad. “It’s a place we can switch off, unwind and relax,” adds Ginny.

But it began with a whirlwind of decisions and then action. They were settled in their renovated villa when Chad and Ginny drove past a sign for a Fitzroy subdivision developed by Chad’s iwi, Te Atiawa (he is also of Taranaki iwi descent), which steered them in another direction. “We weren’t even really looking,” he says. “It was at a time of our life when we didn’t have to move.”

In early 2021, they bought the section in the Te Kekeu Park development which was named after Hone Ropiha Te Kekeu Sr, a prominent chief in the area.

The build started in November of that year and, in October 2022, they moved into their new home on Te Ara o Ngakeiha, a street with a significant name.

“Ngāti Tawhirikura, the Te Atiawa hapū with mana whenua [territorial rights], had aspirations to ensure female tūpuna [ancestors] were reflected within the development – hence the use of ‘Ngakeiha’, who was Te Kekeu’s mother,” Chad says

“It was a busy time – thank goodness for family,” says Ginny. In those hectic days, Indi was 3, and Bowie was born two months early. While Chad was in the final weeks of completing the 310m² house, Ginny was spending most of her time at the neonatal unit with their son and Indi was with whānau. It took about a year for them to settle in, especially Ginny. “It’s definitely taken time. It had been such a crazy time with a toddler and a newborn.”

Their build coincided with the tough pandemic years, when building costs rose and there was a shortage of materials. For that reason, they mostly opted for locally sourced products, including their cladding.

“We had to be inventive,” says Ginny. “There are so many decisions to make it can be overwhelming.”

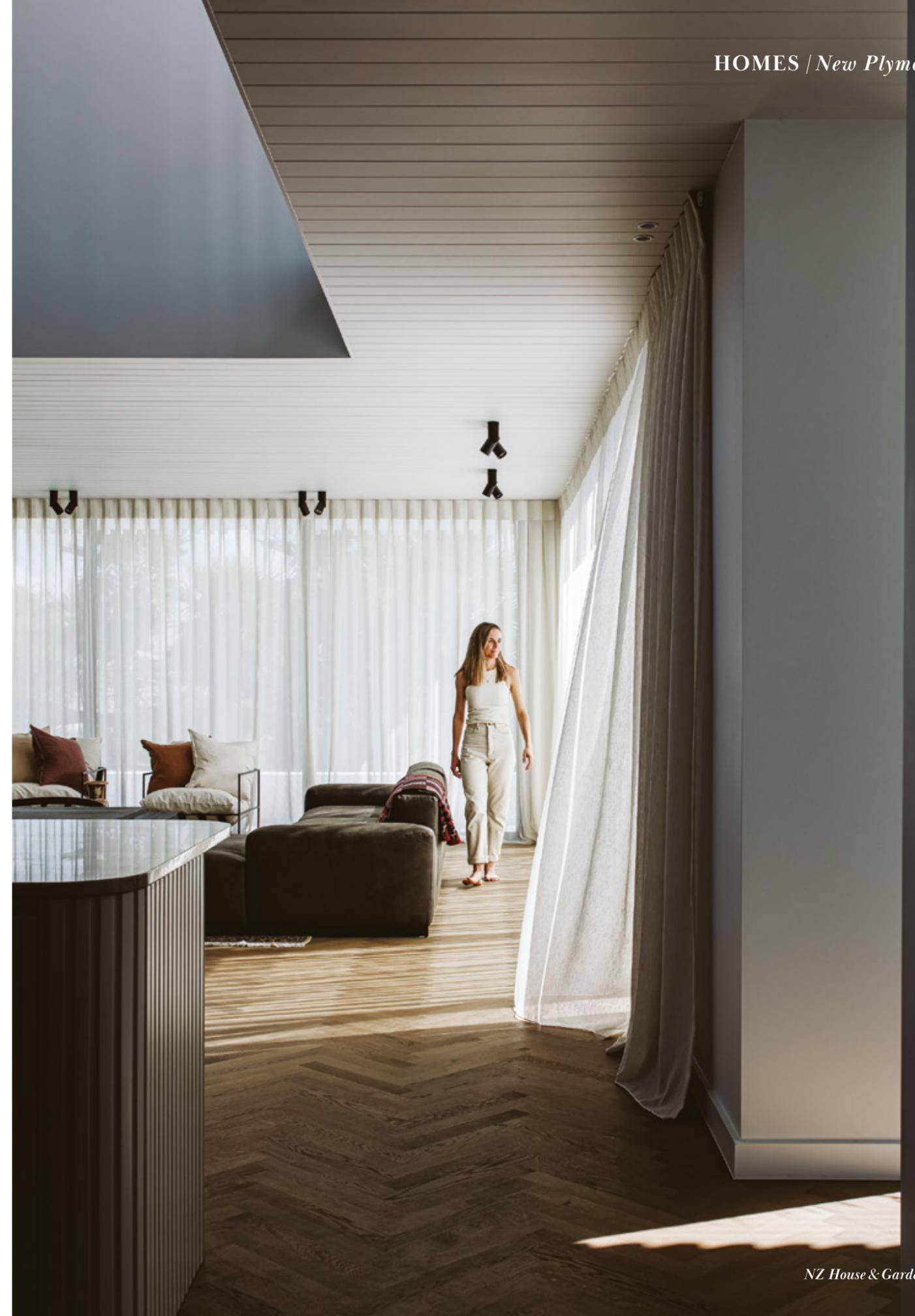
LEFT The lounge opens to the back lawn where Indi plays; aluminium batten rain screens from CE Aluminium in New Plymouth provide privacy for the upstairs bedrooms.

BELOW Baby Bowie gives Indi a hongī on the patio laid with crazy paving from Eco Outdoor in Australia: “We had seen it on Instagram – there wasn’t anyone else doing it in New Zealand,” says Ginny; Eco Outdoor has since opened a showroom in Auckland.





ABOVE The dining room, like most areas in the house, is painted Resene Wan White, and sits between the kitchen and the lounge; *Marla* and *Garance* portraits from Bianca Lorenne face each other above the sideboard atop which sits a vintage-style speaker and turntable flanked by antique porcelain figures. **RIGHT** The pine ceiling in the living area is from Taranakipine; sheer cream curtains from Freedom filter the light while the deep forest-green leather couch from Città and the Lauro Club chairs from Belhams Interiors in New Plymouth are inviting places to relax.





LEFT In the lounge, a black oak coffee table from Freedom sits on an Iranian rug from Vintage Industries in New Plymouth and the built-in shelf below the television displays antique finds by Ginny's mother, Cindy Death – the taxidermy deer is from Sanson, and the bronze men and fighting hares were found in Foxton; the chocolate-hued hand-blown glass vases are from King & Teppett in Palmerston North.

ABOVE LEFT A New Zealand-made wool throw from Noa Blanket Co is arranged over the back of the sofa. **ABOVE RIGHT** The indoor garden provides a leafy touch to the stairwell where textured plaster from Impact Feature Walls adds depth to the walls.

Along the way they had professional input, starting with architectural designer, Kyle, who Chad had worked with on other projects. “We really like his style and his work, so it was a no brainer.” In July 2023, the home, Whare Niwa, was named one of the two winners in the Regional ADNZ Resene Architectural Design Awards for the Taranaki/Whanganui/Manawatu region.

Must-have elements were two living areas, four bedrooms for their growing family and space for a backyard. They also had ideas on aesthetics and style, including the Palm Springs look and, for privacy, they wrapped the exterior with aluminium batten rainscreens.

One of Kyle's ideas was to create an indoor garden with curlicues of verdant vines flowing down a white wall above the kitchen. Another feature is the mezzanine floor. “When the kids are upstairs, it's great for communication,” says Chad.

The kitchen, with its granite-topped island, was designed by Annika Rowson of Rowson Kitchens who also provided ideas for the interior design. “We would always run ideas past her,” says Ginny.

As well as the media room, the outdoor lounge on the deck overlooking the lawn is a favourite hangout. Palms spring from the margins of the garden, created with help from landscape designer Nathan Richardson. They bought the palms early and quite big in size, sourcing them from a range of different places including Botanical Roots Nursery at Ōkato.

“We had palms at our last property, and we learned that the vegetation isn't suitable unless they are locally grown,” Chad says.

The couple are looking forward to Indi and Bowie growing up in their house of clean lines and muted interiors. “We are lucky having a quiet cul-de-sac where they can scoot up and down the street – it's a lot more ‘back in the day’,” Ginny says.



TOP LEFT In the main bedroom, a sage-green linen duvet and white pillows from Foxtrot Home are joined by a cream woollen throw from Bianca Lorenne, bedside lights from ECC and wedding photos taken by The Virtue.
TOP RIGHT An oak bedside table from Città rests on loop pile carpet from Choices Flooring; beyond is the en suite.
ABOVE LEFT In Indi's room, ceramic rabbits from Mee O Mi giftshop in Fitzroy sit on a bedside locker from Little Haus; on the wall, a cane acorn from Mocka sprouts dried flowers beside a rainbow print from Society6; the bed linen is from Foxtrot Home.
ABOVE RIGHT The cane side table and rocking chair in Bowie's room are from Freedom.
RIGHT Baina towels from Crystal Cylinder in New Plymouth add flair to the main bathroom where the floor and walls are laid with porcelain tiles in Stone Valley White from Tile Depot.



Q&A

with *Ginny & Chad Niwa*

OUR DECORATING STYLE:

We like a clean modern style, a little moody, that draws inspiration from nature – oak, stone, natural textures and colours – while still being family friendly. *(Ginny)*

A TIP FOR OTHER

HOMEOWNERS: We got the design done early, after purchasing the section and my thing is to sit with the plans and keep going back to them. *(Ginny)* Look outside the square a little bit and talk to your builder about products. You will be surprised at what you can achieve with money without compromising on quality. *(Chad)*

BEST DECORATING IDEA:

I like a natural palette and I believe you can bring in colour through your furniture. Simple is sometimes best. *(Chad)*

BEST BUDGET TIP: Having a good relationship with the architect and builder at an early stage is critical. Engage with your builder well in advance of the start time. *(Chad)*

FAVOURITE APPLIANCE: The Zenith HydroTap in the kitchen – it's a luxury to make a cup of tea or have a glass of sparkling water straight from the tap. *(Ginny)*

THE BEST MONEY WE SPENT: The aluminium batten rain screens are worth their weight in gold in terms of privacy, cost and aesthetics. *(Chad)*

IF WE COULD DO ONE THING DIFFERENTLY, IT WOULD BE:

If we'd had the budget, we would have loved a pool. *(Ginny)*

BEST ATTRACTION IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: The beach and Coastal Walkway at the end of the street. *(Ginny)*



ABOVE Stone crazy paving leads to the front door which is made of flat-panel aluminium in Colorsteel FlaxPod. **RIGHT** The lounge doors open out onto the patio and a garden fringed with palms that provide privacy, a tropical flavour and shaggy shadows.

