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A stairway to apartment heaven

BY BRENDA WEBB PHOTOGRAPHY ANA GALLOWAY

Using fresh materials and colours helps to unify spaces, giving the owners what feels like a new home.

It began with a simple brief to improve the boxed-in and awkwardly placed stairway in a Nelson waterfront apartment.

It ended up being a total refurbishment, and the owners are delighted.

“We’re thrilled with it,” they say. “It has more than exceeded our expectations, and increased our enjoyment of living here a hundred-fold.” Helena Alexander, from Arthouse Architects, says the project began when the owners approached the firm to discuss redesigning the stairwell, which they felt was heavy and ugly.

The project slowly expanded to the point where the entire apartment was renovated, although nothing structural, except a bathroom wall, was involved.

“As with many alterations, it began with the goal of changing one small feature of the existing space,” says Helena.

1. Sleek lines and a smart stainless steel bench in the updated kitchen.
2. Sliding doors give unimpeded sea views from the dining area.
3. A quiet spot for the office with unobstructed views.
4. Oiled American oak floors feature in the living areas.
5. American oak was also used for the new staircase.
6. Tan leather furniture matches perfectly with the American oak flooring.
7. Detail in the steel handrail.
8. The staircase, previously bulky and awkward, was the impetus for the renovation.





That feature was the carpeted and boxed stairway that divided the living space of the two-level, 120sq.m. apartment.

“It created a visual interruption and spatial disconnection. The opportunity to transform it into an elegant sculptural piece became the catalyst to evolve into a complete overhaul.” Helena worked to a plan of opening the space up and creating more functionality.

The first step was to create uniformity with a single flooring material throughout the living spaces. Oiled American white oak was used, and this also features in the striking new staircase.

Using a simple palette of materials and colours helped to unify spaces.

“We wanted to create more light and space, and looking through the stairway rather than having it blocked off achieved that,” says Helena.

Renovations can be just as challenging as designing a new-build, she adds.

“Quite amazing things can happen when you have added constraints and limitations, which were the case with this apartment.

“The exercise was a valuable lesson in how subtle changes to surface and detail can transform the space. We

- 9.** Timber features throughout along with a neutral colour scheme.
- 10.** Colourful art is shown off beautifully on white walls.
- 11.** The updated bathroom features grey tiles and a timber washstand.
- 12.** The master bedroom is upstairs and also enjoys spectacular views.
- 13.** A love of books is evident with this large built in bookcase.





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were lucky the owners had an incredible eye for detail and were excited to be involved with the project.”

The owners, who have lived in the apartment for 12 years, say they were triggered into the total refurbishment as their confidence grew with Arthouse.

“As we got to know them and looked at the number of projects they had done, both residential and commercial, we realised what amazing scope and tremendous experience they had. We remarked that we had found the right people and we both felt like it was right to take the plunge.

“It became obvious after several meetings that we had to take this further and so we decided to change our approach from just doing the stairs into the whole apartment.”

Simple changes to materials have completely altered the way the apartment functions, say the owners, who can’t believe how different their home feels. “The materials work really well and are very soft and pleasing on the eye. The whole apartment has a lovely feeling, and of course the views are amazing.

“The simplicity of the layout also works really well. All of the elements seem to work seamlessly together and it makes everyday living a tremendous pleasure.”

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14. Hardwood decking outside echoes the timber flooring inside.

15. Wonderful views over the sea from the private decking area.

16. Timber throughout helps create a seamless transition from exterior to interior.



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