

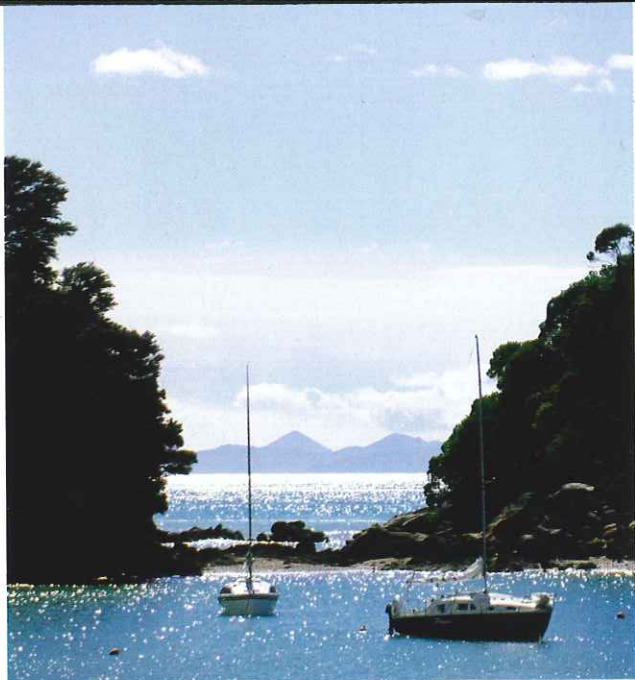


# THE **sun** catcher

Vincent and Blathnaid Cantwell fell in love with a sunny patch in Tasman Bay but the house on site didn't fulfil their dreams... so they asked their architects for a total rethink

WORDS JOSIE STANFORD PHOTOGRAPHS DANIEL ALLEN





**WHEN BLATHNAID AND VINCENT** Cantwell immigrated to New Zealand from Ireland three years ago they knew they would settle in the South Island. They spent time travelling around, comparing everywhere with the Nelson area where Blathnaid had made strong friendships during a working holiday years before.

"We realised that there wasn't any place better than Motueka," says Blathnaid. "Just the weather alone is a huge factor. Motueka has its own microclimate shielded by the mountains, which seem to catch the rain. We can drive to some of the best beaches in the country in 10 minutes and the people are wonderful."

Having settled in the area, when it came to house-hunting they had their hearts set on a lifestyle section – but then a friend told them about a 'real gem' in town.

It was the setting, not the house, that they fell in love with. Handy to town and yet on a quiet back section, the home was surrounded by mature gardens and trees. But the house itself was far from perfect – it was run-down, dated and there were fundamental issues with the floorplan. The kitchen was in a dark southern corner, there was no connection between the house and garden



**ABOVE LEFT:** The couple fell in love with the Tasman Bay area and beaches like Kaiteriteri. **LOWER LEFT:** Rebuilding allowed the architects to raise the roof height to add light and improve the floor to roof proportion. **THIS PICTURE:** This concrete wall captures the warmth of the sun during the day and releases heat at night. Red Saturnia light by Oskar Cerezo from UFL. Contempo sofa from D A Lewis.



and there was a garage and workshop that took up space that could be better allocated for living.

With son Ronan, then 18 months, and Blathnaid pregnant with Naoise (now one), the couple were looking for a family home with lots of light and space.

Thankfully, the price allowed them to think about renovation so, after a successful offer, they approached local architects Arthouse Architecture for advice.

Two plans were drawn up, one working with what was there, and the other suggesting the gains from starting again, keeping the actual footprint of the house and therefore the foundations, but rebuilding up from that.

"I can't be cold so the opportunity to re-insulate to the highest standard really appealed," says Blathnaid. "Plus we

could raise the roof height to let light in and improve the flow far more easily. We believed we'd get a better house."

So with a demolition prospect on their hands, the couple's thoughts turned to where they might live during the rebuild, and that's when lady luck really gave them a winning hand. Vincent, an instrument and control engineer, was offered an eight-month position in Brisbane that included accommodation for his family.

"It was amazing," says Blathnaid. "Everything was done via email, with zero stress. Then we got to come home to this brand-new house!"

"Some friends had thought we were mad to tear down what they saw as a perfectly good house. But when they saw what replaced it, they understood completely."

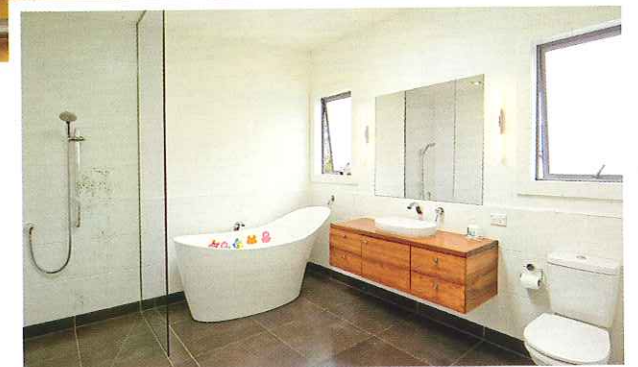
The new house is spacious with an easy flow and an effective relationship to the garden, with several decks and large windows giving all-round views. Rebuilding allowed valuable updates such as high-grade insulation, solar panels for heating and design initiatives such as a raised roof that allowed a greater glazed area to the northern aspect, angled for solar gain: When the sun is low in winter, it can come into the house all day, but in summer, when the sun is higher the house won't overheat.

Complementing this design is a concrete floor area in the play room off the deck and a concrete wall between the kitchen and entry area. These absorb the sun's heat during the day and then release it later – giving a substantial warmth boost in winter.





**ABOVE:** A reclaimed rimu floor adds character to the new home. The modern dining table was specially made by Safari Furniture and is complemented by tulip chairs by Eero Saarinen. **RIGHT:** The Amalfi slipper bath is from Robertson.



Inside, the house is light and airy with strong colours lending a sense of fun. The couple are keen entertainers so the kitchen design was crucial. Along with storage solutions and an island, they wanted to inject a little colour in a glass splashback. The colour, Resene Orient, was made up to match a pair of Ronan's jeans that Blathnaid loved. The idea then came to add interest by extending this colour to a run of Titan cladding outside.

As a natural step to contrast with the blue, Arthouse sourced a large red designer light to be a focal point and Blathnaid found the perfect red sofa to match.

Revelling in the space and peaceful setting, Blathnaid says they haven't been in too much of a hurry to buy furniture, choosing instead to enjoy lucky finds such as the sofa and to commission pieces such as the dining table. "We like to find things as we go along and really want and love them and have them fit into our lives."

They see the walls as blank canvases too. First up are a series of picture decals from Blik – giraffes in the dining room and character stories in the bedrooms.

"So many people have the same things; it's nice to find something unique and colourful," says Blathnaid. Other plans include an Ireland portrait wall to connect them and the children to family, and an Olympics theme in the bathroom to remind them of their trip to Greece in 2004.

"It's people, not things that are important in life," says Blathnaid. "This is foremost a family home and I love that it's a place where friends feel free to randomly appear. It's a very sunny existence. I wake up every day and look at the big blue sky and I never get tired of it." □

### Should you renovate or rebuild?

For Blathnaid and Vincent, the decision to rebuild was fairly easy as the flow of the house wasn't working, there was no real character to preserve and there were a lot of design gains to be made through starting again from scratch. But it's not always a cut-and-dried decision.

Consider the following:

- Find an architect early on who can advise you – even before you've bought the house.
- Try to be open-minded to all possibilities.
- If you can keep the footprint of the house and the foundations, as the Cantwells did, there's a big saving.
- If the house is structurally sound and just an upgrade of the layout is needed, it might be better renovating.
- As soon as you talk about raising the roof height, there is work in the walls. In this case rebuilding is often better.
- Work out the costs of each option.
- Make a comprehensive list of priorities.
- Consider how long you want to live there and balance that against the costs so you don't over-capitalise.
- Where there is character you wish to preserve, renovation might be the way to go.
- Write a list of your gains and losses for each process.