

MILLIEU

SUMMER 2015

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Homes &
Gardens

A n uckland dventure



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Opening pages: An interior view of a house in New Zealand glows with Holly Hunt sconces by Kevin Kelly. Left: An antique weathered iron from a French chateau. This page: Holly Hunt lounge chairs in giant cotton jute, custom round table. Bronze wall sconces, Benille and a table with a linen-wrapped base are from Christian Lacroix. Pendants are by Decode.

An American couple establishes a second home in New Zealand, where all is at once familiar yet different

Like many tourists at the end of a great vacation, a couple from Oklahoma found it hard to go home after visiting New Zealand. Every time they returned to the remote island nation in the South Pacific, leaving became more difficult. Finally, they began to wonder what it would be like to buy a second home there.

After all, New Zealand offers stunning natural beauty, from pristine beaches and snow-capped mountains to breaching whales and gushing geysers, as well as the cultural traditions of British heritage and indigenous Maori tribes. In addition, Auckland is considered one of the most livable cities in the world.

Captivated, the couple purchased an open-plan, rustic-modern home, built in 2007, in the gently rolling hills outside Auckland and within walking distance of the sea. The owners wanted to explore both a new lifestyle and a new design direction.

"Our 1930s home in Oklahoma is built of stone," says the wife. "The decor is formal and traditional. For our second

home, we wanted the opposite. Modern with clean lines. Neutral and calming. I like softness."

But transforming the home's spaces into chic and comfortable, understatedly modern interiors would be no simple task. For one thing, a massive stacked-stone wall in the living room towered twenty-three feet to a vaulted ceiling of exposed timber trusses. For another, a dramatic bridge of steel and native jarrah wood, connecting the study to the master bedroom, coursed through the double-height space. Somehow, the renovation needed to reduce the sense of exaggerated scale.

The couple turned to Atlanta-based interior designer Barbara Westbrook, who had decorated their primary residence. She flew to Auckland.

"When I first saw the house, it felt like Aspen on steroids," says Westbrook with a good-natured laugh. "There was way too

In the home's entryway, a Holly Hunt console table on a slender metal base with a patina finish and a Patara limestone top showcases a pair of framed archival inkjet prints by Danish photographer Trine Sendergaard.





In the dining room, a Holly Hunt mirror in an iron frame continues a modernist geometry. Tuscan custom chairs in Hodsoll McKenzie wool flank a Christian Liaigre custom table. The antique Italian chandelier features a sea dragon motif. Concentric squares define a Kyle Bunting hide rug.



In the open floor plan, the kitchen overlooks the living room. The Costantini counter stools are made of a semi-matte, espresso-stained guayubira wood with black leather seats and backs. The stainless-steel faucet in a platinum matte finish is by Dombracht.



Opposite: A Holly Hunt bed and Christian Liaigre linen headboard dominate the master bedroom. Bagni Volpi Noemi Italian linens include custom-banded sheets. The Christian Liaigre bench has an ebonized metal frame and Jerry Pair Leather hide seat. The carpeting is made of New Zealand wool. Above: A Jun Ho custom cabinet uses espresso rift-sawn oak. A Christian Liaigre lamp has a bronze infinity base. The silver gelatin print is by Masao Yamamoto. Right: Giant cotton chenille covers a Holly Hunt chair. The drapery is of linen hand-painted by Coleman Taylor.



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much stone and it all felt very masculine. Some of the wooden shelf units reached twenty feet high. The wife wanted the home to look fresher, so I stripped away the excess woodwork and stonework and painted the walls a warm white."

As the renovation continued, the designer kept in mind how the couple intended to use the home. "Family time," says the wife. "Christmas and New Year's. We're following the seasons. When it's winter in Oklahoma, we go to New Zealand."

The home needed to function not just as a vacation property, but one that would be truly livable at any time of the year. To that end, every change had a purpose. When Westbrook painted the walls a soft white upstairs and down, she unified spaces of varied ceiling heights, creating a soothing harmony. "The rooms flow into one other. This house had a tendency to feel chopped up, but doesn't now. Where there used to be interior doors everywhere, I had them removed. Too many doors make for a kind of visual noise." It is as if Westbrook enabled the open floor plan to breathe easier.

With cleaner and more spare interiors, Westbrook says, "You are drawn to the view with its pretty grassland outside. In soaring spaces like this, the furniture needs strong lines or else it gets lost."

The designer and the wife went on buying trips. In New Zealand, they found carpeting for the bedrooms, as well as some assorted antiques, while most of the significant furnishings were purchased in the United States. Westbrook's project designer, Elizabeth Hanson, shipped almost the entire contents of the home to Auckland.

As Westbrook studied the property, she thought of the

elegant furniture of minimalist master Jean-Michel Frank, but updated. "To me, his successor is Christian Liaigre, whose furniture I felt would be great in this house. Liaigre uses a wonderful mix of materials — bronze, various woods, even linen-wrapped pieces, like his coffee table that is positioned by the living room fireplace."

Simple lines and sculptural forms suit the scale of each space. "The living room essentially rises two and a half stories, so it was necessary to anchor the space with strong shapes, such as a round table and lounge chairs with sloped arms. It was important to add an element of delicacy, as we did with a pair of black ceramic birds above a fireplace and, in the entry, photographs of a woman. Art is a big part of this house."

The restrained neutral palette synchronizes the furniture, fabrics, and other elements, chiefly in shades of ebony and ivory. "The black is more like dark chocolate and the ivory has a warm undertone," Westbrook emphasizes. Fabrics are mostly solids in natural fibers. A leather and chenille sofa adds muted khaki green. Westbrook balanced the architecture with fabrics that are soft to the touch.

Through glass doors that fold back, an expansive, partially covered deck becomes an inviting extension of the living room. Teak furniture provides a place to relax and gaze at a neighboring pasture as the sun sets.

Her clients are pleased. "Barbara's genius was in bringing the high ceilings down," says the wife. "Sitting in the living room, you don't even realize the ceiling is so far above you. The artwork is at eye level. You suddenly become aware of the view. She brought the outside in. You feel comfortable." ■



On the deck, the simple lines of chairs and tables are compatible with the interiors. All teak furniture is by Sutherland. Outdoor fabrics for upholstery and custom pillows are from Perennials.