



# Terra firma

After six fascinating years in New York, an Auckland couple are grateful to have their feet on home soil again

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**THIS PAGE** A corner of Bridget Hanley and Mike Allen's living room exemplifies their Parnell home's interior style: a mid-century lamp, a black-framed pull-up chair, silk cushions, a vintage rug, an American green ceramic stool and *Sail Boats*, an abstract oil painting by Florence Luxford, all work in harmony.  
**OPPOSITE** A sunny spot in the dressing room, which was added during renovations.



**THESE PAGES** The 1973 painting in the TV room, *Palely Loitering*, is New Zealand artist Phillip O'Sullivan's take on the Hudson River; the grass-paper wallcovering reminds Bridget of New York interiors. Art, photographs and a mid-century bureau in the foyer make an immediate statement.

**S**IAM NOSES HIS beefy frame through the cat door to inspect his food bowl. He and his sister, Miss Greene, make the most of indoor/outdoor living these days; they were once apartment cats and, before that, homeless. Their owners – Bridget Hanley, director of Auckland interiors store Mid Century Design and her husband Mike Allen, an international energy consultant – rescued the kittens eight years ago from a rubbish bag outside the Siam restaurant on Greene Street in Jersey City, New York, where the couple had lived since 1995.

“Mike ran a geothermal consultancy for years and travel had always been a big part of his work,” says Bridget. “When he was headhunted by a company in New York, we were thrilled.”

Living in a brownstone full of fascinating neighbours in downtown Jersey City – “an area so scuzzy it was used as the backdrop for movies like *Godzilla*” – the former public relations whiz felt the need of a new professional calling. So she completed a diploma in interior design over the Hudson River at Manhattan's prestigious Parsons the New School for Design and went to work for some of the city's most influential designers. >



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It was an eyebrow-raising experience at times. “There is serious money in New York and you really get to see it in that industry. Mike would come home from worrying about creating solutions for clean energy and I’d be stressing because Mrs Kozlowski’s sofa frill hadn’t arrived from the supplier on time.”

After six years of exploring their adopted city and much of the United States, the pair moved home to Auckland just a month before the World Trade Centre attacks in 2001. But, in a twist of fate, they were in New York on the way to Europe the day it happened. “I still can’t make sense of the city without those two beautiful buildings. It’s taken a long time to process what happened that day,” says Bridget.

Back in Auckland, Mike and Bridget immediately bought a duplex apartment in Herne Bay and just as quickly regretted it. “We lasted less than a year because we kept asking ourselves, ‘What are we doing up in the air?’ After so many years of apartment living, we really wanted to get our feet in the dirt.”

In search of terra firma, the pair sold the

duplex and settled in a property that Mike had owned for a while: a classic 1950s red brick and tile two-bedroom townhouse in Parnell, one of Auckland’s leafiest suburbs. The location was ideal but the place was small. Council restrictions prevented them from extending up or out, so they dug down. Mike, Bridget and the cats moved out for six months while architect Paul Leuschke and the builders trucked out tonnes of earth to add four new rooms underneath the house.

Upstairs, one of the original bedrooms and the laundry were transformed into a spacious, clean-lined kitchen with plenty of storage and a wide Silestone benchtop that doubles as a servery when the pair, who love to entertain, cook for family and friends.

From wide east-facing windows in the dining and living area, expansive views across Hobson Bay and around to Mt Hobson make for mesmerising weather-watching. The room embodies Bridget’s design aesthetic: layered, comfortable and filled with objects infused with meaning and memories. >



**THIS PAGE** In the living room *Matapouri Bay* by Tom Burnett hangs above Bridget’s collection of Chinese ceramic fu dogs. **OPPOSITE** (from left) Bridget was thrilled to find eight vintage 1950s Thonet chairs exactly like the ones her parents owned; the table was shipped from New York and extends to seat 12. Bridget in the kitchen.



The antique Chinese rugs and her collection of grinning turquoise ceramic fu dogs are a bit of a hangover, she says, from the years she spent in Singapore as a child with her family and four mid-century American lamps reflect her love of that design period.

In the TV room, a stand-out feature wall in Aalto's 'Jelly Bean' and a scattering of marine-themed accessories add an extra dimension to the space where Mike and Bridget spend most of their evenings. "I think this room became a seaside room by default," she says with a smile.

Down the sisal-covered stairs are cool, quiet, private spaces that can act as self-contained accommodation for visitors: a laundry, bathroom, double bedroom and a sitting room that leads to the garden. "Our guests love it down here. It's just like a separate little apartment," says Bridget. "We're so busy at work we really only go 'below stairs' on weekends to retreat to the garden room and to do laundry."

Work for Bridget is her Newmarket store, where she sells 1950s-70s American furnishings. "It combines the two worlds of design and collecting and I'm a born collector." Her customers, she says, are intelligent, interesting and loyal. "You need to be comfortable with things that have had a life before to shop there."

Mike still travels often for work – he owns a Singapore-based business that raises finance for clean-energy projects – but bases himself at the Mid Century Design store when he's home. "The business is very much a partnership for us," says Bridget. "There's very little he can't do – and he's the ideal Mr Shifter."

With their hands in the soil at last, Mike and Bridget revelled in planting the garden and slowly discovering what would work. They treasure the ancient plum tree, which still produces rich red fruit that makes delicious jam. The small, steeply sloping site was made over by some "lovely and very clever friends" who created three tiers: a wooden deck on the top level with French doors from the kitchen, a gravel path and steps that lead down to a patch of smooth lawn and a courtyard covered in 50s-influenced crazy pavers.

It's out here that Mike and Bridget's former street cats now lead the life of Riley, dozing in the sun and drinking from the huge mosaic bird bath. "They don't know how lucky they are half the time, but we do," says Bridget. "We love living here. Even though the area's quite built up, the house is very private and we have wonderful neighbours too – there's a real sense of community in the area." ■

**ABOVE** (from left) The bottom corner of the couple's three-tiered garden. Mike and Bridget. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) The cream, salmon and brown fabrics in the master bedroom give a lush, serene feel. A light-filled corner of the downstairs bathroom. With its 'Pagoda Red' Chinese Chippendale chair, the garden room is a favourite place to relax with a book; the oil is *Portrait of a Woman with Red Lips* by Susan Burki. Tartan wallpaper and a chandelier make the guest bathroom upstairs special. French doors open from the kitchen to the sheltered, sunny deck.

