

# Love to love you baby

A full house is a happy house for the owners of this sunny bungalow, in which the pleasure is palpable.

WORDS  
**Philippa Prentice**

PHOTOGRAPHY  
**Michelle Weir**



## THE PROJECT

Teacher Sarah Carlsen and her design director husband Danny renovated this four-bedroom bungalow in Auckland's Sandringham for themselves and their daughter Phoebe (5).

**KITCHEN & DINING** Phoebe, Sarah and Danny in their sunny kitchen/dining area, where custom-designed shelving displays a selection of pieces found in op shops and gifted from talented loved ones. The chair Phoebe's standing on was made from an apple crate for Danny by his father when Danny was a little boy. Another charming detail is found in the table made from upcycled timber removed in the reno: it's complete with the hole where the telephone wire once ran into the wall.



**KITCHEN & DINING** Aiming for a home that's uncomplicated, open and natural, the couple have favoured a palette of timber, stone, brass, marble and white, accented with greenery. "Once the hedge grows a bit, you'll see green all the way through," says Danny. "It's interesting without being too cluttered, which fits the no-fuss approach of the house design."



*EVERY SO OFTEN, YOU WALK INTO A HOME AND CAN really feel the love. At Danny and Sarah Carlsen's Auckland abode, it's all around. It's there in the rare mid-century Jon Jansen armchair, one of two an elderly Trade Me seller and his wife sat side by side in all their days. It's in the sentimental treasures carefully collected (like the ice-cream sign rescued during the demolition of a favourite eatery in their oft-visited holiday spot) and crafted by their own and loved ones' hands. And it's in their voices as they sit down to tell the tale of a cold 1920s bungalow that survived a 70s facelift to become a modern, warm-as-toast family home they plan to cherish for a lifetime.*

The couple's own love story began 20 years ago, when they met as teens and began nurturing their dream of having a home they could share with others, where they could wine and dine family, friends and creative characters. "The opportunity to create this house was an extension of our vision of us as a couple," says Danny.

Auspiciously, the "dinky" bungalow became theirs at an auction on Sarah's birthday. "We'd missed out on so many that we weren't really thinking we'd get this one, but some things are meant to be," she says. >

**ABOVE** A chic white curtain can be drawn across the glass doors that run the length of the extension and connect to the deck. The kitchen tap seen here was a "splash-out" buy. "Without sounding snooty," says Danny, "it's nice having something that's beautiful looking, even though it's a functional item."



Previously owned by a couple who had lived in it for 76 years, it had been immaculately kept. "It's quite romantic – they'd looked after it really well after buying it as newlyweds," says Sarah. "But it had a sunroom and laundry at the rear that blocked all the light and warmth, and they'd renovated in the 70s, so it had floral wallpaper, the kitchen was 70s veneer, and they'd taken most of the bungalow features out."

"There were Persian carpets everywhere, so if you dropped something, you could never find it!" laughs Danny.

An update was clearly necessary, so 18 months after moving in, they moved out to make way for a renovation involving their nearest and dearest: architect and friend Chris Wood; Danny's mate Ryan Bickley of 360 Degree Project Management; Danny's builder brother Chris part of Ryan's crew and brother Tim pitching in on the after-hours labouring; plus interior designer friends providing advice and encouragement.

Replacing the sunroom and laundry with an extension that houses living, kitchen and dining was a priority, as was reviving the bungalow's character. In the end, though they'd not intended to renovate the entire house, "we did everything," says Danny. >

**ABOVE** Sarah and Danny both have fine arts backgrounds and their wonderful works are dotted throughout the home. The pieces in this central zone were painted by Danny for a Parachute Festival VIP area. That year, the tag line was 'The happiest little place on Earth', "so I thought it fitted rather well with our little house", he says. The nifty little stool pictured here was a cheap-as-chips op-shop score.



**LIVING** Complementing the open shelving and cabinetry by Chris Wood is a Bulb table lamp by Minimalux from Simon James, coffee table by Noguchi, vase from Flo & Frankie, and cushions, throw, bowl and rug from Città. The tumbled limestone tiles behind the Studio fire by Peter Haythornthwaite from Fires By Design forge a connection with the kitchen flooring.



That meant that as well as the extension, they added a bedroom and deck; rejigged the entryway; painted and insulated; reinstated the skirting boards, hardwood doors and panelled ceilings; restored the bay window and installed in-built cabinetry in the main bedroom (formerly the lounge); revamped the bathroom and created an ensuite. In an epic “Texas chainsaw massacre”, ex-landscaper Danny overhauled the jungle-like garden too.

The heart of the finished home is a long dining table that draws you from the entryway into the extension. Initially irked by the “weird communal area” in the middle of the house, Sarah and Danny sought to make a change, but their architect had other ideas. With an insider’s understanding of the pair’s love of playing host, Chris suggested they make the perceived weakness of the home its strength, and design the house around it.

The resulting space is a triumph, furnished by the table designed by Chris and made from rimu removed during the alteration. Its brass stretcher echoes the use of this metal throughout the house, from the handles of the period doors found on Trade Me to the open shelving designed by Chris and Danny, both a storage solution and a standout décor feature. ▷

**ABOVE** In the master bedroom, charcoal artworks by Sarah team with an old physiotherapy heat lamp bought at second-hand haunt Whangamata Traders. The Thea Ceramics pieces on the dresser are by the pair’s friend Esther McDonald, and the vase and cushions are from Indie Home Collective.

**OPPOSITE** Originally the bathroom, turned into the kitchen in the 70s and now the main bathroom again, this room has been given a restrained revamp. The towel and knitted jute basket are from Città, and the soap, wooden soap dish and wooden bath mat are from Everyday Needs.



As with the rest of the bungalow, the genius of the kitchen lies in its simplicity, and the elegant oak and unlacquered brass shelves exemplify that, allowing the deep bank of windows above the marble bench to let in maximum light and a layered view of the fragrant michelia plants and eugenia hedge outside. The pantry and most of the appliances are hidden in an adjoining scullery, while the dining table functions as another work surface.

A shift in flooring from the kitchen's pale tumbled limestone tiles (laid in a herringbone pattern accented with brass trim) to the warm heart matai floorboards of the living area creates a subtle definition between zones. In the living area, that fabulous shelving is integrated with bespoke cabinetry that sits either side of the new fireplace, which Sarah says is perfect for gathering around in the evenings and "taking a bit of the 'grrr' out of winter".

Life here is relaxing and social, says Danny. "It feels like a sanctuary. To have a house you want to invite people into is really special; we feel so privileged. We're all about creating memories, and that includes having friends and family coming in and sharing the house. That's one of the things we love most." 🍷

**PHOEBE'S ROOM** Phoebe may have lost a metre of floor space when it was borrowed to create the ensuite in the room next door, but she scored when it came to her vintage desk, says Sarah. "Danny's brother bought it on Trade Me thinking it was an adult size, so we ended up with it." The couple made the mobile on the wall from shells collected from Whangapoua in the Coromandel, forming a sweetly sentimental link to the family bach, which was recently sold.



**FROM LEFT** Type 75 Maxi floor lamp by Anglepoise, \$2066, cultdesign.co.nz. Ata cushion cover, \$70, cittadesign.com. Vionnet Platform console, \$2248, sorenliv.com. IC S2 pendant light by Flos, \$1225, ecc.co.nz. Sympathy for the Devil potted plant, \$80, silllife.co.nz. Beechwood bowl, \$40, cittadesign.com. Comback chair by Patricia Urquiola for Kartell, \$818, backhousesnz.com.

#### ASK THE ARCHITECT:

*Chris Wood of Christopher Wood Architects*

**Chris, what's your approach when adapting older houses?** Sensitivity and consideration to the existing typology; not necessarily replicating the existing, but designing an aesthetic that enhances and responds to it. Functionality for modern-day living is also important; today's houses tend to be highly social with an emphasis on being able to incorporate outdoor living, which is a lot different to turn-of-the-century houses, which centred on street appearance.

**What challenges did you get to sink your teeth into with this renovation?** The original idea for the kitchen was to have a large central island with cabinetry on the back bench. But due to planning restrictions, the rear addition needed to be scaled back, which meant that the smaller space no longer allowed for the island. In the process of re-strategising, we replaced the back cabinetry

with a long work bench and a concealed scullery, and utilised the dining table as part of the kitchen.

In modern kitchens, the island often becomes the dining and social space, but we adapted the farm-cottage concept of having a dining table in the kitchen. The 3.4m table became an integral part of the house: dining table, food-preparation area, work space and social arena. It sits on the central axis of the house and operates as a hub in the way it opens out to the kitchen and living space. This solution to a 'problem' became a celebrated part of the design and enhanced Sarah and Danny's way of living in bringing together a community.

**What's a key thing homeowners should consider when renovating a kitchen?** Scale – whether the kitchen is an isolated project or part of an extended renovation. If it's solely a kitchen renovation, consider how it fits with the rest of the house. If it's part of a larger renovation, think about the opportunity that change can bring to optimise the layout of the kitchen in relation to the rest of the house.