

With some tender loving care, this run-down waterside cabin has risen from the ashes.

# RIVER PHOENIX

WORDS  
Philippa Prentice

PHOTOGRAPHY  
Nicole Mason



## THE PROJECT

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Karie Higgins, a jewellery designer for Bing Bang NYC, and Nike footwear designer Lee Gibson are renovating this two-bedroom cabin in Oregon as a holiday home for themselves and their baby daughter Lo Goldie, and to rent on Airbnb.





**LEFT** In the dining nook, a Lisabo table from Ikea is paired with vintage Cesca chairs by Marcel Breuer. "We like even simple items like glassware to feel well considered, given eating and drinking is such a big part of our time spent here," says Karie. "Falcon Enamelware and inexpensive Japanese glassware by Toyo-Sasaki is great, because we don't need to be precious about taking it outside." **OPPOSITE** Karie and Lee have favoured neutral tones: white walls accented with pale oak and ply, rattan and indoor greenery, plus pops of rust in the rugs and bed linen. Lee built the birch ply bench seat in the dining area, "and it's made the space much more accommodating", says Karie. "We often hang out on it."

As far as 'waterfront' goes, you don't get much more 'extreme' than this. Kiwis Karie Higgins and Lee Gibson were over the moon when after a couple of years of searching for a seaside or riverside bolthole not too far from their apartment in Portland, Oregon, they found this mid-century cabin with almost 100m of private river frontage.

"It was the dreamiest location we'd seen," says Karie. "We told the realtor we wanted to make an offer that day, then were heartbroken to find out the owners had already verbally accepted a cash offer. But in a strange turn of events, their deal fell through a few weeks later, and we managed to swoop in."

Both Karie and Lee have backgrounds in spatial design (she in interior design and he in architecture) and had a hankering for a space they could gradually transform. An hour from the city and right on the banks of the Wilson River, they'd found it.

Built in 1963, the cabin had been allowed to fall into disrepair. Recent owners had done some significant work, so it was structurally sound when Karie and Lee got the keys, but the interior still left a lot to be desired. The original wood panelling and cabinetry gave the house a folksy quality, "but made it feel tiny and dark", says Karie. "The bathroom had a strange compartmentalised layout and was just weird."

In the year since they took ownership, the couple has undertaken all their renovations themselves. "We've changed the interior quite a bit," says Karie. "The master and guest bedrooms were like little caves, so we painted them white within the first few weeks, and we've chipped away painting the living areas and doing some demo in the kitchen and bathroom. We have big plans to do a new kitchen and bathroom, new floors, and paint the exterior and add a guest suite extension. Who knows when it will end – the minute we finish one thing, we start obsessing over another." >





**BELOW & OPPOSITE** The pair developed their DIY skills through renovating their former apartment in Wellington. One of their most satisfying fixes in the cabin has been ripping out the top cabinets in the kitchen and replacing them with floating oak shelves. “We want to completely gut the kitchen, but in the interim simply pulling out the dark-wood Shaker-style uppers has made a huge difference,” says Karie. “The space feels twice as big and much brighter.” The fully stocked pantry is, of course, complete with Milo and Marmite. Other Kiwi touches include ceramic mugs by Waiheke makers Thea Ceramics.



Pacific Northwest architecture is typically quite rustic and cosy, with plenty of dark timber. Karie and Lee have brought an Antipodean sensibility to their holiday home, creating a light, bright look that’s layered with character and texture. “Our colour and material palettes veer more towards California-causal-meets-Scandinavia than Oregon-log-cabin,” says Karie.

She sums up their approach to decorating as “work on the ugliest bits first! If this was our main home, we would have rushed to get it slicker sooner; here, we like that it looks like a vacay space with a story. The bathroom still has a bizarre blue linoleum countertop, but we don’t totally hate it. We want the cabin to be comfortable and relatable like a Kiwi bach, and not strip all the personality out of it.”

Secluded and serene, this lovely dwelling makes you feel as if you’re in the middle of a forest. Needless to say, the couple spend as many weekends as they can here, and even moved in for most of last summer while commuting to their offices in the city. It’s usually just the three of them now baby Lo has arrived, but they love to host friends here too.

“Having lived in apartments in New York and Portland for the past 10 years, we hadn’t spent a lot of time cooking recently,” says Karie. “Now we love to prepare meals on the open fire or grill as much as possible. We enjoy lazy mornings looking out at the view while Lee makes us something yummy for breakfast, but our favourite thing to do is cook dinner on our pebbled beach on summer evenings while watching the eagles fly through.”

Between the wildlife, wind in the trees and general waterfront wonderfulness, it’s hard to say when @rivercabin\_oregon is at its most magical. “We enjoy the ‘ends’ of the day,” says Karie. “Waking up to the sound of the river is the best, and the light in the evening is also pretty special; sitting down by the water in front of a fire is hard to beat.”

**“WE DELIBERATED OVER WHETHER TO PAINT THE FIREPLACE BUT ARE SO GLAD WE DID. WE’RE IN LOVE WITH IT.”**

**LIVING** It’s compact, but with windows running the length of the open-plan living, dining and kitchen area leading the eye across the river to the pine trees on the other side, the cabin doesn’t feel cramped. The living space is cosy, casual and all about enjoying the view and snuggling up by the fire. “We play with texture and layering,” says Karie of her and Lee’s approach to decorating.



**BELOW** "Our record player unit is a DIY creation we love," says Karie. "Not too kitsch or too modern, it's just an Ikea bench with a piece of ply screwed to one end. Our record collection is super eclectic — we have everything from the Beatles to Prince to Young Thug. It's a fun way to spend an evening out here, drinking cocktails and listening to random music."



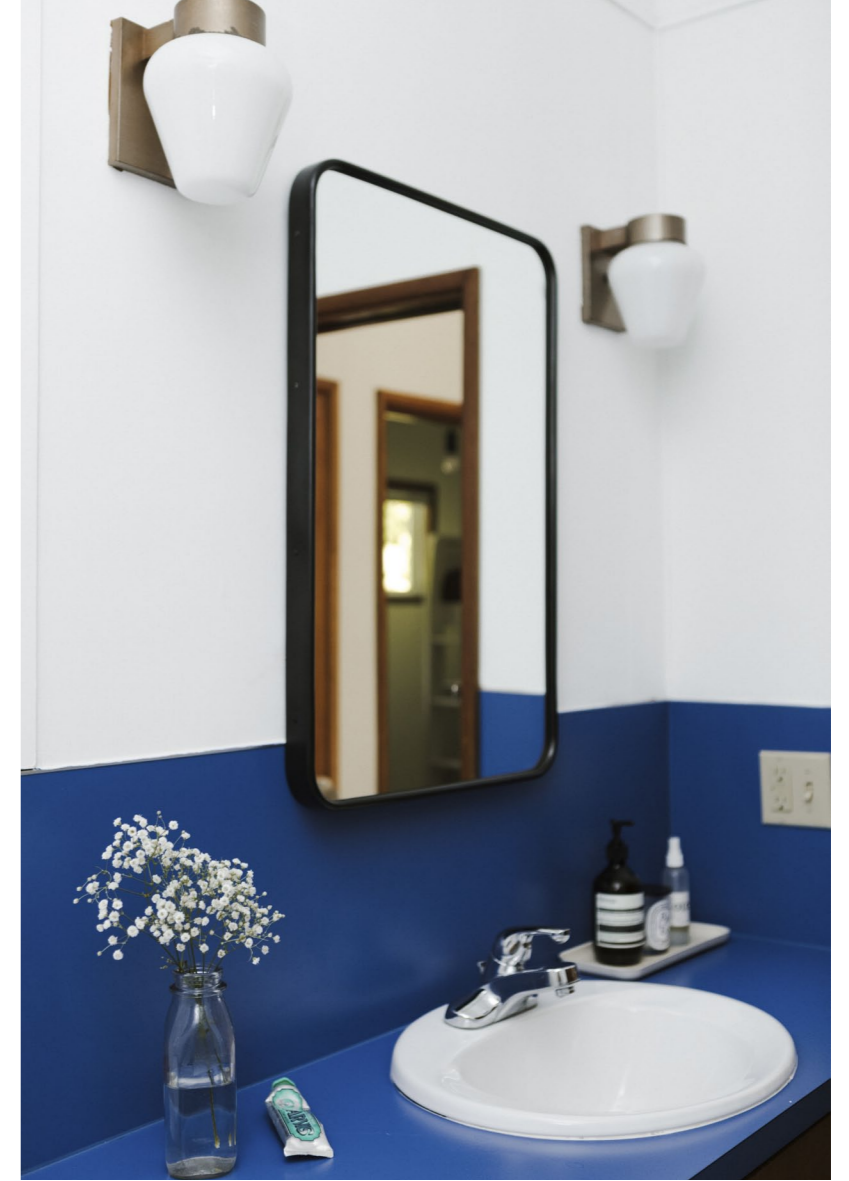

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**"SMALL THINGS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE: BEAUTIFUL MUGS, LUXURIOUS CANDLES, FRESH FLOWERS, DECENT LINEN, NICE SHAMPOO IN THE SHOWER..."**



**MASTER BEDROOM** The cabin might be deep in the woods, but it's equipped with modern appliances and connectivity, including Bluetooth and Sonos speakers, and smart TVs in the living area and bedrooms. Linen bedding from Parachute and Tuft & Needle mattresses make the beds ultra-comfortable.

**GUEST ROOM** Karie and Lee added double bunks and a trundler bed to their spare room to enable up to seven visitors to stay. A Frosta stool from Ikea is an easy bedside table and smart bulbs make the cabin's industrial-style cord lights from Rejuvenation a more eco-friendly option.



**ABOVE** That cobalt bathroom vanity does have a certain charm. The couple has spruced up this room with extras including a Torso bath mat by Cold Picnic and a mirror from Rejuvenation. **LEFT** This mid-century bentwood stool in the guest room was a happy find in a local antique store.



**EXTERIOR** It has just one neighbour, yet the property is only 10 minutes from the nearest city, Tillamook, and 20 from the coast. "The connection to nature and water makes us feel like we're at home," says Karie. "We also love how Kiwi baches are all about the deck and barbecue, so we're into replicating that here."



**DESIGN DETAILS**

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Cesca chair by Marcel Breuer for Knoll, \$2890, studioitalia.co.nz. Tumblers, from \$30 each, thea-ceramics.com. Vivero watering can by AYTМ, \$165, partrigedesign.co.nz. A&C flax linen flat sheet, \$160/queen, achomestore.co.nz. Torso bath mat, \$88, coldpicnic.com. Frosta stool by Ikea, \$29, akia.co.nz. Be My Guest bench seat by Warm Nordic, \$1795, goodform.co.nz. Bird of paradise plant, POA; terracotta pot, \$29, bunnings.co.nz. Marbled enamel pitcher, \$49, flotsamandjetsam.co.nz.

