

On the shelf

A read that might change the way you see things.



Words: Philippa Prentice

ABOVE LEFT This Arts & Crafts house located outside Raglan was designed in the 1930s by Sholto Smith. **ABOVE RIGHT** “Even though I live quite minimally, I really enjoy other people’s infatuation with things,” says Jane. The portraits she took in this special home in Christchurch show artwork and objects arranged with aplomb.



Rooms by Jane Ussher & John Walsh (Massey University Press, \$85)

A typical look might come to mind when you think of New Zealand interiors. For this book, the venerable Jane Ussher MNZM shot some that are in another category altogether.

Jane spent 29 years as chief photographer for the *Listener*, rising to become the country’s foremost portrait photographer. After stepping down from the role in 2008, a chance meeting sent her to Antarctica to shoot explorers Scott and Shackleton’s huts, and she arrived home indelibly altered, >

“When I walk into a room that interests me, it’s like meeting a person who interests me. I look around the space, and I start seeing ways I can create images of that space.”



RIGHT Both the kitchen and the dining table in this ‘50s bach at Lake Rotomā were designed and built by Mark Bruce. **BELOW** This turn-of-the-century Auckland villa is filled with artworks created by its owner. **OPPOSITE, TOP** On the Japanese dresser in this Wellington dwelling is a pair of birds the owner handmade using shells. **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM LEFT** This photo taken in a 1979 Governors Bay home by Jonty Rout includes a bowl by Mirek Smíšek, a pot by Margaret Ryley and hinaki (eel traps) by Kari Morseth. **OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT** The view into the bedroom in this renovated 1913 villa in Wellington reveals a painting by Catherine Clayton-Smith.



committed to photographing interiors as she had people. Evident in this book is her expert ability to capture and communicate the singular nature of a space — akin to the uniqueness of an individual.

This tome doesn’t take us anywhere as exotic as Antarctica, but many of these rooms from around Aotearoa have an international feel that makes this a read you can really escape into. Bookended by a wonderful essay by architecture writer John Walsh and an illuminating index by publisher/journalist Nicola Legat ONZM, it’s page after page of spaces you can get lost in, marvelling at the layered detail lovingly installed over time. In fact, more so than the houses themselves, Jane’s interested in the human urge to collect and curate the stuff that’s in them. “Put me in a room... and I don’t see the architecture,” she says. “I’ll be drawn to the corner with a pile of things.”

Although no people feature here, there are many signs of life: artworks creatively chosen, sofas you want to sink into, curiosities you’d love to clutch in your own hand. All are a very entertaining portal to the personalities that have made these walls talk. 📖 *Rooms is on sale from October 20, but you can pre-order your copy now from your local bookseller or masseypress.ac.nz.*