

The owners of this villa thought they knew what they were getting, but it wasn't till they moved in that they discovered...

MAJOR DETAILS

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THE PROJECT

With Malcolm Walker Architects and interior designer Karen Kelly of KKID, owners of Kwanto Maria Ross and James White renovated this three-bedroom villa in Auckland's Sandringham for themselves and their daughter Mackenzie (12).

Secrets reveal themselves in their own time at this home in Sandringham, Auckland — little quirks in the design that you might only catch a glimpse of when you're opening a blind, kicking back on a window seat or playing with the dog in the garden. Switch on the indoor/outdoor sound system concealed within the walls and you're in for another surprise.

"There are so many well-finished details that you can't take them all in in one gulp," says homeowner James White. "It's so cool — I really love that about good design."

Much of the original goodness of this 1920s villa had been stripped out when it was converted into two two-bedroom flats in the '60s, but James and his wife Maria Ross, who run quantity surveying firm Kwanto, were keen to retain what character they could while putting a spin on it, bypassing the standard villa renovation with the box extension out the back for something more inventive.

Kwanto has had a professional relationship with Malcolm Walker Architects for several years, so the pair were excited to bring his creativity to their personal project as part of an A-team that included "true craftsman and hero of the show" Craig Miller of Miller Builders and "frank, pragmatic, talented and wonderful" interior designer Karen Kelly.

"Malcolm is a genius when it comes to making spaces >



EXTERIOR The pergola and decking out the back are two of Maria and James's favourite features. They were extra chuffed with the picture-frame deck when they took a closer look at its flawless finish.

THIS PAGE Street-side, the villa remains true to the traditional format, with the front garden raised to provide level access from the footpath and the façade upgraded with details including new double-glazed windows in the existing configuration. The low-maintenance planting of the front and rear gardens by GreensceneNZ placed the focus on natives (among them kōwhai, nikau, pūriri, ponga and puka) and other plants that will attract the birds and the bees.

KITCHEN The kitchen by Cube Dentro offsets the visual complexity of the island's mare giallo quartzite from Artedomus, the oak veneer cabinetry, and the parquet flooring from Timber Floor Solutions with a simple stainless steel bench, and light grey Antilia tiles from Artedomus. The vases (on the bench and island) and bowl (on the shelf) are by 101 Copenhagen from Frobisher Interiors, the Mesa bowl (on the bench) is from Città, the *Untitled 30* artwork is by Grace Badar from Melanie Roger Gallery, the Highline pendant is by Rakumba from ECC and the Harriet bar stools are by David Shaw.



ABOVE With all those sun-loving windows, double glazing and underfloor heating, the home is as warm as toast; still, the Spartherm wood fireplace is a focal point in the living area that the family loves for the cosy atmosphere it creates. Poured concrete and bagged bricks add textural interest around it, while downlights tucked into the adjacent shelving can be used to accent objects and artwork, including (top shelf) a pair of Kansas vases from Bauhaus (left) and a couple more by 101 Copenhagen from Frobisher Interiors. One of the two Dexter tables by David Shaw also holds a vase by 101 Copenhagen from Frobisher Interiors, while the coloured cushions on the window seat are from Città.

interesting, and having him on board and understanding how we wanted to live allowed him to play with the idea of the villa while flooding the rooms with natural light," says James.

"The key essence of the alteration was to extend the living areas to the eastern boundary to provide open western evening living and access to the rear garden," says Malcolm. "Replanning within the existing footprint of the villa provided two bedrooms and a bathroom off an entry hall by way of a lobby to the west, and a master bedroom, ensuite, laundry and study to the east. The new extension for the living areas creates a sense of retreat while maintaining connections to the sheltered decking and newly landscaped garden, while all-day sun is provided without loss of privacy by the extensive yet careful use of clerestory windows."

Years of travel taught Maria and James that you don't need loads of possessions to be happy. They value quality over quantity, and that's evident in every aspect of this sophisticated abode. "We're a family of three and don't have a lot of stuff, so we aimed to avoid 'space redundancy' and invest in design, materials, fixtures and fittings so this home will serve our needs for a long time," says Maria, who along with her husband is highly conscious of the issues around consumption and consumerism.

With myriad ideas on the table, they needed interior designer Karen to help keep their décor succinct (and to become an ally for James, who could talk furniture and lighting all day). Her >

“IT’S NOT REALLY UNTIL YOU’RE IN A SPACE THAT YOU CAN APPRECIATE WHAT MALCOLM WAS TRYING TO ACHIEVE THERE,” SAYS MARIA.

LIVING Initially, the couple thought they’d make a bold statement with paint, but on Karen’s advice, they opted for more neutral choices, including Dulux Haast Half on the walls in the living spaces and Dulux Ōkārito for the ceiling, trims and doors. The triangular window to the south accentuates the gable nature of the home, and the family has discovered that from the outside looking in at night, it looks sculptural, like a star. “You’re welcome, neighbours,” jokes James.

DINING The curtains in Barcelona fabric by Villa Nova from James Dunlop Textiles are a cool, steely blue, but their velvet texture lends them a luxurious warmth. Over the table custom-designed by Karen, with Tangerine chairs by Simon James, are globes by Luke Jacomb of Luke Design. The Monk vases are from Bauhaus and the *Untitled 29* artwork is by Grace Badar from Melanie Roger Gallery. *Untitled Oil Painting I, at Lockdown* by Yukari Kaihori from Public Record hangs in the living area beyond, where the sofa is another of Karen's custom pieces.



ABOVE "Because of the nature of the build, we avoided anything too trendy," says Karen. "The feel was actually the number-one consideration. Maria and James are very busy, so I wanted their home to be a restful oasis, but also liveable. For example, they need to be able to drag firewood inside, so the custom rug by Designer Rugs in the living room is 100% wool; although it will inevitably get dirty, it will also clean well and last." The Cooper chair sitting on it is by Bauhaus, the Ridge vases to the left are by Muuto and the Dexter coffee table in the foreground is by David Shaw.



peaceful, minimal palette of natural, textural, hard-wearing materials came together around an amazing slab of stone (which the couple had already chosen for their kitchen benchtop) and is expressed in neutral colours accented with blues and greens, and brass and stainless steel highlights.

Dressed in Karen's expertly resolved finery, the remodelled home is exerting its influence on its inhabitants slowly but surely. "I think you subtly begin to change your behaviours when you're living in a new house," says James. "You kind of develop go-to points – like, for me, peacing out on the window seat with my headphones on for an hour in the weekend, or sitting on the deck with a cup of coffee and having Mackenzie come and sit on my knee. To me, that's just so precious, and what it's really about. It's about giving ourselves different spaces in which to enjoy each other's company, and the longer we're here, the better we become at exploiting those areas."

Providing just enough spots to share and retreat to, the villa is now a perfectly formed place in which this family can enjoy life and grow together. "With your kitchen, your dining and your living, it is a villa push-out, but Malcolm has done it differently with the nooks and insets and interesting ceilings and hidden doors," says James. "It's kind of like waking up in a luxury retreat every morning, but what really spins my wheels are the details. We may never really appreciate it all as a whole package because there are just too many things to take in." ■



“I FREQUENTLY FOUND MYSELF PARING BACK THE PALETTE UNTIL THE BALANCE WAS JUST RIGHT,” SAYS KAREN.

ABOVE “Generally, our approach is to acknowledge that villas are generous and simple, and we followed that by making all our doors, windows and spaces generous and simply linked,” says Malcolm. “We also allowed the central hallway to continue notionally right through to the back wall. There’s something nice about looking right through a house.” Traditional accents he’s reimagined include the ceiling battens, which aren’t intricate but dressed and lead along the hallway through a frameless glass highlight window past a pivot door and into the dining area. **RIGHT** Having used wallpaper in their Kwanto office, the couple were keen to incorporate it here (with Curiosa wallpaper by Arte from Unique Fabrics) to make a ‘moment’ of this nook.



MAIN BATHROOM Both this bathroom and the ensuite are compact, so Karen knew she wanted to use a single stone for the walls and floors, something earthy and dramatic. “I chose azzurro marble from Artedomus, which like the kitchen stone has copper veining and an underlying warmth. ‘You can’t go wrong if you stick with nature’ was my motto.” Enhancing its beauty is Essence tapware by Grohe from Robertson, a vanity by Cube Dentro, a Bari light by Astro Lighting from ECC and a vase by 101 Copenhagen from Frobisher Interiors. The Nought stem holder beside it and the towel on the Barcelona bath by Victoria & Albert from Robertson are from Città.



MAIN BEDROOM Here, Bailey pendant lights by Rakumba from ECC enable a restful wind-down in the evenings. "I love the way the curtains [in Carezza fabric by JAB from Seneca] fall behind the scotia detail, emphasising the bay windows and the height that comes with these grand villa rooms," says Karen.



MACKENZIE'S ROOM Karen chose Dulux Narrow Neck Quarter for the walls in all three bedrooms, including this one, where the décor effortlessly ties in with the rest of the house. Now there's a home office big enough for everyone, the couple have instigated a no-screens policy for the bedrooms, so Mackenzie's wide window seat is dedicated to device-free reading and relaxing.

