

# your home & garden

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**THIS PHOTO:** Designer Barbara Drake has added her unique version of soul to this unit, built inexpensively in the 70s as part of a "sausage block". The artwork over the tea trolley behind Barbara was bought in a Californian market, while the pottery cups, saucers and tureen are by Ali Cooper, Greymouth. **BELOW:** Even the exterior has benefitted from the designer's touch.

## Q&A

**Barbara Drake:** international designer.  
**Lives with:** Her partner Peter Huck, a print-media foreign journalist.

**Loves:** Using her favourite herbs and spices in vegetarian cooking.

**Q: How did living in Africa change your life?**

**A:** We moved to Kenya when I was 11 and lived there for three years. That experience

coloured my life and made me what I am – I love the colours of Africa.

**Q: Why keep spices in glass jars?**

**A:** They're another way of adding colour to my life. I love those rich shades – the yellow of turmeric, the reds of paprika and cayenne. I also keep dried peas, chickpeas and red kidney beans in glass jars, because I love their colours, too.





**THIS PHOTO:** By removing walls to improve flow, Barbara's kitchen and dining areas are now both functional and good-looking. The cupboard interiors are in Resene 'Decadence', which adds fabulously strong colour to the white interior.

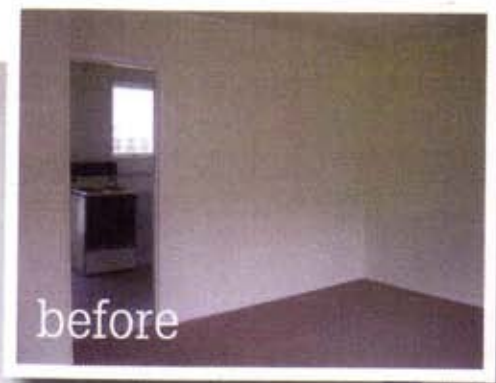
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**PERFECTLY  
FORMED**

An American designer brings Californian glamour to her Auckland home

STORY BY ROBYN WELSH  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN PERRY

**RIGHT:** The blue against white scheme, carried from the kitchen through the house, reflects Barbara's love of the sea.  
**BELOW:** "Colour has made me what I am."



**F**or Los Angeles-based designer Barbara Drake, renovating her home in Devonport, Auckland resembled the creation of a set for a film or photography shoot in a new town. "You have to find things fast," she explains. "I had to do a lot of asking to get the local knowledge you need."

Her latest home here is a world away from life in California, where her design work has featured regularly in American décor magazines.

Here Barbara has worked her magic throughout her modest brick-and-tile home and, in doing so, she has further cemented her connection with New Zealand where her partner Peter Huck – a print-media foreign journalist – grew up.

At a quick first glance, there's little to distinguish Barbara's unit. It's the middle of three in a standalone block of the 70s spec housing often referred to as "sausage block" units.

However, a closer look reveals enough stylish points of difference to hint at something special beyond the front door. The steps and wrought-iron balustrades are painted black and, on either side of the steps, she has planted dark-leaved native cordylines, surrounded with white gravel for contrast.

Barbara's visionary interior is evidence of the harmony and elegance achieved by adhering strictly to one palette of colour and materials. In this case, the scheme is simply white, azure blue and turquoise with metallic accents – chrome, satin-

**THIS PHOTO:** Most pieces on the open shelves in the living area are from a Californian market, but the silver tea service hails from a Devonport, Auckland, charity shop.



## FloorDIY

1 Use a primer undercoat, such as Resene Quick Dry acrylic, once you've sanded and dusted off your floors.

2 Allow sufficient drying time between coats of paint to ensure the floor is well dried. Paint retailers don't like suggesting a time because the weather, the season and the location can all affect drying time.

3 Resene Lumbersider is an all-purpose floor and wall paint, equally suitable for timber decks and interior wooden floors.

4 It isn't necessary to seal the finished painted floor, but if you decided to do so, a couple of coats of water-based polyurethane will suffice.

The interior is evidence of the harmony and elegance achieved by adhering to one colour palette



THIS PHOTO: The artwork over the living area's sofa bed is a favourite that Barbara once hung in the cabin of a boat she was travelling in to convince herself she had a porthole view of the sea.

### THIS PHOTO:

Revamping the Wassily chair in her office is Barbara's next project. The caravan picture by Sue Dove makes her smile: "It's so typically Kiwi."



finished accessories and appliances, and metal-look custom-mixed paint and tiles.

Before decorating, she redesigned the interior layout to maximise space and improve traffic flow, removing the internal hall wall and another wall between the dining room and kitchen. This created an open-plan living area that is functional, elegant and welcoming.

One of the two bedrooms now serves as an office; the other is the main bedroom. "I wanted the bedroom to be sensual so I've used silks from India and sheers made from the linings of Indian saris," Barbara explains.



**THIS PHOTO and ABOVE:** The bathroom area was reconfigured to create a generous space with an open, wet-area shower, complete with deep shelving. This was made possible by cribbing space from the previous laundry on the kitchen side of the wall.

## Clutter-free hints

- Keep to your chosen palette to create a coherent look.
- Relate your colours from room to room for a look that's easy to live with.
- Use texture to add interest – "corrugated" fabrics, ribbed latté glasses, bamboo floor mats.
- Change your groupings to suit your mood – and that latest op shop find.

Her sanded, painted particleboard floors, the walls and the ceilings were, quite literally, a blank canvas. Barbara chose matt finishes, rather than high-gloss sheens, for a good reason. "I prefer a flat paint finish because you can allow yourself to be absorbed into the character of the surface. If it's a shiny surface, it almost repels you. It's the texture in fabrics and your accessories that gives a room its depth."

Barbara's love of colour comes from her childhood days in Africa and her appreciation of the importance of detail from her training as a designer for still photography shoots. "I focus on tiny details and pull out to the big picture – it was a great way to learn."

Many of her accessories have come from flea market shopping sprees both here and in the US. Indeed, most of the turquoise and metallic items on display in the living area came from one Saturday morning splurge at the Rosebowl flea market in Pasadena, California. "I gave myself a little money to see what I could find in turquoise and metals," says the woman who calls herself the "thrift shop queen".

Her glass-topped coffee table travelled from Los Angeles, as did the little shelf above the kitchen bench that holds her favourite colourful spices in old pharmacy jars. "I knew space was tight on this part of the wall, so I packed that with keepsakes, too."

Barbara has made a feature of the original cupboards by inserting glass into the old doors of the upper cupboards and painting the shelves blue to contrast with her china and glassware.

"This place had very little character and very little soul, but for me that's great because in every place you do up, you can give it back its soul by what you do. I knew instantly that I wanted this place to be my version of a modern bach and, because it's very close to the sea, I wanted to create the aura of the sea with these colours. It's all part of the charm."

Turn the page to recreate the look ▶

**THIS PHOTO:** Sari fabrics have been used as curtaining material (backed by white timber-look Venetian blinds) in the soothing main bedroom. The silks used for the pillows and duvet cover are also from India.



before

Barbara's love of colour comes from her childhood days in Africa

## factfile

### ■ exterior

Concrete steps in Resene Paving 'Black'; *Cordyline* 'Red Sensation' plants from The Wholesale Tree Company, Auckland.

### ■ interior

All wooden floors in Resene Lumbersider 'White'; architraves in Resene Zylone SpaceCote 'White'; doors in Resene 'Decadence'; handles from Bunnings Warehouse, Auckland; lighting from Alpha Lighting, Auckland; timber-look white blinds from Pacific Blinds, Auckland.

### ■ living/kitchen/dining

Walls in Resene Zylone Sheen 'White'; trims in Resene 'Decadence'; benchtop inlaid with paua by Custom Concrete, Auckland; blue chairs in Sheba from The Fabric Room, Auckland; Arkie dining chairs, bamboo floor rug, Jasper side table from Freedom Furniture; lampshade from Lighting Plus; sofa bed from Noel Leeming; tea trolley and oak dining table from Bay Country Antiques, Waipawa; mosaic wall mirror by Stacey Reynolds, from the Pukeko's Nest Café, Maramarua.

### ■ office

Walls in Resene Zylone Sheen 'White'; desk from Noel Leeming; art by Sue Dove, Auckland.

### ■ main bathroom

Walls in Resene SpaceCote 'White'; Toto basin and Klensa tapware from the Building Depot, Auckland; Contessa bath from Plumbing World, Auckland; Blanco Niveo square tiles and steel mosaics from the Tile Warehouse, Auckland.

### ■ main bedroom

Mayer bed and Alpha drawers from Target Furniture Hypermart, Auckland; mosquito net from Spotlight; bedside lamps from Freedom Furniture; triangular paintings by Jan Baker, Auckland.

Contact details, page 148.