



# VILLA DIVINE

A renovated 100-year-old house provided the perfect solution for a 21st century blended family

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**Opposite** Original English tiles surround the wash stand in the bathroom. The shelf above is the perfect spot for the glass collection dug up from the garden. **This photo** The view from the original hallway through to the new dining/living room.

## WHO LIVES HERE

**Charlotte** (therapist) and **Stuart Cummings** (family lawyer) and their blended family of **Francis** (23), **Georgia** (19 and currently studying overseas but returning at the end of the year) **Ana** (17), **Anthony** (9) and **Honey** their dog. (Sharpe Labrador cross)

**Where is it?** Grey Lynn, Auckland  
We bought this house because... we needed a bigger house to fit another baby, but we also wanted traditional villa features, a sea view – and to live in it straight away while we contemplated changes we wanted to make.

**The renovation gave us the house we wanted...** Absolutely! We have a flexible family home with an office for Stuart, lots of separate living spaces for all the children and tonnes of storage.

**If we had to, we'd do it all again...** We hope not! We see ourselves staying here forever, sharing it with our children, and their partners eventually, and our grandchildren. We want to have a sandpit in the garden for the rest of our lives.



**This page** The 'snug' is a quiet place for Charlotte and Stuart to catch-up at the end of a busy day. It's the perfect place to display treasures like the ceramic 'Good Luck' horse picked up on their honeymoon in Vietnam.

## STYLE TIPS

**1 Stuart:** Get a good architect. It sounds like a cliché, but you can't make good work of a bad design. Unless you want a career change and to learn everything there is to know about building and plumbing, then get a good architect because you'll get good plans. We used Steve Voyle from Context Architects and he was brilliant.

**2 Charlotte:** Accept that your garden is going to be destroyed. I dug up all the plants and replanted some at friends and family's places and then fetched cuttings back to replant when we moved back into the house.

**3 Work with your builders.** Be cooperative and helpful and they'll go the extra distance. Charlotte says she really tested their builders. "I took all the kauri weatherboards off and de-nailed them and then asked the builders to put them back on. I wasn't very popular because kauri is so hard."



**This photo** The back of the villa was transformed from a 'pokey, dark' kitchen and laundry and 'tiny' verandah into a character-filled kitchen and living space, and a big deck to take in the sun and seaviews.



**This photo** The country style kitchen is big enough to accommodate everyone and features a demolition window. **Below right** Religious icons contrast with an antique chair and bags of the tip shop at Raglan.

**When Charlotte Cummings decided to take on the renovation of the Grey Lynn villa she shares with husband Stuart and their blended family, she had no idea she would amass a new list of skills – including learning how to drink beer.**

"I learnt so much about houses, wood and people over that time, for example I learnt that baking for the builders helped build rapport and the more I learnt about building, the better we could all communicate about ideas and issues."

Charlotte also learnt how to negotiate ('well, haggle, really') with demolition yard owners.

"I found that after lunch was the best time to catch them. They were more mellow then. But the builders hated me because I would bring home old windows and doors and they had to build new frames for them." Still Charlotte and Stuart are unapologetic for choosing to do the

house this way.

"We weren't multi-purists," says Stuart. "Sure, we scoured demo yards and second-hand stores and put in old windows, but we also did all new plumbing, wiring and insulation, and we took out all the borer. Our mantra was do it once and do it right – renovating is so stressful!"

Stuart says the house was lifted a metre and half and the whole downstairs is new. The new rooms have been set up so that their function can change. "Flexibility was the key."

The major work involved opening up the kitchen and back living room and building a bigger, more usable deck off these rooms. The downstairs area is a kids' lounge, with three big bedrooms and a bathroom.

The renovation has given them a grand total of 484 sq m of house comprising five bedrooms, three living rooms, two bathrooms, a double garage, storage room,





**Above** The front verandah features an original stained glass window. **Far right** The new deck echoes the villa's original style and character. **Below left** Anthony (with a rehabilitated hedgehog), Charlotte, Stuart and Honey on the front steps of their 'fantastic' flexible home.



office and a new light-filled kitchen with expansive sea views.

Although it's coming up for its 100th birthday, the villa spent years as a state house, and many of its beautiful features were covered over. It meant that skirting boards, ornate ceilings and doors were untouched and just waiting for a paint or varnish to bring them back to their former glory.

Once the kitchen and open plan dining and living area was sorted, they re-decorated the rest of the house, including the bathrooms. Charlotte says she knew she had established a good relationship with the builders when she asked them to save some of the rotting floorboards in the bathroom because she had given birth (unexpectedly) to Anthony there a few years before. "I think they

understood where I was coming from!"

A grand front room became a home office for Stuart, and they restored another special living space which they refer to fondly as 'the snug'.

"This is a cosy place where we can get away with a glass of wine and catch up at the end of the day", says Charlotte. "It was important to have a living area away from the main action in the house."

Often that action involves a sick hedgehog. Anthony is one of the SPCA's youngest helpers and his special responsibility is rehabilitating the spikey animals. "I think it's wonderful, the range of activities this home facilitates, as well as being a fantastic flexible family home," says Charlotte.

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