



Gone With the Wind

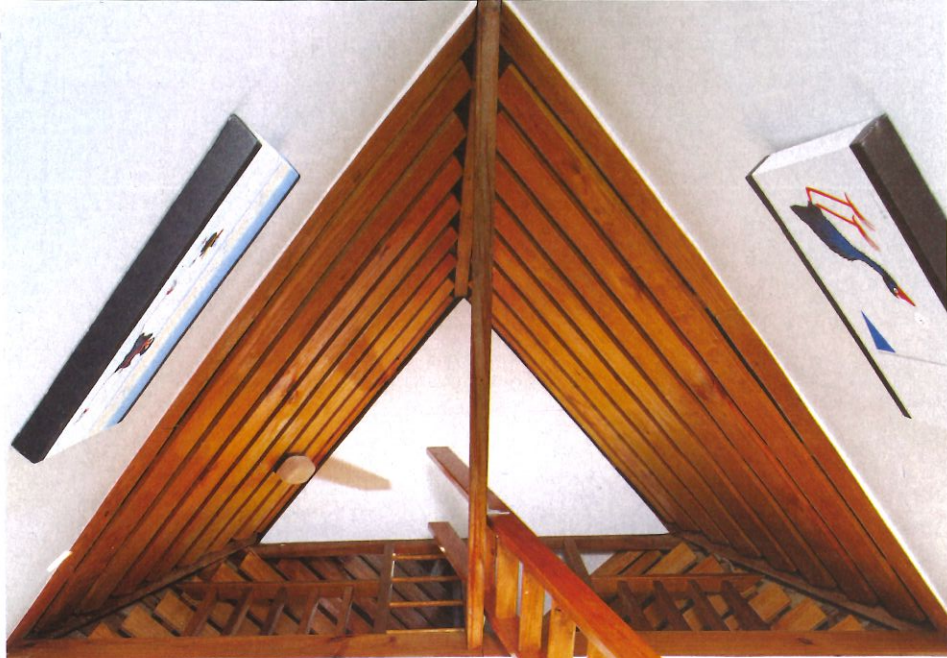
WORDS Victoria Matsunuma PICTURES Roger Richardson

The story begins like a
gothic novel.

*It was a dark winter's evening, wind
and rain lashed the mysterious old
turret house while a figure in the
window watched a flock
of blackbirds float
up the valley.*

But I saw it
a flock of blackbirds
float up the valley
and I saw it
a flock of blackbirds
float up the valley





But it was a tornado, not blackbirds, that slammed into Jocelyn and Peter Rich's hundred-year-old house — resulting in an enormous clean-up and a ghoulish 12 months of repairs to their heritage status home.

Jocelyn had been watching the storm from her Bracken Street living room window on August 20, 2018 when the tornado hit.

"I had a deaf cat, blind cat and a disobedient one on my knees. There was thunder and I was sitting watching the lightning. It was so dark. Then it looked like a flock of blackbirds coming towards the house, and you just don't register because it was so quick. All of a sudden something

hit the house and the house shook like a bloody truck had hit it. All three of the cats shot out the door. I just stood there thinking, 'what the hell just happened?' I opened up the front door and saw trees all over the front lawn. Leaves and petals plastered all over the house. Downstairs

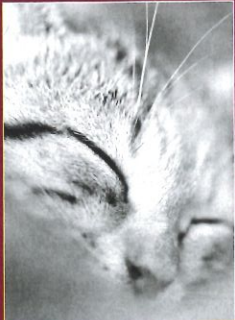
one of the neighbour's trees had fallen down and jammed against the house."

The Bracken St home is poised high up on the street, looking out towards the sea. One of the most distinguishing features of the home is a turret that stands tall above the second level veranda.

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“As I came upstairs, I could hear the wind whistling and that’s when I knew something had hit the roof. It had hit the turret which doesn’t have a ceiling, so of course the turret got absolutely flooded.”

The tile roof above two bedrooms was badly damaged and the turret fully exposed to the elements. It rained steadily and Jocelyn did her best to protect the adjacent rooms using, “many, many miles of plastic sheeting from Mitre 10 and changing towels every hour.”

The tornado had ripped up trees, lifted furniture, then spat them out far from where they originally stood. Tiles from the roof of the Bracken St house were found 300 metres away, embedded in the field at Sanders Park.

The combination of water damage and destruction of the roof lead to a very hefty insurance claim, which was completely covered by their insurance company. The couple had spent forty years chipping away at the restoration of the property and had invested an immeasurable amount of emotional energy and financial commitments into their family home.

The History

When the Rich’s purchased the house in 1978 for 50 thousand dollars it was in a dire condition. Jocelyn explains although it was on the verge of “death by neglect,” it meant it was priced low enough for them to afford it.



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The home was built in 1912, for a New Plymouth businessman Charles Stuart Curtis, who gave the home the title 'Glen Stuart'.

There had been five other owners between the Curtis family and the Rich's

and when they took ownership in 1978, it had been converted into two flats by a previous owner.

The home was divided with a flat upstairs and the other down, partitioned

by a cupboard in the hall. They bashed out the back of the cupboard to reconnect the two levels and the restoration project began.

Then, year by year, Jocelyn a nurse and Peter a GP, poured their energy and funds into sanding and stripping woodwork, sourcing fixtures and repairing leadlight, rebuilding and maintaining the exterior – all while raising their four children.

In 1998 their restoration efforts were celebrated when the Rich's property was recognised as a historic building by the New Plymouth District Council. This status acknowledges the home as culturally significant to the city and protects it from development or destruction.

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From Brown to Black Tiles

Of all the years working on the house, the 12 months it took to repair the damage after the tornado was one of the most challenging, Jocelyn says. There had been no structural harm, but the water damage inside the upstairs bedrooms and the turret meant they needed to be completely redone, along with the roof.

The entire house was masked by scaffold in stages during that year and the original asbestos tiles were removed. The roof had to be covered with ply, then titanium wrap, after which a malleable recycled rubber tile was installed. It looks identical to slate but is durable and can withstand the elements.

Resource consent sign-off came with a few complications due to its of 'Heritage building' status.

The exterior aesthetic appeal of the home is protected so the NPDC has the authority to have a say in decisions about the external appearance of the home.

In this case the council approved a light brown tile but the Rich's had chosen a neutral charcoal colour to match the paint on the weather boards. After a bit of back and forth they ironed out their differences and the black tiles were installed.



Having salvaged the home from its dilapidated state, devoting years of her life and hundreds of thousands of dollars restoring the home to an exemplary condition, Jocelyn is grateful to know the council will continue to oversee the protection of her beloved home in the years to come.

At the end of the 12 months living with contractors scaling their scaffolding day after day, Jocelyn says her patience did start to wear thin. But never so much to make her want to leave.

"After all these years, I still come up over Vivian St and stop at the stop sign and I think, 'She's lovely.' And that feeling has never gone."

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