



Family honours historical treasure

By Mike Shaw

COMMENTS overheard at an open home could have put Hamish and Kirsty off buying the historic Maranui residence in New Plymouth. Instead, their interest was piqued.

The couple weren't specifically looking for the character and history they found here at Maranui St, on the edge of the city's iconic Pukekura Park. "We stumbled across this when we were out looking at open homes," Hamish recalls. "It was a stunning building, had established trees, and was in a great location."

Not everyone at the open home was as impressed as Hamish and Kirsty. "We heard people talking, 'How would you heat it? Imagine painting this place!' But we saw the opportunities here."

The open home was on a Sunday five years ago; they put in their offer to buy on the following Thursday. And they have never regretted their decision, despite the testing times of restoration work since.



The two-storey villa called to Kirsty's Scottish heritage. "It felt like home for me," she remembers. "The bedrooms upstairs, living below." The gentle lilt of her accent underlines the memory.


"We also have a lot of British friends and the home resonates with them... the entrance way and the rooms off the hall."

For Kiwi Hamish, the home offered serious family space and a sense of comfort in its character – which was only enhanced when they found out about its history. "The former owner had done a lot of research and left us a lot of notes."


There's a pleasing continuity of families living here. "The vendors knew we had young kids and they wanted it to go to a family. The owners prior to them had given them that opportunity as well. The history here is all about quality family memories and that is a legacy that we are carrying on and honouring."

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A protected Phoenix palm towers metres above the two storeys of the home.

"This home is just magic. We feel privileged to have a place like this."

Maranui has a deserved place among New Plymouth's notable historic homes. It was built in 1892 for city builder and property developer James Cartwright George, after he obtained the land from well-known businessman Newton King.

The location at the end of Maranui St, off Coronation Avenue, is as desirable today as it was when the villa was built. A Taranaki Herald advertisement from early 1892 announced the auction of choice suburban building sites along Avenue Rd, as Coronation Avenue was then known, and mentioned the Maranui residence.

"Three level building sites, each of one acre, being subdivisions of Section E, Avenue Road. The Auctioneer begs to invite the special attention of persons on the lookout for a really choice homestead site, as the allotments to be offered are, without exception, the most eligible properties of the kind now in the market. They are situated on the Avenue Road, immediately outside the Borough boundary and in close proximity to the High School, Racecourse, Eliot St station ... The Avenue Road plateau offers special advantages for the erection of private houses, being handy to town ... and commanding fine views. A handsome residence for Mr J.C. George is approaching completion, and several other recent purchasers propose to build very shortly."

George lived in the gracious villa for a number of years, before selling it in 1901 to prominent city lawyer, Clement William Govett. Govett lived here until 1914 with his wife Frances and four daughters - Marian, Dorothy, Margaret and Monica. Monica later endowed money to what became the Govett Brewster Art Gallery. Subsequent owners included T.C. List, a former owner of the Taranaki Daily News.

That background made the home even more special to Hamish and Kirsty. "I love all the historical connections," says Hamish.

They are keen to keep their home as original as possible, while enhancing it as a family home. "We have not planned an extensive renovation, more reinstating it to restore it back to its former glory," Kirsty adds. "The history makes me want to keep it the way it is."

There's a lot to appreciate here.

The original 35 acres that Newton King once owned has been subdivided and sold off over the years, but there's still a generous 1400sqm around the villa with impressive, established trees, including a protected Phoenix palm towering metres above the home.

The home itself offers a more-than-generous 410sqm of living space, which includes the entry foyer, two downstairs lounges, a new kitchen-dining area, a refurbished bathroom, the original kitchen with a baked-enamel Aga stove set into a fireplace, and



THIS PAGE: Kirsty and Hamish feel privileged to bring up their children, Neve and Arche, in the historic home. The stairwell links the impressive entry foyer and the huge landing, that's as big as many modern lounges.



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The wide upstairs verandah boasts views to a sea horizon.



The generous verandah porch across the front offers easy access out into the grounds.

behind that a partly renovated area that Hamish understands was once a maid's quarters.

A recent Christmas emphasised the family space in this home. Hamish describes the huge Christmas tree that filled one corner of the front formal lounge and reached the ceiling almost 4m up. "We had three tables, end to end in here on that Christmas day. Kirsty had family over from Scotland, we had my extended family, and our friends. It was brilliant!"

Space continues up the stairs from the foyer, to a huge landing as big as many modern lounges, five large bedrooms, a family bathroom, and the wide verandah from which you can look out over the neighbourhood and the nearby racecourse to a sea horizon.

Kirsty loves all the character detail, which impresses visitors the moment they step across the wide welcoming space of the front verandah porch and through the leadlight-framed front door into the huge foyer. The detail includes fine timber mouldings of the

wide architraves and deep skirting boards, and finely refinished tongue-and-groove linings of the timber ceilings high above. "I could sit and look at the detail and character all day."

Much of the timber had been painted previously and the couple has accepted the lighter look, continuing it themselves. That paint focus wasn't quite their intention, Hamish admits. "We had owned a 60s weatherboard home and painted it inside and out ourselves. We said 'Never, ever again!' And then we built a new low-maintenance home."

He smiles at the recollection of talking earlier to friends who owned a big, old house. "We gave them a bit of stick about it," he admits.

"We were a bit nervous about an old home and weatherboards again," Kirsty says, "but the character and history here appealed to us."

They have taken a more balanced approach to the painting in this home, tackling some of the labour-

intensive preparation themselves and then having a professional painter finish the job. "There is so much detail in every square inch here," Hamish notes. "In our old house, we could paint a room in a weekend. Here a professional could take three weeks on a room."

Painting has been an ongoing project for the past five years, and they have been well supported by the skills of painter Jeff Cox, who also has valuable experience as a builder. "He's been here from the start ... he's like a member of the family now."

Most of the paint Jeff has applied inside and out has been white. "It modernises the home, without losing the texture of the timber details," Hamish says. It also provides plain walls on which art works can stand out.

There's a bright contrast, though, in the lounge in front of the kitchen that their children Neve and Archie enjoy as their special space – a vivid yellow glows on the

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The new kitchen is a simple statement in white and grey.



All five bedrooms upstairs are spacious and simply styled to allow the period features to shine.




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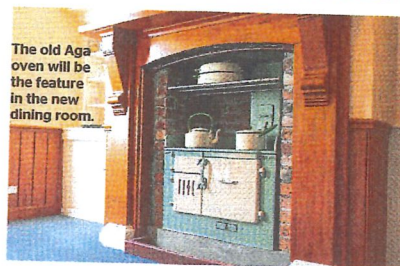
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The beautiful fireplace in the formal lounge is complemented by the contemporary efficiency of radiators, which Hamish and Kirsty installed throughout the home.



Fireplaces still have their place in the formal and kids' lounges.



The old Aga oven will be the feature in the new dining room.

walls. "I wouldn't have painted it this colour if we were selling the house," Kirsty says. "But it's the kids' room."

Wallpaper on the walls of the staircase and upstairs landing are the current exception to the paint finishes. It seems the bold, colourful, Asian design has been there since the 1920s. The couple is reluctant to remove it, but the years have taken their toll and it is likely to have to be replaced. Hamish is thinking a portion of the paper in reasonably good condition can be kept and framed as a feature to respect the past.

Contemporary convenience has its place, and that's emphasised by the installation of a full radiator system throughout the house soon after Hamish and Kirsty moved their family in. Fireplaces still have their place in the formal and kids' lounges, but the radiators add an efficiency and comfort that is appreciated through the cooler months.

Hamish is keen to convert the former kitchen space into a formal dining room with the old Aga oven taking pride of place as a feature. He can visualise this as a special room in the house, entertaining friends and family in here over the winter months.

The new kitchen crafted by Elite Kitchens is another pleasing contemporary feature. It's a simple statement in white and charcoal cabinetry, with an island clad in a matte-grey, stone-like material – front, top and sides. "It looks like a solid block," Hamish says.

The cabinet doors and drawers are touch-opening, without handles to intrude on their simplicity. On the wall behind the gas cooktop, classic white subway tiles

link the new kitchen to the era of the home.

In the dining area to the side of the kitchen, a table sits neatly into a corner windowseat that Hamish understands was a later addition to the home. Morning sun angles into here, making it a favourite area in which to start the day.

Outdoor living is easily achieved in this home, with the wide verandah porch across the front and the upstairs balcony area, and easy access out into the grounds. And it's only going to get better. Hamish and Kirsty intend extending the front verandah decking around the corner of the house to meet the French doors that open into the dining area. That's not so much a change as a restoration of a feature that is shown in a photograph from the 1920s.

It's a commitment to keeping this home as true to its origins as they can, while enhancing its family focus. "Every previous owner has done something," says Hamish, "and the whole property looks brilliant. We want to do our work while we are young enough to enjoy it."

He estimates their restoration project is 90 per cent finished, but is happy to complete each portion and take whatever time is necessary. "Do it once and do it right," he says.

The couple now consider Maranui their 'forever' home. "We want to live here another 30 years," Hamish says.

"By that stage, we may need to bring back the servants," Kirsty adds with a smile.



Maranui was built in 1892 for city builder and property developer James Cartwright George.



The bold wallpaper up the staircase and upstairs landing has been there since the 1920s.

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