

Coastal gem



A classic Kiwi bach at a hidden Northland beach is given a new lease of life, with its owners making use of junk-shop finds, salvaged timber and upcycled objects

Text by Fiona Ralph. Photography by Melanie Jenkins. Styling by Shani Luckman.



Big on beaches

Call them serial renovators or holiday home entrepreneurs, Vanessa and Richard Owen love doing up houses – and they're good at it. They also love hosting people and have recently added four new properties to Driftwood Seaside Escapes (driftwoodnz.com), their boutique accommodation business near Kerikeri (as seen in the Christmas issue of *YH&G*). One of these, Reef Cottage, is a charming, two-bedroom bach at Tapuaetahi, a gated beach. "We felt we needed something that was absolutely 'beachfront' and big enough for families," says Vanessa. (The one-bedroom cottages on their main property are elevated, with water views.)

Overhaul time

Named after the couple's son, Reef Cottage is the quintessential Kiwi bach. Richard and Vanessa's aim was to keep the original footprint of the house, but give it a much-needed tidy-up. They installed a new roof, re-clad the exterior, and relined the interior. "Only the joinery and floors were left," says Vanessa. "We had to fight to get the character back in and be really inventive."



OUTDOORS With such a stunning view, the landscaping could be kept simple. Vanessa scoured marine chandleries for nautical accents such as old rope and a lifebuoy. Apart from a giant fig tree and the neighbours' handy overhanging lemon tree, there were no plants, so the Owens added natives in raised beds and pots.



MEET + GREET

Vanessa Owen, 48 (designer and boutique bach developer), **Richard Owen**, 57 (renovator and boutique bach developer), **Reef**, 9, **Milli**, 17 (horse riding instructor), **Poppy**, 21 (superyacht crew), and **Dione**, 23 (superyacht crew).





DIY spirit

The Owens bought Reef Cottage last April and spent just 10 weeks renovating – with an eight-week trip to Greece in between. The holiday inspired Vanessa to add Grecian-style shutters and bright blue accents to the house, which “perked up the soft coastal colours”, she says.

The couple completed most of the renovation themselves, with help from friends. The bach was booked solid for the summer before they even had a chance to stay there, but they have enjoyed entertaining friends in the outdoor room, a living space they added to extend the small lounge and take advantage of the ocean view.

Driftwood decor

Vanessa’s decorating style is well honed from many years designing home interiors. “I am passionate about creating seaside spaces and about the nostalgic feel that can be achieved on a budget,” she says.

Her relaxed, coastal style makes use of offcuts and vintage finds. The resourceful couple even salvaged and reused timber from the property. “Old houses often have great timber stored underneath; you can de-nail this and run it through a thicknesser,” Vanessa says. “We made a table and bed and trimmed all the interior with what looked like rubbish, but was in fact lovely, old, hard rimu.” ●



KITCHEN Vanessa bought the pot belly stove from Trade Me; the antique candlestick above it was her grandmother’s. Marshmallows in the pantry are a Driftwood trademark, as are fire pits in the backyard. The pantry was in the house when it was purchased and was then built into the wall during the renovation.

"I am passionate about creating seaside spaces and about the nostalgic feel that can be achieved"



BEDROOM, LIVING
The Owens encourage their guests to feel at home, supplying blankets, games, movies and books. The cane chair was found in a junk shop and painted in Resene 'Alabaster'. "I am always looking," says Vanessa of her knack for finding vintage pieces.



GET THE LOOK

Pier rope **table lamp**, \$159, from Freedom.



Marine striped **towel**, \$69.90, from Citta.



Altan **chair**, \$640, from Citta.

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MAIN BEDROOM
Shutters made from old cedar conceal a mirror and bring a touch of Greek charm to the bedroom. Custom Paint Plus colours were used to create hard-to-find shades, such as that on the living-room shelves (which surround the entry to the bedroom), and to match colours found on timber under the house.