

**THIS PAGE** Milla Novak, 14, turns cartwheels on Oakura Beach.  
**OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) Caz and Steve Novak make the most of the balcony of their clifftop home, which gets sun from breakfast through to evening drinks. The chimney for the freestanding woodburner goes right through both storeys of the house, providing all the heating in winter. Milla has been surfing for three years. The blue trim around the window is Resene 'Comfort Zone' and the green is Resene 'Gulf Stream'.

# Weathering storms

Recycling, rethinking and rebuilding have transformed a Taranaki bach into a sturdy family home

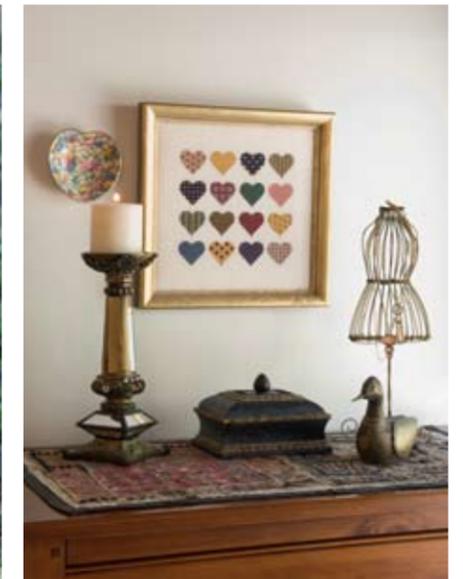
WORDS VIRGINIA WINDER / PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL MCCREDIE





**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from above) Inspired by a trip to Rarotonga, Caz painted *Island Time – Muri Beach*, which hangs at the bottom of the stairs; a growing collection of Crown Lynn ceramics sits on the bookshelf behind the re-covered retro sofas. The sunny lounge window seat is a family favourite. Milla heads home after surfing.

**OPPOSITE** (from top left) Rare polka dot Cornishware, owned by Caz's grandmother, takes pride of place on the kitchen dresser. Teddy, the "mostly British shorthair" cat, loves oceanside life. Collectables in the master bedroom sit on a runner bought at a Kathmandu street market. A collection of Ann Skelly ceramics in the kitchen.



These days the house, which began life as a bach, feels as sturdy as a ship

**C**AZ AND STEVE Novak's family home overlooking the Tasman Sea at Taranaki's Oakura beach took the full force of Cyclone Bola back in March 1988. "The neighbours who saw it said the roof lifted intact, like a handkerchief, and deposited itself elegantly on the beach," says Caz, sitting in her art studio and gallery at the top of the house. "We were downstairs and had no idea we'd lost our roof until the next morning when we came up here and could see light through the sarking."

These days the house, which began life as a fibrolite beach bach, feels as sturdy as a great ship, especially from the elevated studio. Picture windows frame nothing but sea, as if the house were ploughing through the waves.

Other pictures, as huge as the windows, hang between the pounding surf. These luminous botanical canvases are formed by layers of paint, which Caz scrapes back in places to reveal underlying levels of colour and depth. "It's a combination of impasto and sgraffito," she says, checking off the painting terms.

Art met music when a painting from each of her *Pacifica* and *Lush* series was chosen to adorn the walls of Sir Elton John's dressing room when he played at New Plymouth's Bowl of Brooklands in December 2007. >





**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from left) *Lush – Rhododendron I*, inspired by New Plymouth's Pukekura Park rhododendron dell, on display in Caz's light-filled upstairs studio. A custom-built rimu art desk stores tools of the painter's trade. *Pacifica – Patterns I*, from Caz's Pacifica series. Reference photos are pegged alongside finished paintings on the studio wall; the blue angel sculpture came from New Plymouth store Kina years ago.

**OPPOSITE** The greens in the master bedroom echo those of the tropical palms in the courtyard; the chandelier was found on TradeMe and *Spring Silhouette* above



One was of an in-bloom rhododendron dell in New Plymouth's Pukekura Park. The other was a diptych in which the brilliant flush of a New Zealand summer was expressed in flowering flax, cabbage trees and a full-headed puka, all standing before a turquoise ocean.

At ground level, the windows of the kitchen, lounge, bedrooms, bathrooms and dining room frame a view of the garden that could be straight from the *Pacifica* series. Pohutukawa, karo and puka are given haircuts once a year to preserve the vista, says Caz.

She loves the flax, whose sculptural flower stems lure tui to the garden. "By the time they have had a feed they end up with a red crest on their foreheads from the pollen – they look like exotic birds."

Away from the sea, the master bedroom opens on to a subtropical courtyard studded with bangalow palms and hibiscus. Next to this is Steve's office. In between counting numbers, the self-described beach accountant, who has been working from home for 20 years, can glance out his window at the rolling Tasman.

"When I came back from overseas I was working for a big accounting firm and I liked the thought of working for myself at home."

A visit to an optometrist identified severe eye strain, which led to headaches. Going beach changed all that. "I still haven't got glasses, but I might soon," he says, grinning.

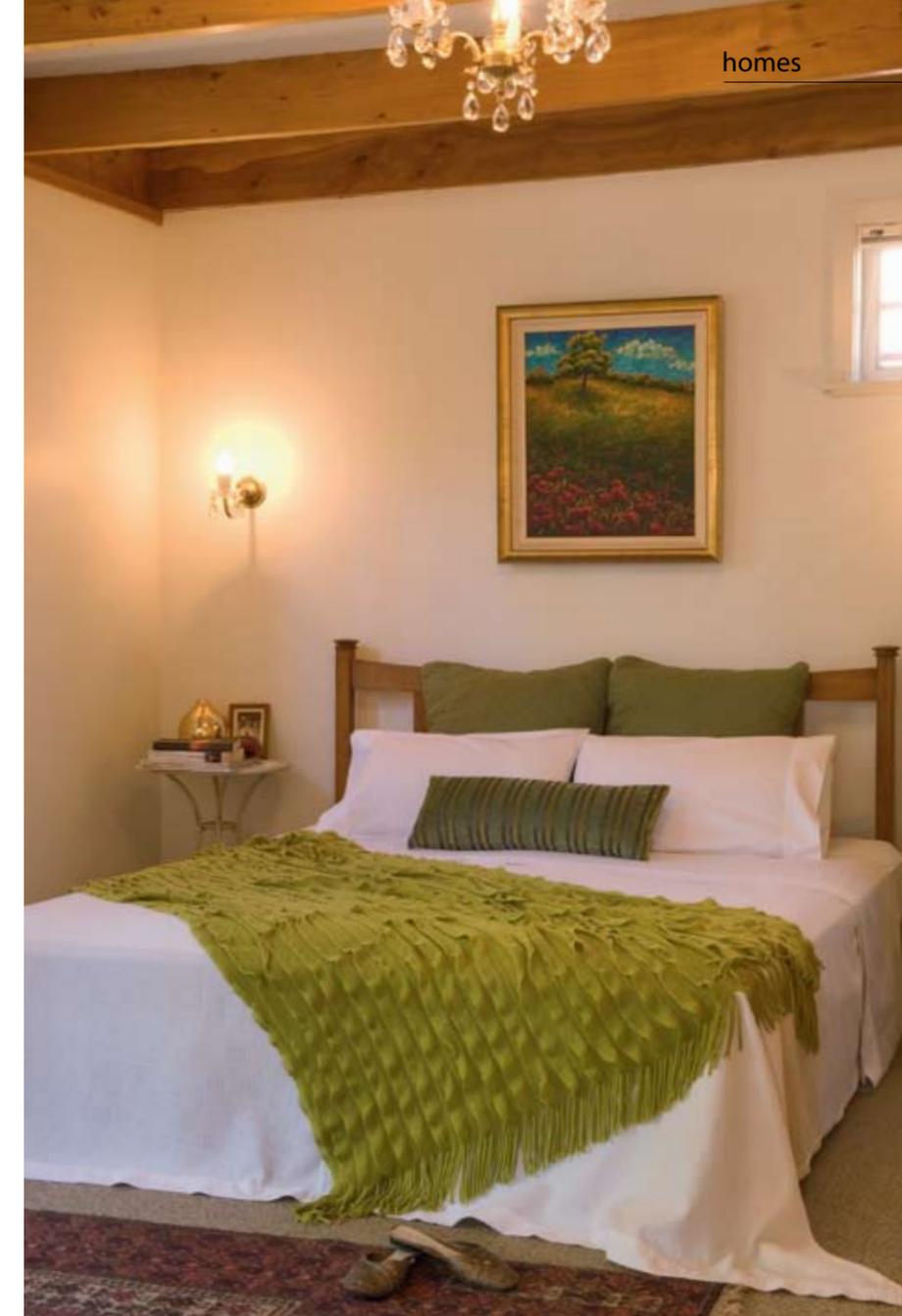
In summer, when the weather is gorgeous, the couple take lunchtime swims. "You learn to seize the moment," says Caz.

She also enjoys her husband's company. "Life as an artist can be seen as quite solitary, but I have always got someone to have coffee with."

Both are disciplined about meeting deadlines, but have always been flexible enough to attend their daughters' sports and cultural events.

Even better, Milla, 14, and Tess, 19 (now at Victoria University), have grown up having not just one, but two parents to come home to – and often visitors too.

"One of the lovely things about our children growing up in this home, apart from the obvious that life is a beach for them, is that they have come into contact with such a wide variety of interesting people – either Steve's client base or those visiting from New Zealand and overseas to see my work." >



**This weekend I will be:** On the beach till a hungry family requires feeding.

**The best time of the week for me is:** Friday night. Though we're both self-employed, we enjoy the ritual of kicking back and celebrating the weekend's arrival.

**My favourite part of the house is:** Our sunny window seat. Perfect for reading a book, enjoying the view or having a snooze.

**My best moments in the kitchen are:** Now that I have such a willing kitchen hand in my eldest daughter, we are cooking our way through

some flavoursome recipes to equip her for flatting.

**My best moments in the garden are:** Watching my salad greens taking off in the courtyard and hoping we will eat them before the slugs do!

**I love this part of New Zealand because:** The West Coast does vibrant colour with aplomb.

**In the next five/10 years I'd like to:** Be in the Greek Islands singing Abba songs with our good friends. We've been planning it for years – just hoping the plan becomes a reality.  
*Caz Novak*



**THIS PAGE** (from above) Flax kete hang in the art studio. In Milla's bedroom, the chandelier, mirror and 1960s telephone stool were all TradeMe finds; Caz created the mixed media butterfly painting to match the stool fabric. Tess in the studio; the window divan doubles as a guest bed and visitors say it is like sleeping on a ship.

Family life and the demands of home business forced the evolution of the bach into a rustic home, with a long, slow game of musical rooms along the way. The studio was once the master bedroom, Steve's office was formerly in the main part of the house and other spaces have changed their faces.

Through three stages of growth, and with the help of clever builders, the house has been transformed into a recycled, reclaimed, rethought, TradeMe-acquired beauty that glows with golden timber.

In 1986, when Steve first bought the bach, he tracked down a huge load of macrocarpa at a timber yard closing-down sale and has made full use of the hardy wood as exterior cladding and throughout the interior.

"This is the house that mac built," Caz quips. "We love it because the outside of the house has weathered to a bleached driftwood colour."

The interior features tongue and groove reminiscent of New Zealand's colonial heritage and macrocarpa features on doors, cupboards,

walls and ceiling. It's often called "poor man's kauri" but the floor is the real thing. One of the builders found the floorboards during the demolition of a dilapidated house in New Plymouth. "It was all painted black and silver," says Caz, "but its kauri heart was revealed when it was sanded."

To these solid foundations they have added an eclectic mix of furniture from different eras, reconditioned candelabra in the bedrooms, crockery collections and plenty of colourful cushions, rugs and throws.

Walls painted in Resene's 'Pearl Lustre' provide blank, warm backdrops for Caz's Europe-inspired pictures, *Spring Poppies* and *Irises*, and the tropical image *Island Time*.

But the most powerful presence is the wild Tasman Sea that shush-shushes below.

"It's hugely invigorating," says Caz. "It's constantly changing from the still calmness of summer to atmospheric and moody in winter. It's inspirational for my work."

See more of Caz's work at [caznovak.co.nz](http://caznovak.co.nz) ■