

A lifelong passion

interiors

Interior designer Campbell Johnson always knew he would be an architect or a designer, and so did his mother.

“My mother still has floor plans from when I was five or six,” says Johnson.

More recent designs and floor plans hang on his living room wall beside a genuine Japanese wall chest and black Pantone chair.

A self-confessed “preppy and colourful” dresser, Johnson prefers the look of white walls in his home, with colour taken from objects, art and furnishings.

His grandmother’s art deco lounge suite has been recovered in rich black velvet.

A Marimekko cushion pops with colour on the dark sofa.

“I might wear a lot of purple and pink, but I am pretty much over feature walls in the home,” says Johnson.

The walls throughout his three-level townhouse are painted a stark white. Occasionally, a blast of red catches the eye.

“I don’t follow trends in colour, but my personal accent colour for now is red,” says Johnson.

“I am, however, very passionate about New Zealand designers – like that red chair by Well Groomed Fox.”

Johnson moved back to New

Genevieve Robinson meets an interior designer who is delighted to be back in Christchurch.

Zealand in 2009 after many years travelling and working overseas. But it wasn’t until December 2011 that he finally felt the time was right to return home to Christchurch.

He searched for a place where he could live and work under the one roof. That’s when he discovered for sale a townhouse in the Tonbridge Mews complex in Merivale.

The late Christchurch architect Peter Beaven was well known for his quirky futuristic designs and crisp use of light and space.

For Johnson, purchasing one of Beaven’s 1970s townhouses was the perfect transition from working in an office in Auckland to working from home in Christchurch.

“I wanted this home because of the separate office up top; somewhere feeling detached from ‘home’ life down below,” says Johnson.

“I love all the nooks and crannies, confident architectural detailing and exposed ceilings

creating a sense of increased space.”

A walk around this house has you wondering what lies around the corner. A shadow on the stairwell wall indicates a hidden nook or another shaped cupboard.

A black-painted wooden staircase, only wide enough for one person, extends from the upper landing.

At the very top of the building is Johnson’s Tree House – the office space that separates Johnson’s work from his pleasure. It is his favourite room.

Entering this space makes me feel like a child; I had a desire to play hide-and-seek. But Johnson is disciplined and there is no time for play once he enters this space. He separates his upstairs work life from his relaxed life downstairs perfectly.

Heading to his Tree House a little after 7am, Johnson only breaks to make a coffee on his Rocket, and for meetings with clients.

“I need to know that it’s like heading out to work,” he says.

There’s no denying Beaven’s sense of proportion was masterful and well ahead of his time. This house is rambling, but it works.

When coupled with Johnson’s styling, the place oozes 1970s sophistication and takes on a sense of monochromatic masculinity.

“My own taste is as clean and as crisp as possible, and wooden



floors – you can’t beat them really,” says Johnson.

“Aesthetically, the house itself has a sense of character and quirkiness that reflects my own personal style.”

Working and travelling through many countries including Bahrain, Johnson has purchased many collectable items, which now adorn walls, shelves and tables. The usual photographs have been replaced with trinkets and souvenirs, acting as reminders of his amazing trips – all with stories behind them.

“I have a bit of a thing for lamps; lamps and clocks. I’ve probably got too many.”

One wall clock stands out from the rest; a mirrored contemporary take on the cuckoo clock – a souvenir from another trip. “That was so cheap. I got it for €20 [NZ\$31.50] in Amsterdam.”

Although small in size, the cuckoo’s mirrored case reflects almost everything around it, capturing light and artwork from the stairwell.

Everything serves a purpose: a colourful woven villager’s bag covers an ugly light switch.



Downstairs, clockwise from right:

Retro Chic: Campbell Johnson relaxes on a sofa by Concept.

Contemporary time: Amsterdam cuckoo clock.

Reflection: A chrome-plated Japanese ceramic stool.

Bronzed beauty: Glass vase by Arik Levy for Gaia & Gino.

Black and white: The steps to the “Tree House”.





Work and play, from left:
Classic design: Peter Beaven’s Tonbridge Mews complex.
Amber glow: A Kartell classic lamp.
Simply wired: Stackable wire chair by Wellington designer Well Groomed Fox.
Best view in the house: Campbell Johnson’s “Tree House” office. Photos: DEAN KOZANIC/FAIRFAX NZ

His favourite piece appears strong and branch-like. But it’s made of thin glass and has been “glued” to the table to prevent any quake damage.

“I got this in the Middle East at Villa Moda. It was 60 per cent off and I bought it back in my hand luggage on the plane. It was bloody expensive. It is by Arik Levy for Gaia & Gino. I love the finish and the patina of it.”

Johnson loves the interior design of the store – mostly black and white with hot splashes of colour.

“It was designed by Marcel Wanders and probably reflects my own personal style quite well. It’s divine.”

For Johnson, objects have a strong place in the home. They all have a story to tell.

He believes you should never sacrifice the “real McCoy” for a reproduction – especially with furniture.

“The thing about reproductions is, people tend to go overboard. It feels like you are going into a Nood store.”

It’s always better to wait and save up for the real thing, rather than go out and get the reproduction.

“Then you will really appreciate it,” he says.

Johnson is enjoying the change in pace and projects that goes with moving back to Christchurch.

Sitting on his tulip chair in the Tree House, Johnson talks about his design ethos.

He says clients often have so many ideas of their own and it’s his job to help them eliminate the good ideas from the not so good.

What a person is wearing and what they have in the way of furniture and art is a good indication of their own “true style”.

“I never prescribe a style.

What someone is wearing is a pretty good indication to me. It shapes to me where you are at,” says Johnson.

“A television should never be the focus of a room. That is a big hate of mine. And ceiling lights that aren’t dimmed.”

Lamps and candles are flattering. So is coloured lighting.

He points out a bright yellow Kartell lamp sitting on a corner stool. “I love illuminated colour,” he says.

And I can see why. I have the exact lamp and we both get excited discussing the finer points of Kartell’s designs.

For Johnson, this home has its limitations, and like all projects, will come to an end.

“I am excited about chipping away at this house, and then moving on.

“I will always look for the next house, and firmly plant my roots back in Christchurch.”