

POLISHING A GEM

An interior designer's revamp puts a fresh new spin on a piece of Christchurch's architectural history

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THIS PAGE In the dining area of interior designer Campbell Johnson's Merivale townhouse, bright red plastic Boogie Woogie shelves, by Spanish design house Magis, showcase little ceramic houses by Nelson potter Owen Bartlett; a branch candelabra, bought in Bahrain, has been glued to the dining table in case of further earthquakes.

OPPOSITE In the downstairs living area an antique coffee table brought back from Japan in the 60s by Campbell's grandparents complements an art deco suite that belonged to his grandmother; a chromed Japanese stool, from Auckland's MMD Home, provides a contemporary touch along with a red WSC chair by Wellington design studio Well Groomed Fox, seen in the garden courtyard.

HOMES

THESE PAGES (from left) An antique ladder-back chair, a graduation gift from Campbell's parents, works well with a set of genuine black Verner Panton chairs, designed in the 60s; the Persian rug is from Bahrain and the glass lantern is a purchase from the Dubai markets; a State House cushion by New Zealand designer Genevieve Packer sits on Campbell's grandmother's sofa. Campbell surrounded by a few of the things he loves: a cardboard Graffiti stool by Remember and, hanging on the wall, a camel bag, bought in Bahrain.



WHEN INTERIOR DESIGNER Campbell Johnson's workday begins, he heads up the stairs to his "tree house", way up high in one of Merivale's Tonbridge Mews townhouses.

Once there, he settles behind the desk in his home office, sips a coffee whizzed up in his much-loved Rocket espresso machine and slips easily into his work persona. It's his favourite space in the townhouse, one of a cluster of 18 designed and built in 1974 by Christchurch architect Peter Beaven as his interpretation of modern urban living and acknowledged as a modernist gem.

Each apartment is slightly different in detail, with intersecting roof lines and playful touches such as porthole windows; some have a "turreted" third storey – perfect for Campbell's office.

He came across the apartment in 2011, while house-hunting in post-quake Christchurch. After years of living and working overseas, he'd first settled in Auckland, in 2009, before deciding to make the move back to his southern hometown. He instantly saw how well Tonbridge Mews would suit his work-from-home intentions. "[The upstairs office] is somewhere that feels detached from home life down below. It's like actually heading out to work."

He was also drawn to the 120sqm, two-bedroom home's 70s character – its interlocking concrete block work, rough-sawn heavy timbers and pitched iron roof – as well as Peter Beaven's sense of proportion and clever use of light and space. >



“I love all the nooks and crannies, architectural detailing and exposed ceilings. Aesthetically, the house has a sense of character and quiriness that reflects my own personal style.

“My own taste is as clean and as crisp as possible... And wooden floors – you can’t beat them really,” says Campbell.

The home was in a state of brown and beige neglect, but now its white walls provide a masculine, monochromatic backdrop for Campbell’s collection of objects, art and furnishings. Some are family heirlooms – such as an art deco suite, now re-covered in rich black velvet, that belonged to Campbell’s treasured grandmother – and others were gathered on his travels.

His favourite recent purchase is from Bahrain – a glass, branch-like candelabra that has been glued to the dining table in case of further earthquakes. “I got it in the Middle East at Villa Moda. It was bloody expensive – it’s by Arik Levy for Gaia & Gino. It was 60 per cent off and I bought it back in my hand luggage on the plane. I just love the finish and the patina of it.”

Campbell’s always had an eye for beautiful things and knew he’d be a designer or architect from an early age. “My mother still has floor plans I drew from when I was five or six.” Now, plans drawn up for clients hang on his living room wall beside a Japanese wall chest. He’s enjoying helping his clients refine their idea for the projects that have come his way in Christchurch. >

THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) The antique clock on the landing used to hang in Campbell’s grandparents’ store, Johnson’s Grocery, before it was demolished after the earthquakes; the chair is a French antique bought for \$60. The small plaster side table was bought by Campbell’s grandparents on one of their trips to the East. Campbell’s bedroom has more of a classic flavour than the rest of the house, with its sleigh bed, a leaving-home gift from his parents. Hanging on the wall in the spare room is a rimu foundry pattern bought from a roadside Coromandel antiques store.

OPPOSITE Campbell’s “tree house” office.



THIS PAGE (top two pictures) Large pavers surrounded by smaller stones give a subtly oriental feel to Campbell’s outside courtyard, which he planted himself with thuja trees, mondo grass, Japanese miniature maples and an array of fragrant creepers. Celebrated Christchurch architect Peter Beaven designed Tonbridge Mews, his take on “village living” in the city, in 1974.

“I never prescribe a style,” he says. He takes his cue from what clients wear and their existing furniture and art, which he says gives a good indication of their own “true style”.

“I don’t tend to follow trends in colours, but my personal accent colour for now is red. I also have a bit of a thing for lamps and clocks. I’ve probably got too many.”

He points out a bright yellow Kartell lamp sitting on a corner stool. “I love illuminated colour: it’s very flattering to the room and to the people in it.”

Campbell also believes genuine designer objects are worth the splurge. “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 as if you are going into a generic Nood store. It’s always better to wait and save up for the real thing. Then you will really appreciate it. It means something.”

Campbell knows his current home won’t be forever – like all projects it will come to an end. “I am excited about chipping away at this house, and then moving on.”

Two things he’s sure about though... his roots are firmly planted in Christchurch and his next house will again be in the city. “And I will still want to have that tree house feel somewhere in my next place.” ■



Q&A

The bravest thing I did around the house was: Ripping up the carpet on the stairs and upper level and painting the floor black. I get so many comments on it and it allows me to display my rugs collected from past travels.

I’m planning to: Remove the walls between the living room and kitchen to open up what is a slightly tight space downstairs – not helped by the abundance of collectables I have.

A quote I often use is: You can never have too many lamps.

The best piece of advice I ever received was: From my grandfather: if you can’t afford to buy something outright, don’t buy it.

My favourite local restaurant: For weekend breakfast, Vics Cafe in Victoria Street – the scrambled eggs are amazing; for dinner, Harlequin Public House, “and it’s right on my doorstep”.

Favourite local shop: I have always loved Holliday & Sons antiques for its dramatic, somewhat theatrical, collection of pieces. It’s always a treat to visit – I feel like a child in a candy store. I am also enjoying Form Gallery’s new space and its collection of ceramics and glassware.

Campbell Johnson