

# Shaping a life in the country

It's hard to imagine this warm and cosy home in the heart of Whitemans Valley was once little more than a doss house for farm workers, a place to kick off the gumboots, hang the Swannndri, tie up the dogs and bed down after a long day. Today it's home to a family, **Jill Wild** reports.



**Valley life:** The Edwards' house is one of four homes that cluster around the original farm homestead. They have now all been painted in similar styles and colours.

## Latest House Values

### Wellington

Suburb	2 bdrm	3 bdrm	4 bdrm	5 bdrm
Aro Valley	\$421,000	\$484,000	\$558,500	-
Berhampore	\$342,000	\$488,000	\$554,500	-
Brooklyn	\$435,500	\$533,000	\$655,000	\$799,000
Mount Cook	\$382,000	\$502,000	\$589,000	\$349,500
Mount Victoria	\$408,000	\$679,000	\$870,000	\$1,183,000
Newtown	\$420,500	\$504,000	\$610,000	\$652,000
Oriental Bay	\$497,500	-	-	-
Roseneath	\$466,000	\$645,500	\$929,500	\$1,263,500
Te Aro	\$372,000	\$546,000	\$607,000	\$775,500
Wellington Central	\$324,000	\$515,000	-	-

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**T**HE RENOVATION, started in January this year, was the last and largest step for the Edwards family determined to create the home they had always wanted, and while finishing touches are still being made, the home has been transformed from its doss house days.

Gone is the mud outside the door, the yapping farm dogs on the chain, the muddy gumboots and dripping Swannndri, life now is one of simple but modern living.

But it's taken foresight and vision to get where they are today. In the depths of cold winters the roof leaked, the house was frigid from no insulation and Rachel Edwards admits there were times they thought life in suburbia might have been easier.

"But we moved out here for space, that was 13 years ago, the best things when we arrived were the new septic tank and the telephone and that was it. We bought it sight unseen. Well, we'd looked in the windows but the tenant wouldn't let us look in the house and when we arrived it was hideous, very run down and absolutely freezing."



**Rural scene:** The Edwards family can look out to the countryside when seated around the table for dinner.

CONTINUES NEXT PAGE





# Country life

## FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

WITH no DIY experience the family made it as homely as possible, got on with living, and in the summer when they had spare time picked off jobs on the long list of things to do.

"We built the deck, changed windows, polished the floors and refitted the bathroom and laundry. But it needed to be re-roofed and that was the thing that made us think about a full renovation."

The house is one of a cluster around the original farm homestead, now the base of architect and passionate restorer of New Zealand's heritage homes, Mona Quinn.

The surrounding pasture was once a dairy farm, the three cottages for workers with a fourth, larger and more recent, at the end of the lane on the road edge.

With her passion for restoration, Quinn has keenly encouraged renovation of the worker's cottages, starting with her own, adjacent to the homestead, which now doubles as a guest bedroom and office.

In the mass of structures, when others would have seen buildings of little architectural merit, Quinn saw much potential.

"The cottages are unique because they are all placed along the same country lane leading up to the homestead, there are no boundaries in the sense that the kids roam from one house to another, there are endless cups of sugar borrowed between neighbours, plus wine, cups of tea and ad hoc parties and good, old fashioned pot luck dinners."

The passion of the architect becomes clear, so it was with encouragement and support from her that the Edwards family took that final plunge to re-roof and fully restore.

"The process was kicked off when we decided to renovate our cottage," says Quinn.

"As a general rule all the cottages were in need of some TLC, builders Smith & Sons were roped in to help me and the first cottage started. Snowball effect, the Edwards joined in, then the Mumbys and the fourth lot of neighbours and voila, two years later they are all fit and ready for another century of living and cup-of-sugar sharing."

The Edwards reclad the exterior of their home in board and batten, removing a cladding builder Trevor Taylor, of Smith & Sons, suspected had an element of asbestos.

The big window in what is thought to have been the original lounge, was below bench height in the new kitchen so was lifted to bench height. A second-hand kitchen, bought for just \$400, was crafted to fit and the room opened to take advantage of the Australian-made Nectre woodfired baker's oven with wetback attachment.

"It's been mild this winter and the house is now so well insulated we haven't had to have the fire going, but of course with the wetback it's excellent, and before the insulation was put in this year we had the fire going nine months of every year."

Today there are three bedrooms, each compact, but of double size, and a fourth the family fondly refers to as "the walk in wardrobe".

"It's my daughter's bedroom, she loves it, she could have another room but she just loves the tiniest room in the house."

The surrounding five hectares is shared between horse grazing (not their horses) and a substantial vegetable garden.

"The veg garden is my husband's domain, but we're all either vegetarians or vegan so we love our vegetables," Edwards says.

When the floor was pared back, the original footprint became easy to read, it was once a tiny one-bedroom cottage, of single farm worker proportions, enough for a man and his dog. And since, the flooring indicates there have been two additions.

Today it's the comfortable and warm home the family hoped for when they returned from working in England 14 years ago. The restoration is in sympathy with the original, yet amply fitted for modern living.

The house remains an essential part of the lane cluster, with the homestead at the heart. That the four farm cottages have now been painted in similar styles and colours says much about the owners' mutual appreciation.

As architect Quinn says: "Today the homestead alongside the four farm cottages very much read as a whole, and that suits the inhabitants just fine – the community is still going strong."



**Exterior update:** The Edwards reclad the exterior of their home in board and batten, removing a cladding builder Trevor Taylor, of Smith & Sons, suspected had an element of asbestos.



**Hot stuff:** The Australian-made Nectre woodfired baker's oven with wetback attachment keeps the family toasty warm.



**Farmhouse kitchen:** A second-hand kitchen costing \$400 was made to fit and the room opened up for to take advantage of the woodfired baker's oven.



**Modern twist:** Modern art work is right a home in the former farmer's cottage.



**Transformed:** What was once a DIY challenge is now a cosy family home in Whitemans Valley.



**Cleaned up:** The bathroom was one of the first rooms renovated for family comfort.

## WHAT'S NEW



**WOW FACTOR:** Backhouse Interiors is the place to see innovative and internationally acclaimed imported design alongside creations by top New Zealand manufacturers. In store now are the Mantis lights, originally designed in 1951 and re-issued by French design stars DCW design. It is available as a table, floor, ceiling and wall mount. From \$1042. And from Wellington-based design studio, Well Groomed Fox, are these Notch lights made from porcelain (fired in a kiln in Paekakariki) and available in a subtle colour palette. From \$288. Backhouse Interiors, 12 Kaiwharawhara Road, Wellington.



**CLEAN UP:** Add some sparkle to your teeth-cleaning routine with the new Philips' Sonicare DiamondClean Black Edition tooth brush. Powered by patented sonic technology, it improves gum health in only two weeks and is also clinically proven to whiten teeth in one week. It is gentler than a manual toothbrush, helping to keep teeth stronger and healthier for longer. It gently whips toothpaste and saliva into an oxygen-rich foamy liquid and directs it between and behind teeth, even under the gum line, where plaque and bacteria flourish. \$329.95 From selected Farmers, Smiths City, Harvey Norman and Noel Leeming stores.



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