



Opposite The 'punch holes' in the foundation, where the 1970s extension was demolished, are still visible in the porch, which the family uses year round. **This page** A print by one of the family's favourite artists, New Zealander Sam Broad, hangs above restored classic French cafe chairs.



# grand dame

A 1910 villa set among the green hills of Whitemans Valley needed a thoughtful renovation to restore her

Text by **Sharon Stephenson**. Photography by **Nicola Edmonds**.







## in a nutshell

**Who lives here?** Mona Quinn (architect), Richard Quinn (engineer), Oscar, 8, Rebecca, 7, and Lucas, 3.

**Mona, why did you move to Whitemans Valley?** Wellington must be the only capital in the world where you can have a rural aspect and be 25 minutes away from the CBD; it's so unique.

**What do you love about old houses?** They have soul and spirit and stories to tell.

**What's the best thing you did?** Getting rid of the old swimming pool to allow room to reinstate the original formal approach to the house.

It's a long way from Copenhagen to Whitemans Valley, but architect Mona Quinn has successfully made the leap, bringing with her a large dollop of Nordic style to the countryside north of Wellington.

Eleven years ago, Mona and her Kiwi husband Richard relocated from the Danish capital to Lower Hutt, where Richard's family is based. They'd met in London and spent a year in Jamaica working on a new marina development.

Their first Kiwi port of call was a Chapman-Taylor house in Silverstream. But after completing that renovation, the search for a new challenge led them to this 1910 villa which was once part of an 800-hectare farm and the centrepiece of the rural community, hosting high-society high teas and tennis parties.

The villa came with four hectares and 11 outbuildings, six of which were so rundown, they had to be demolished. One of the former workers' cottages is now Mona's office/guest accommodation while another is currently being renovated.

But it was the 280-square-metre villa that the couple focused their energies on after buying the property four years ago.

"The sheer scale of the renovation was so large, we tackled it in two stages," says Mona, who completed her architecture degree at Victoria University.

The first phase involved gutting the original bathroom and installing new tongue-and-groove walls and fittings. As with the rest of the house, the walls were re-lined, ceiling and underfloor insulation was installed and the house was re-plumbed and re-wired. The kitchen was next on their hit list, and Mona expanded the footprint by moving a dividing wall, allowing them to borrow space from the adjoining boiler room. The latter is now a handy butler's pantry.

By re-purposing building materials, Mona not only saved money, she preserved the integrity of the space. "We did things like reuse timber from one of the gutted barns for the benchtop. I'm a great believer in using materials appropriate to the age and style of the house. It also adds layers of history and saves historic structures for future generations."



**entry, living** In the now-generous hallway, the couple reinstated full-height ceilings and added panel work, trims, scotia and architraves in pine which was painted white, to reduce costs. The front door and frame was found after a two-year search of secondhand shops. All shelving was custom-built on site and continues the house's colour scheme of light Scandinavian colours with bursts of black for contrast.







**kitchen, dining** Mona loves cooking but admits to being a messy cook, so wanted to separate the kitchen from the dining room. The shelving was retained from the original kitchen and traditional white tiles replaced the old hardboard linings. The biggest transformation occurred in the dining room and included a new fireplace with inbuilt storage on either side, as well as new columns which mark the transition from the formal garden outside.



## renovating an old villa

- ✦ **Take the time to research** the age and style of the house so you can source items that respect the integrity of the place.
- ✦ **Be patient and be prepared** to wait until you find exactly what you're looking for.
- ✦ **View each wall** as a canvas on which you can add detail, such as mouldings and trims, to add layers and interest.
- ✦ **Mona's firm**, Callidus Architects, produces a free booklet on 'The Seven Mistakes People Make When Renovating'. Email [info@callidusarchitects.co.nz](mailto:info@callidusarchitects.co.nz) for a free copy.

Previous owners had filled in the wraparound porch so the second renovation phase involved reinstating the original 1.5m porch, which had been pulled down during a spate of renovations in the 1950s. Fortunately, the original foundations were able to be re-used, and new columns were added which were painstakingly matched to the originals. "We spent two years searching for period windows and doors to match the original features. The glass came from Hamilton, the corbels on top of the house were made by a retired craftsman on the West Coast and the finials came from Levin."

Installing a wall between the dining space and hall provided oodles of storage and helped define the space, but Mona was keen to keep the kitchen and dining room separate.

"Open-plan cooking and dining doesn't really suit the spirit of the house or my cooking style. We have a lot of dinner parties and the Danish way is to prepare 10 or so dishes but I'm not the tidiest of cooks!"

In the wide hallway, Mona installed panels to add interest and help bring the high stud into scale. "We couldn't afford to buy original native timber panels and architraves, so we had them made in pine and MDF and painted white."

The house's colour palette owes more than a nod to Mona's Scandinavian heritage, with lots of white and muted hues. She also retained timber features such as the doors and the matai floorboards which were repaired or, where necessary, replaced.

Most of the furniture was bought for the house and Mona is responsible for the oil paintings. Every two years she visits family in Copenhagen and returns with suitcases of goodies from Ikea, including the colourful fabric she has stretched across two panels and hung above a sofa in the living room.

Outside, the couple has also been busy, planting a large vegetable garden and breathing life into a former apple orchard and berry garden. They also planted a formal garden that leads off the dining room and, says Mona, is designed as an extension of the house.

So far, the original tennis court has only been used to house a marquee for an end-of-renovation party but Mona says one day they'd love to restore it to its former glory.

"We've got lots of plans, including adding another storey, but for now we're enjoying our hard work. It's also amazing how many people drop in to tell us they're pleased that the old homestead has been restored." ●

➔ Find out how they got the look on **PAGE 138**.







**bedroom, bathroom** The gorgeous painting above the master bed was done by Mona. The couple wanted a super-sized bed so that the kids could fit into it for their Saturday morning ritual of making caves out of the blankets and pillows. Mona re-purposed an old washstand with modern fittings for the family bathroom.



**exterior** Mona planted the formal garden a year ago and is gently coaxing heritage roses back to life. One of the reasons the couple chose the property was so that the kids could have plenty of room to play. Mona reinstated the house's original circular driveway and plantings.