

AN EASY YES

It was less about location and more about style when a Christchurch designer saw this retro beauty

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LEFT Barry and Anita Connor's living room, with its dimpled-glass divider, is in original condition although Barry did refashion the built-in cabinet from an existing one as a lockdown project; the Danish wall hanging next to the Samsung The Frame television was bought on Trade Me, the green leather Rubens sofa is from Hunter Home, the leather chair is from Hawthorne Collections and the rattan coffee table came from Freedom.



LEFT The sunroom also operates as a dining space; the Lego flowers tie in well with the lampshade made from a retro tablecloth by a friend: “We are avid Lego fans,” says Barry; the round cane side table once belonged to Anita’s grandmother while the brown floor lamp was bought in London for the couple’s first flat. **ABOVE** Hazel, the cat, who has sadly since died, enjoyed being the centre of attention; the house has been recarpeted throughout with Feltex 8th Wonder in Waitaki River and the artwork to the left is *Quirky Little Collection* by John Santucci.



The living room may be strewn with Lego most days and the sunroom festooned with clothes horses in winter, but the mid-century features in this Spreydon home will not be bowed. Diffused light spills through the distinctive dimpled-glass divider that slides back to create an open-plan space and a rich rimu board-and-batten wall that wraps around the kitchen is definitively of its time.

When Barry and Anita Connor were looking to move, with their young son Felix, from their Merivale townhouse designed by celebrated architect Peter Beaven, they never imagined shifting to this southwestern suburb. But then they saw this architectural nugget: “We immediately spotted that it had the Christchurch modern vibe. To a certain extent, it didn’t matter where it was or how many bedrooms there were,” says Barry.

TOP LEFT The artwork at left on the rimu-lined wall is by Steve Gill and was bought from a window display at Paper Plus Kaikōura while the other is from Trade Me. **LEFT** Beneath an old photo of a New Zealand National Airways Corporation airplane, a cabinet of treasures includes a vintage phone, German pottery and a radio from Barry’s student days: “The block of wood next to it was a present from a dear friend; it’s a toilet-door lock that has ‘engaged’ and ‘vacant’ on it and our friend gave it to us when we got engaged – and signed it ‘no longer vacant!’” **ABOVE** Barry and Anita with son Felix in front of Barry’s studio. **RIGHT** The popcorn and kernels ceramic art is by Madeleine Child.





LEFT The bedhead in the main bedroom features boucle fabric and rimu, which ties in with the existing window frames and built-in cabinetry; *Give Me Shelter* by Thomas Hancock is propped up on the ledge. **ABOVE** Barry and Anita love the quietness of their bedroom, which is farthest from the road, and its connection to the garden; the chair and ottoman are retro pieces picked up at a school fair and the artwork is by Steve Gill.



As it turns out, it had far more than they bargained for. A swimming pool for starters. A river boundary. Four bedrooms. And a whole heap of interesting history.

Designed in 1969 by Charles R Thomas & Associates, the dwelling was a passion project for the original owner, engineer John Boyd. "His daughters passed on two boxes of documents. There were papers where he had worked out the sun's trajectory and calculations to determine the best spot for the pool," says Barry. There were also sketches of light fittings, original leaflets on the heating system and consent documents including plans and the building contract.

Barry had graduated with a degree in architecture in his native UK but was working as a chef in a Michelin-star restaurant in London when he met his future wife. When they visited her home town of Christchurch, he asked: "Why are we not living here?"

After a refresher course at night school, he was back on the design pathway. Now he runs his own practice, so he was clear-eyed about the pitfalls and possibilities of this house. He saw the good – the practical way the spaces are laid out and their wonderful feel – and forgave the bad – the single glazing and minimal insulation. In fact, not long after the Connors moved here in 2020, they applied for a building consent to install a wood burner. "We realised that the concrete block walls appeared to store heat and the house is so well oriented we ended up not needing it," says Barry.

Although the home is only 140m², its design makes it magically bigger on the inside than it looks from the outside. Clever planning, with no wasted circulation space, has allowed for three equal-sized bedrooms looking out to the pool terrace plus a larger main bedroom occupying the eastern corner beneath the gabled mansard roof.

There was one issue: a single bathroom, incongruously divided into four spaces, each with a door. "You had to walk through the room with the vanity to get to the toilet, and the bath and the shower were in separate rooms too." Barry and Anita plotted a fire sale of demolition doors as they reconfigured the experience. With an accomplished stroke of the pen, a walk-in wardrobe and en suite were created plus a separate bathroom for 8-year-old Felix and guests all within the same floor area.

TOP LEFT The colour of the custom-made cabinetry in the walk-in wardrobe was matched to a ceramic plant pot: "It's an orangey, raspberry and paprika kind of tone," says Barry. **LEFT** *Hikaru Dorodangoes* by ceramicist Madeleine Child enlivens the en suite which is lined in Winckelmans Jaune tiles. **RIGHT** Winckelmans Australian Green tiles feature in the family bathroom; the wall lights and basin are from Robert Gordon potters in Australia.





‘We liked the idea of doing a modern twist on a mid-century vibe’

The bathrooms may be new, but they are infused with the spirit of the 1960s. “We liked the idea of doing a modern twist on a mid-century vibe,” says Barry. Standard 100 x 100mm tiles in a matte finish keep the look grounded and rimu vanities mimic the materials of the original door and window jambs. Handmade clay basins and circular wall sconces tick the crafted look while matte white tapware adds a modern touch with a nod to the past.

Forest green and mustard yellow wouldn’t be a common first choice for interiors but the Connors say they have grown to be more comfortable with using colour. “We’re not afraid to go out on a limb as long as it still fits with the overall scheme of the house,” says Barry.

In Felix’s bedroom, the angled ceiling is painted blue to echo the night sky and the walls are vibrant orange for the sunset. Chalk drawings of planets and farting spaceships hover overhead and there are stars named for loved ones who are no longer of this earth.

In the main bedroom, adding a timber headboard that stretches the width of the room, along with built-in side tables and boucle upholstery, has transformed what was once a “boring” white space into a retro-modern showpiece. Plants and a picture window framing the garden seal it as a sanctuary. “Anita is very green-fingered whereas I tend to kill plants,” admits Barry.

Sometimes he relocates one or two specimens to his design studio, which he has created in the former carport. It’s not long before Anita stages an intervention. Being able to work from here, surrounded by trees and within cooee of the river, is a blessing. It’s just one of many.

From the summer months when the unheated pool, still with its roughcast concrete surround, welcomes one and all – or longer if you’re “brave and silly” – to winter when the sunroom comes into its own, it ticks every box.

“Spreydon was never on our radar,” says Barry. “But this cool house brought us here randomly and we feel amazingly lucky.”

LEFT Felix wanted a space theme for his bedroom so chose the dark colour to represent deep space and orange as the sunset; the Ikea Kura reversible ladder bed is from Nordic Chill. **TOP RIGHT** A petal mirror in the entrance hall bought at the Ellerslie Flower & Garden Show hangs beside an artwork by Guy Mathews. **RIGHT** An outdoor dining space is tucked beneath the distinctive gabled mansard roof of the house, which was designed in 1969.





ABOVE The pool area is yet to be renovated but the couple plan to landscape and plant so it becomes a backyard oasis which the bedrooms open out to. **RIGHT** The studio is clad in vertical Abodo timber battens over plywood and the orb is a Linea Light Group Oh! lamp from Lighthouse.

Q&A

with Barry & Anita Connor

NEXT TO RENOVATE: The kitchen which was rebuilt on a bare-bones budget after the earthquake. We'll likely look at working with timber and modest natural tones and maybe a tiled benchtop. *(Barry)*

WE BOTH LOVE: Mid-century style, but Barry tends to stick more closely to the cleaner lines and bare surfaces. I like a more natural approach – pottery, wood and lots of plants – and although we both love the same style of art, I'm

more inclined to a good still life, whereas Barry would likely go for more abstract works. *(Anita)*

AND THE GARDEN: We like to live with something before making any big changes. We have started planting along the river and outside our bedroom focusing on plants that will attract nectar feeders like bellbirds and bees. *(Anita)*

ADVICE FOR RENOVATING A MID-CENTURY HOME: Try to read

your home – pick up from existing elements and references that suit the style to keep authenticity. Try to do the least changes but ones that will have the biggest impact both spatially and budget-wise. Be thorough, do your research and take your time to think things through. *(Barry)*

SPREYDON'S BEST-KEPT SECRET: The Waiting Room Cafe in Lincoln Rd. It does great coffee, and chocolate chip cookies according to Felix! *(Anita)*

