

# LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Won over by a charming Christchurch villa, this young family then treated it to a thoughtful update

WORDS **CLAIRE McCALL**  
PHOTOGRAPHS **HAZEL REDMOND**

**RIGHT** The benchtops and splashback in Josie and Daniel Mathieson's Merivale home are in Neolith Calacatta Gold, from CDK Stone, and strike the right modern-classic tone in the kitchen where brushed-brass tapware from Perrin & Rowe is unlacquered so it will develop a patina; the hardware ties in with the Visual Comfort & Co lighting above the bench; the cooker is a Lacanche from France.







**ABOVE** In the living area, a Belle Interiors Collection sofa from McKenzie & Willis is paired with Lucca chairs from Montreux Furniture; although the main source of warmth is a fully ducted heat pump system, Josie felt that a traditional-style home wouldn't be right without a fireplace, which is an Escea gas model; speakers in the ceiling are part of a sound system that pumps music throughout the house.



**J**osie Mathieson likes to spend time researching important decisions. She and husband Daniel had deliberated before zeroing in on the suburb of Merivale as a prime spot for their young family. But when Josie came to view this property, her emotions took over. There would be no poker-faced negotiations here.

Originally built in 1939, the house had palpable character, something the Mathiesons felt their first place – a sleek new-build in semi-rural Halswell – was lacking. “It was lovely, but it didn’t feel homely,” says Josie. “It was also tiled throughout the living areas so not that child-friendly.”

These days Theodore, 3, and his little brother Toby, 19 months, make full use of the flooring, scooting down the long, parquet corridor on indoor bikes. While Josie, who has overseen a renovation that touched practically every surface, may not have anticipated such antics, she’s nonchalant about inadvertently creating a racetrack. It proves the spaces have much better flow.

The previous owners had updated the house 15 years before, but the layout didn’t work for the Mathiesons. Both born and bred locally, Daniel – a commercial insurance broker – has six siblings so family get-togethers are a sizeable event. “It was important to be able to accommodate them all in one big, open-plan space,” says Josie, who is currently at home with the kids.

A simple enough idea. But once the couple started writing their wish list, it grew and grew. The first draft of the plans by architectural designer Barry Connor responded to every request – but almost made the problem worse, ending up a veritable rabbit warren. Something had to give. While the second living area was prioritised, a separate laundry became part of the scullery. Keeping within the existing 177m<sup>2</sup> footprint, a generous northwest-facing family, kitchen and dining room was created.

The couple considered it genius, but others questioned why they wanted to embark on the project. “They couldn’t understand why we’d go to the trouble and expense of renovating such a beautiful old home,” says Josie. One day, standing in the middle of the ordered chaos, she had fleeting doubts too. “There was a point when the entire back of the house was stripped to the framing, we had no internal walls, and only about 60% of floor left. That’s when I thought, ‘What have we done?’”

For the interior style, Josie knew she wanted to team old with new to honour the heritage of the house. She just needed someone to help her bring it together. Candice Van Dyk from Mooi Design became her sounding board.

Since the start of the two-year design process, Josie had been gathering Pinterest images in an inspiration folder. Slowly, a signature style emerged. The showstopper kitchen is a case in point. Josie had seen a photo of US designer Shea McGee’s own kitchen and worked with Candice to interpret it. “Initially, I

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envisaged all built-in joinery on display but that wasn’t going to look right so we came up with a plan – a door – to disguise the scullery,” says Josie. That door (dubbed the “hashtag door” for the shape of its steelwork) is now a highlight of the kitchen. That and the French Lacanche oven which was a splurge purchase but anchors the scheme.

The interiors may look superb but practicality has been a cornerstone philosophy. A butterfly chicken can be on the table within 40 minutes thanks to that fancy fan-forced oven, upholstery fabrics were chosen for their durability and the dining table is not antique, as it appears, but a mass-produced piece made of recycled elm. “I quickly realised an antique was impractical due to the stage we are at with our children – they’re messy eaters who have a thing for felt pens. They certainly don’t know that something is expensive and 100 years old.”

Having reinstated original features – wide skirtings, architraves and coving – the rooms retain a sense of history which textiles in stripes and tartan and traditional wallpaper patterns reinforce. A neutral palette keeps the mood light and liveable.

**RIGHT** Daniel and Josie with their boys Theodore, 3, and Toby, 19 months, who like to make full use of the home’s timber flooring by scooting around on their indoor bikes.







**ABOVE** Two sets of doors that define the Mathiesons' entranceway are made of timber painted black; the wooden joinery is so fine it mimics Crittall steel; engineered oak flooring, from Forté, features as straight planks in the living spaces but is laid in a parquet pattern in the entrance. **RIGHT TOP** A comfy David Shaw sofa in the rumpus room can accommodate the whole family: "Originally we called it the adults' lounge," says Josie, "but that lasted little more than a day. Now during the day, the kids command the space with their toys"; the Hume side table, also from David Shaw, is made of fossil stone. **RIGHT** In replanning the home, architectural designer Barry Connor turned the focus on being able to see right through the living spaces to the garden from the front door; double doors, at left, lead to the rumpus room.



That said, Josie is not afraid to step outside this realm. "In our first home, I was scared to make design decisions and we ended up with a house that was white, grey and black with no personality," she recalls. This time, she's been more adventurous with blue-grey wallpaper and charcoal-blue wall panelling in Theodore's bedroom and a savanna scene in Toby's.

She's had to be wily when presenting some ideas to Daniel, though. "If I'd told him we were having floral-print wallpaper in our bedroom he'd have said 'No' straight away, but where I have made a bold choice, I have grounded it with safer colours." The bedroom is sprinkled with a delicate French grey print that segues seamlessly with marble mosaics in the en suite.

And while Daniel sometimes gets frustrated with some of Josie's very specific ideas – when choosing plants for the planter box on the deck, he had to haul a tree around the nursery measuring it up against others, with two toddlers in tow, so Josie could check they matched – the attention to detail has turned out for the best.

The doubters are won over by the revamped layout which seems to have been this way forever. "The main thing is, it feels homely," says Josie. That was my number one priority." After all, who wants to own a house that you're too afraid to live in.





**ABOVE** Pure Acorn wallpaper by Morris & Co brings pattern to the main bedroom, while the bedside lights are by Ralph Lauren and Josie found the reindeer hide online. **RIGHT** Wildlife roams in Toby's bedroom where a Serengeti mural by Borastapeter is set within a frame: "Because we have high ceilings, the mural would have been too short for the room, so I Googled it and came up with this plan," says Josie. "I think it looks better this way."







**LEFT** A cut-style porcelain tile on the wall of the en suite lends a textural touch and ties in tonally with the marble penny rounds on the floor, both from Brymac Tiles; Aberdovey half-cup drawer pulls, from Armac Martin, along with brass tapware and towel rails from Perrin & Rowe, add a traditional touch to the custom-designed cabinetry. **BELOW** Mixing Cole & Son Florencecourt wallpaper in Grey on Slate with tiles on the other three walls gives the family bathroom a far more interesting material palette: “I got my inspiration from Pinterest,” says Josie who, in conjunction with Candice Van Dyk from Mooi Design, made the look her own.





# Q&A

with Daniel & Josie Mathieson



**ABOVE LEFT** Having side-by-side basins in the family bathroom will one day ensure the boys don't need to fight for mirror time; Josie bought the Jim Lawrence wall lights directly from the UK: "I saw them on Instagram and bought them online. They didn't need rewiring," she says. **ABOVE RIGHT** The powder room is painted Dulux Rāwene and features a brass mirror custom-made by Joska & Sons. **BELOW LEFT** Panelling in Theodore's bedroom is painted in Aalto Platform while above it is The Wave wallpaper by Borastapeter. **BELOW RIGHT** A Japanese maple underplanted with buxus features in a planter in the back garden; the couple repainted the home's exterior, formerly a blue-grey, in Resene Half Merino. **RIGHT** The entrance, with its original front gate, has a lovely sense of classical symmetry.



**ADVICE FOR A MAJOR RENOVATION:** Have a realistic understanding of what you are undertaking, including time frames and costs. If you are not from a building background, there is a big difference to looking at a set of plans and fully understanding what they mean. *(Josie)*

**BEST PLACE IN THE HOUSE TO GRAB SOME "ME" TIME:** In the rumpus room. It's cosy in there and it's nice at the end of the night to be able to close the pocket doors and watch a movie. *(Daniel)*

**FAVOURITE DESIGN MOVE:** The scullery door. It makes the kitchen pop. *(Daniel)*

**NEXT ON THE AGENDA:** Landscaping. We've done the deck and a planter box. We have plans drawn up and want to do the planting ourselves, as we enjoy the process. *(Daniel)*

**SOMETHING YOU WOULDN'T DO AGAIN:** We're both so happy with the result and there's nothing we would change. Thank goodness too! *(Josie)*

**ON A WEEKEND MORNING:** We spend time together at home as a family. Honestly, we just like hanging out. *(Josie)*

**THE BEST BUY FOR THE HOUSE:** It was probably the Lacanche cooker. It really ties in so well with the style of the house. To me you couldn't have an older-style home without having a freestanding cooker. *(Josie)*