



HAIR APPARENT

Stylists to the smart set cut and run from the suburbs to an inner-city townhouse. Story by Melinda Williams. Photos by Stephen Tilley.



The cheep of car alarms and the wail of fire engine sirens isn't the kind of morning chorus most people enjoy waking up to but it's music to the ears of Stephen and Lucy Marr. After several years sequestered in the leafy suburbs of Auckland's Ponsonby and Waterview, the couple happily traded quiet streets for the excitement of the urban environment, when they chose their house in the recently completed Auckland central Hopetoun complex.

The Marrs, who own two hair and body salons that cater to Auckland's most style-conscious, initially stumbled across the site through friends of the developer. Located near the top of the Karangahape Rd ridge, it looks out across the central city to the east and towards the Waitakare Ranges in the west.

"The first thing we liked was the location, which is amazing," Lucy says. "We'd never really been into apartment blocks and we don't really like villas – that whole colonial vibe isn't really our thing. And the freedom to do what we wanted also attracted us. It was a stand-alone site in the complex and the facade was going to be relatively simple, which we liked."

The complex, developed by Kells Group, which also created the Pulse apartment block on Richmond Rd in Ponsonby, comprises a range of townhouses and apartments built on a triangular site at the



The raw feel of concrete is softened with retro collectibles and leather furniture.



corner of Pitt and Hopetoun Sts. The corner site the Marrs chose was originally intended for two townhouses but was redesigned for them by the development's architects, Leuschke Kahn, into one large, two-bedroom freestanding house.

"We were quite restricted with what we could do with the actual layout but we were able to purchase the house as a shell and do whatever we liked with the interiors," says Stephen. "I'm into a lot of Japanese post-war architecture, especially Tadao Ando, and we were very much influenced by his use of concrete slabs."

The Pritzker prize-winning architect would probably approve of the philosophy of design of the house, which echoes much of his signature combination of modernism, reinterpreted traditional Japanese aesthetics and creative use of light. Long rectangular panels of cast concrete have been used on the indoor and outdoor walls throughout to give the space a cool, airy feel that perfectly reflects its urban setting.

Poured concrete has also been used extensively throughout on the floors – in polished slabs with matte edges in the bathrooms and in a pale grey speckled with black downstairs, although this will eventually be covered with light silvery timber flooring for warmth. Stephen worked closely with Stuart Goldsworthy on the poured concrete wall panels, bathroom floors, cantilevered staircase and cast concrete benches in the kitchen and bathrooms. "He's really amazing," he enthuses. "We first used him when we were doing the Newmarket salon and when we were planning this place we decided to get him to do it. I really love that feeling of cast concrete. It's totally different to plaster; it's a lot more solid and it shows construction detail so you get more of a feeling of rawness."

"Stuart has a product that's about 30 per cent lighter than normal concrete. It's stronger and more flexible and it sets really fast. You can get it in any pigment you like and it works for either

indoors or exteriors." The couple chose concrete to create a spacious feeling within the house. "We wanted to get away from painted walls to something that was a bit more austere and linear, more of a statement," says Stephen. "We continued the panels right through, upstairs and downstairs, and leading through from the kitchen to the courtyard to create a flow from indoor to outdoors and bring it all together."

Although the house is not huge, the three metre ceiling stud, long panels and huge ranch-sliders make it feel far more expansive. The cantilevered concrete stairs with a hanging hand-rail rising along one wall of the living room seem to float, adding to the feeling of lightness in the space.

Light pours in from all directions – filtering through the angled louvres that protect the front deck from wind and the street, shining through the glass panels in the three metre tall front door and streaming in from the ranch-sliders that lead from the living room and kitchen onto the back deck. Upstairs, floor-to-ceiling windows and skylights take advantage of the sun all day. Retro-style tungsten downlights were chosen instead of halogen lights to soften the effect of the concrete and add warmth at night.

Overall, the space borders on industrial, but with a clean, finished feeling. And in keeping with Tadao Ando's philosophy of creating spaces that reflect the individual, the restrained decor provides a perfect backdrop for the couple's most treasured objects. "We wanted to keep it really, really minimal so it could act as a canvas for all the things we like to collect," says Stephen.

"We are into collecting things over time," says Lucy. "I love glass, from the 50s and the 70s, cut crystal and Czechoslovakian. We pick up a lot of pieces when we're travelling around New Zealand. We've found some really incredible things, especially in Invercargill and Nelson."

Two of her favourite pieces – a turquoise jug and glass set and a

I'm into a lot of Japanese post-war architecture, especially Tadao Ando





lilac glass bowl – have pride of place on their kitchen bench. On a sideboard in the living room, ruby bohemian glass sets with delicate gold patterns and cut crystal glasses from Lucy’s grandmother are on display. The sideboard is Scottish and comes from an antique store in Mairangi Bay. “They have a really eclectic mix of pieces, from Georgian to pieces from the 70s,” says Lucy. Much of the Marr’s furniture comprises retro-styled Danish pieces, often in soft brown shades of leather, including a gorgeous modernist chair that was a gift from Lucy’s parents.

In one corner of the living room, Stephen’s double bass leans against the wall, near two round mirrors printed with deco images, which Stephen has had since he was 16 years old. “The cool thing is that we both have things that we’ve had forever,” he says. “A lot of it came from our parents and grandparents.”

Considering the line of work the Marrs are in, it’s no surprise the main bathroom is an oasis. A spacious double-headed shower with a skylight is where the couple holds their “morning meetings”, and the bath is a frequent source of relaxation. Large mid-grey concrete tiles with an aged look anchor the room and add to its restful feeling, and a cast concrete bench with a long mirror above is reminiscent of the look of their salons. Sensibly, the laundry is contained within the bathroom, hidden behind folding doors, which also conceal spacious cupboards. “One great thing about this place is that we have masses of storage,” says Stephen, pointing out the large wardrobe and wall cupboards in the bathroom and bedroom.

The master bedroom and the spare bedroom look westward towards the Waitakare Ranges, but the spare room has the pick of the views. Floor-to-ceiling windows let the sun warm the rooms all afternoon.

If you’re looking for Stephen, you’re most likely to find him in the downstairs media room, his favourite place in the house. “It’s a male

thing,” he laughs. The room is packed with reading, viewing and listening material, with books and CDs packed along floating glass shelves. It’s a room made for lazing about in, with a long black ottoman piled with cushions lining one wall, and beanbags and large squab cushions scattered about the room.

Lucy, a self-confessed food nut, loves the kitchen space. The substantial bench space and a double sink give plenty of room for strewing pots and pans and cooking up a storm. Light box cupboards in the upper third of the kitchen hint at the brightly coloured glasses and bowls contained within and continue the lines of the concrete panels.

The kitchen is a social space, which opens up to the living area, and has a huge, wheeled table where guests can sit and chat. “We wanted to have it mobile so in the summertime we can roll it out onto the deck,” explains Stephen. “It’s really nice in the mornings, with the sun coming through. In summer we’ll be able to sit out here and have breakfast or dinner.”

“Problem is though, nobody can lift the damn thing!” laughs Lucy. Their new home has quickly influenced their lifestyle, she says. “It’s great being so close to work and to K’ Rd. We can just wander up to Verona for dinner or grab a couple of coffees at Brazil. One of the big attractions for us is the way the Beresford St area is being re-developed, it’s being done really well. It has a unique vibe of its own going on. And we love all the Asian supermarkets in the area.”

As for the urban morning chorus? “The noise doesn’t bother us at all. I think city noise is a compromise that you just have to make for having everything so close at hand.”

SELECTED CREDITS

Architect Leuschke Kahn • **Concrete work** PetinaForm • **Joinery** Colourform Joinery, Hamilton • **Lighting** Aesthetics Lighting • **Sideboard** McClenaghan, Albany

