

WeekendHerald  
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# HERALD Homes



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PHOTOS/MICHELLE HYSLOP

Ex-pats longed for the summer vibe of their youth, and this award-winning house helped them rekindle the magic, says **Kate Williams**

# Childhood memories bettered by design

## 55 ROTHESAY BAY RD ROTHESAY BAY

It is probably every ex-pat's dream return scenario: when you reach the old home town, buy a place near the water with striking views and remind yourself why it's good to be back.

That was certainly how things played out for Bruce and Vivienne Watters when they moved back to New Zealand in late 2007, after 20 years in Singapore, America and, most recently, Melbourne. This North Shore-raised couple knew exactly where they wanted to live. They had both grown up on the East Coast Bays, so were determined to find something on the cliffs with the views they'd known all their childhood (and yep, that meant Rangitoto, close to the barefoot beaches and that summer-all-year vibe).

The search took some months, but when they found their place in April 2008 the deal was swiftly done.

"We didn't even look at the old house, we just walked through and got to the cliff top edge and said, 'yes'. This is a dead end street, so the beach is at the bottom of the road and there's no through traffic. The previous owners had done all sorts of work with palisades dug into the cliff, it is all on solid rock, it's not going anywhere," says Vivienne. The couple knew the heavy, dated house would have to go — all dark tile and mansard roofs and a kitchen that cut off the living spaces from the views — but lived there for a few years to figure out how they used the space, the sun angles in winter and summer, the prevailing winds.

They met a few designers, but Vivienne says architectural designer Mark McLeay of Creative Arch really got the brief and brought some fresh ideas for a renovation. However, when work started with David Reid builders the team realised they would be better off knocking the old house back to its side walls and concrete pad, and rebuilding. So that's what they did — with work on



the virtually new house completed in August 2012. The working relationship between the building company, the designer, interior designers Yellowfox and landscaper Matt Rush sounds immaculate and seamless; so much so that it won McLeay's firm the Architectural Designer's Additions award last year.

"We needed to renew the original house, make it more useable — more bedrooms and so on — but mostly orient it to the view," explains Mark.

By retaining the existing slab, sculpting away a retaining wall against the upper neighbour and flipping the floor plan so that the living spaces were on the northern side to capture views, he needed to push out the footprint of the house only a little. The most dramatic change was the massing of the house. From dated 80s to clean and modern, a series of layered boxes break up the building form, with both vertical and horizontal cedar shiplap finishes to add energy to the shapes. Floating concrete steps, courtyards and terraces combine with a careful palette of native



**Size:** Land 941sq m, house 293sq m

**Price indication:** CV \$2.475 million

**Inspect:** Sun 1pm-2pm or by appointment.

Tenders close June 10

**School zones:** Murray's Bay Intermediate, Rangitoto College

**On the web:** barfoot.co.nz/522037

**Contact:** Nadja Court, ph 021 777 690

planting to anchor the house to the site.

Given the house is so elevated, Mark was careful to create outdoor living spaces at the street-side of the house as well as the cliff-side so there are sheltered spots whichever way the breezes run. Careful placement of windows and

huge sliding glass doors mean all the rooms are private from the neighbours, but open to those spectacular views. The two street-front bedrooms are cleverly buffered by cedar slats, seaside bedrooms and the master suite (which includes its own living room) get the best of the ocean views, which are framed by ancient pohutukawa.

The finishing details inside are just as considered. American oak in beautiful sculptural cabinets unites the contemporary kitchen with the dining room buffet and entertainment units in the neighbouring rooms. Wide oak floorboards add a casual barefoot feel to the living spaces, while changes in ceiling heights, split levels and viewing angles create dynamic interior spaces — connected, but able to be carved off for more private entertaining.

But after all the work, and all the dreaming from far shores, the Watters are selling their Kiwi dream: the kids have left home and they're spending more time at their beach house up North, and plan to do more travelling.