

THE PRESS

From earthquake write-off to award winning home for Christchurch couple



Daryl and Tara Hewitt's award-winning rebuilt home in Redcliffs, Christchurch.

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With fancy renovations completed just weeks earlier, Daryl and Tara Hewitt were readying their beautifully reworked house for a home and garden tour.

Then the February 2011 earthquake struck. Stone feature walls crashed through the five-level Christchurch hillside house.

The house was a write-off, their miniature schnauzer puppy Porscha terrified, and almost all their contents lost.



The entrance to the house reveals its structural elements.

The couple were devastated.

A few days later the house was red-stickered and the Hewitts had just minutes to grab a few essentials and leave.

As a builder with his own business whose home was his showpiece, Daryl Hewitt knew they had to rebuild.



During rebuilding the owners reworked the house's outdoor spaces to make the most of sun and shelter.

They negotiated their insurance settlement within five months, in what Hewitt described as "a simple and very enjoyable process".

Too keenly aware of how structures performed in earthquakes, he had the new house over-engineered, pouring money into commercial-style foundations and a structure isolating the house from retaining walls.

He chose lightweight material, steel framing, and suspended concrete floors which could be adjusted in case of future movement.



The home won an interior design award at the Architectural Designers New Zealand awards.

"We went pretty full on with it. If you have a cold house, you build a super warm one next time – if you lose a home to an earthquake, you want a strong house," he said.

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To avoid having to top-up their insurance payout to fund the extra strength, they downsized the house but made better use of space.

"It's still a big house, but it doesn't feel big. It flows better."

They took the opportunity to automate the house, allowing control of heating, lighting, entertainment, doors and alarm from a smartphone. Outdoor living spaces were rearranged to make better use of sun and shelter.

With the Hewitt's company as builder, O'Neil Architecture as architectural designer and Tara Hewitt planning the decor, the home won a Canterbury colour in design award at the Architectural Designers New Zealand awards last year.

Daryl Hewitt said navigating insurance and rebuilding on his own home was to prove a huge help working with clients, many of whom were upset or angry after losing homes.

"Building a house should be a pleasurable experience, but it's not when it has been forced on you."

He described their new house as more valuable and liveable, safer, and more desirable than the original.

"The old house was stunning, but this is so much better. We had the chance to redesign it and build a house for ourselves. It's a major notch up.

"We just love it."

(An earlier version of this story stated the house won an award for its interior design. The award was in fact for colour in design.)