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rock solid

An award-winning home with a "sense of theatre" is both easy on the eye and a dream to live in.

Words **Kelly Andrew** Photos **Doug Richardson**

Dramatic and stark, the carved cliffs of the Halswell Quarry are a fitting backdrop for a striking two-storey family home.

Completed about 18 months ago, the house is imposing, yet has a pared-back simplicity. Owners Merissa and Vaughan, who run their own Christchurch business, were heavily involved in the planning and design.

"We just tweaked things as we went along," Merissa says.

The couple's starting point in the planning stages was a house made from cedar and stone with a modern twist. They are extremely happy with the final result; especially its clean-cut gable design and the eye-catching glass link between the main house and the garage. The exterior buttress walls, made from basalt stone quarried in Oxford, North Canterbury, are one of their favourite elements because

of the meticulous craftsmanship involved. Southern Stonemasons hand-cut the rocks into the right size and shape, and carefully placed them together.

Merissa had a clear vision for the house from the outset. She laughs when she says that after a while, builder Wayne Murray expected her decisions to run contrary to whatever option he suggested. Their working relationship must have been successful, though, as the residence recently won a gold award in the Registered Master Builders House of the Year competition.

The design by Craig South, a partner at Cymon Allfrey Architects Ltd, has also won accolades. The home was a joint winner in the 2015 Resene Architectural Design Awards in the Canterbury region, in the category for new homes over 300 square metres. The awards, run by Architectural Designers New Zealand, celebrate stand-

out designs. Judges described this winner as highly polished, and said the spaces in the home created a "rewarding sense of theatre".

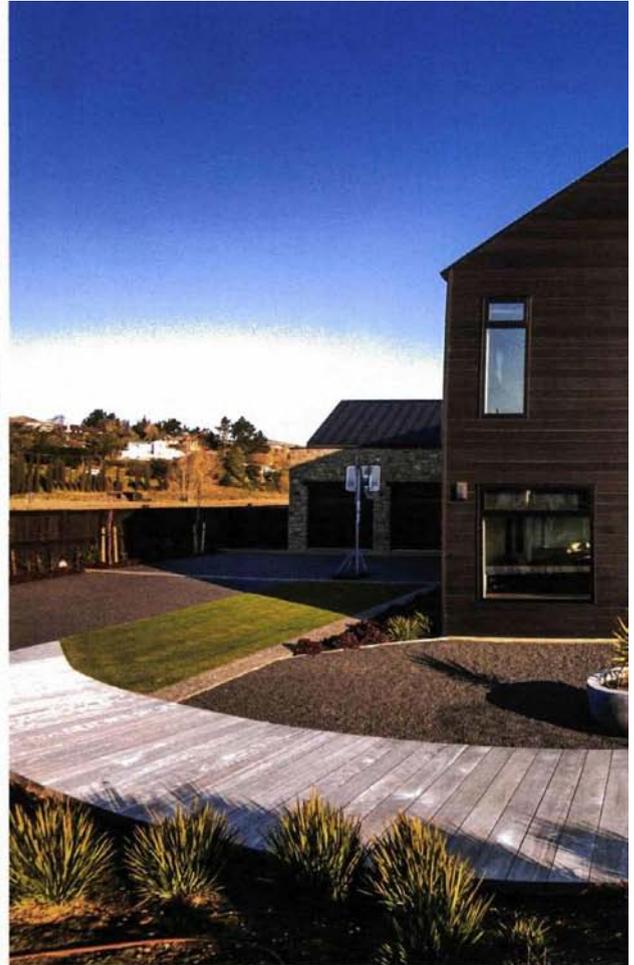
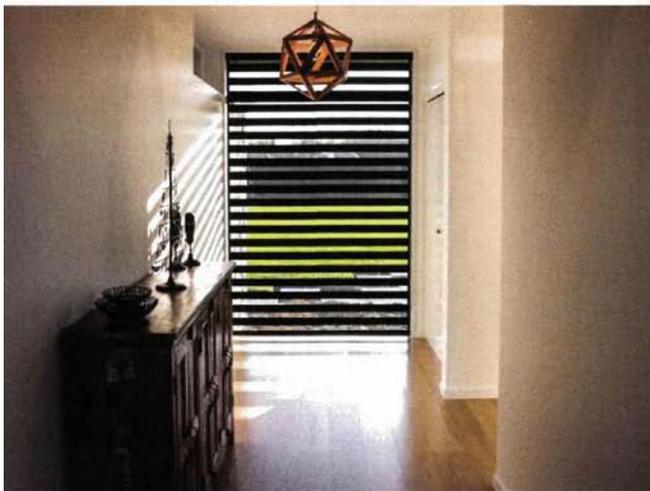
Sitting in a Halswell cul de sac that, until recently, was farmland, it retains a peaceful, rural feel. Views from the back look towards the Port Hills, Halswell Quarry Park, and a field full of jumps for the neighbour's horses.

"The first week after we moved in, it was like being on a farm," Merissa says. "Next door has got horses, there were hawks flying overhead, rabbits, and the hills behind us."

Several neighbours from their previous subdivision in another part of Halswell have also moved into the new one, which has been great for their children, Coby, 10, and Ashleigh, 15, who have friends next door.

Merissa and Vaughan bought the 2500sqm section just before the





September 2010 earthquake, and ended up waiting another two years before starting to plan the house. The design process took about six months and building was another 16 months.

Merissa was in charge of the interior design decisions and she took some lessons from the way the family used the living spaces in their previous home.

"We had two separate living areas and we never used the second living area. If we had friends around, the kids would be in the formal lounge watching TV and we'd be sitting in the kitchen-living area. And we never used to sit at the dining table, so in this place we wanted it to be right next to the kitchen."

A wide glass front door leads into a hallway through to the open-plan kitchen and dining area, which is the centre of the house. With a high ceiling that stretches up to the top of the second storey (an area they call "the void") it is spacious and full

of light.

Like most of the walls throughout the house, the living areas are painted white, 'Mt Aspiring' by Dulux, but a feature wall in the dining area is covered in a patterned turquoise wallpaper, which Merissa added just six months ago, giving it a shot of rich colour. A black-and-white patterned rug under the wooden dining table anchors the colour palette, which is mostly dark grey or black and white, with natural-toned timber. The couple had a lot of colour in their old house, but they were ready for a more neutral decor in the new place, giving them freedom to use colour in furnishings.

Merissa designed the sleek and streamlined kitchen, which has a stainless-steel benchtop, a Fisher and Paykel oven, and a white Caesarstone breakfast bar. The melamine cabinetry was custom-made by Alsop Joinery in charcoal grey, which matches the metallic grey bar stools. The melamine sheets were designed to have a

vertical grain, but Merissa preferred them horizontal so the joiner managed to mitre sections together to give the look she wanted. The other drawers in the kitchen area are lacquered 'Mt Aspiring' white, with custom-made handles, and a large butler's pantry, with generous storage and shelving, is tucked away from the main kitchen, making it the perfect spot for baking.

The lounge, which can be closed off from the dining area with sliding black-and-white screen-type doors, is simply furnished with a black leather lounge suite and thick, springy charcoal grey carpet. A concrete wall has a glass-fronted Escea gas fire and a large-screen television set into it, and hidden cupboards at the side for an entertainment system. A built-in wooden bench seat along one wall has drawers underneath.

The living rooms are designed to be opened up to the outdoors with glass



sliding doors on both sides of the dining area and more sliders in the lounge. An inviting outdoor entertaining area has glass panels for shelter from the wind, a big Simon Gault barbecue, sound system and dining table. The deck is made from polished concrete left rough enough so that it isn't slippery underfoot, and motorised louvres overhead provide summer shade.

More extensive landscaping is planned for the section, but at the moment the children are enjoying having an expanse of open lawn for sport and Ashleigh has been asking for a horse. Pin oaks, Japanese maples and magnolia trees have been planted and a water feature and pond will soon be built next to the entertaining area.

At the front of the house, a boardwalk made from silvery purpleheart timber curves gracefully over a small mound, where there is a metal sphere sculpture, ornamental boulders, and hardy plants,

including mountain daisy and about 1200 small ground-cover plants that have been painstakingly planted by Merissa.

Back inside, the floors are white-stained oak by Ecodure and they're kept warm downstairs by hydronic underfloor heating.

Statement pieces of furniture are made from pale timber with a rustic, quirky look and three distinctive David Trubridge pendant lightshades in a natural finish cast latticed shadows around the home.

In the downstairs hallway, a wooden artwork on the wall is painted with a union jack, and a decorative clock in the kitchen with a vintage-style tin surround has three faces - showing the time in London, Melbourne and Halswell.

With underfloor heating, a gas fire and lots of sun, the house is never cold. Heat pumps were installed, not for warmth, but to cool the house down in the summer. A motorised blind over the high windows above the dining room is necessary when

the sun gets too intense.

Around the corner from the kitchen, a study area with computer and desk is neatly hidden away behind cupboard doors. The only downstairs bedroom is an appealing guest room with a riveted fabric headboard for the bed, curtains with a kina pattern, and a bathroom with walls in cream Italian stone tiles.

A glazed walkway leads to the triple garage, which houses a laundry and a spacious utility area with tidy plywood shelving and cupboards for tools and other equipment. The garage is also where the family's dog Indy, a jack russell terrier, sleeps at night.

Oak steps leading upstairs seem to float in mid-air. The elegant stairwell is framed by glass panels made by EuroGlass and LED lights on each of the stairs are activated by motion sensors at night. The oak treads continue across the glazed link between the main house and the children's



rumpus room above the garage, with black steel support beams visible beneath them. The glass bridge is Vaughan's favourite part of the house. He likes to stand there and admire the views – the hills behind and a more urban aspect in front. The rumpus room has a cosy, attic feel with its angled, gable roof, but a large skylight keeps it bright. Full of toys, beanbags and with its own TV, it's the perfect children's retreat. Behind one wall is a large walk-in storage cupboard or hidey-hole.

The children's rooms are appealing and practical, with lots of storage space and personal touches. Coby's room has a dresser from McKenzie and Willis with flags painted on the drawers and a small window above the bed gives a slice of the view towards the hills. Ashleigh's room is sunny with a feature wall in white anaglypta wallpaper and a pretty quilted bed cover. The children share a bathroom between their rooms.

The master bedroom has a darker, more dramatic palette with dark-stained timber furniture and graphite wallpaper behind the bed, which is textured with small glass beads. The ensuite has concrete grey tiles on the walls, shower and floor, and a free-standing bath. The walk-in wardrobe has a small dresser and make-up mirror for Merissa, and cube shelving, cupboards and shelves to keep clothes and shoes well organised.

Merissa says their outlook on life shifted after the earthquakes. It made them more focused on making the most of opportunities, getting things right, and feeling safe in their home.

"You could have easily lost your life that day, so it changes your mindset."

Vaughan was working in Lyttelton on February 22, 2011, and drove back over the Summit Rd with boulders rolling in front of his car.

Those events have made them even more grateful to be able to enjoy the peace of their new home. As architect Craig South says, it's a house that was designed to fit into its semi-rural surroundings, made of robust natural materials, and seamlessly combining traditional and modern elements. *R*

