

One side of the breakfast bar is finished in the same off-white as the kitchen cabinetry, while the side facing the dining room is of a dark wood in keeping with that room.



# Urban OASIS

An Auckland architect and his family moved into one of his energy-efficient designs 25 years ago – and it is still ahead of its time

Text by Jane Binsley. Photography by Emily Andrews.

*“I tried to limit circulation areas like the hallways, and when I did have to have them, I made them work as spaces in their own right”*



The mezzanine balcony above the living area is central to the home's natural cooling and heating system.

**Y**ou'd imagine architects would hop from one home to another as fast as fashion designers change their clothes.

But architect Frans Kamermans liked the first house he designed in his own practice so much he's still living in it more than 25 years later.

What's more, the three-bedroom home in Remuera, Auckland, was so far ahead of its time that it's only recently the rest of the world has caught onto its principles of natural climate control.

“Energy-efficient homes are now becoming mainstream, but when this home was built passive solar heating was unusual and considered a bit hippy,” says Frans.

The home is one of four neighbouring properties he designed and had built in 1984. He sold the other three, moved into the fourth with his wife Lynne Pascall and has never left.

“We love it so much,” says Lynne, a landscape/interior designer who works with Frans on many of his projects. “A lot of people ask, ‘Don't we want a bigger house?’, like Frans designs for his clients, but I love the size, the comfort and the private garden. It's easy to live in and easy to clean!”

A big part of the reason the home is so pleasant to live in is the way Frans designed it to heat and cool itself using only the energy from the sun. Large, north-facing windows allow the sun to enter the downstairs living area during the winter months when it is at its lowest angle in the sky. The warmth is soaked up by the black slate floor tiles, then released back into the house at night.

Because double glazing wasn't widely available when the house was built, Frans and Lynne draw thermal curtains over the windows at night to trap the heat inside. Good insulation in the walls and roof is also essential.

Clerestory windows on the upper level let the winter sun into the upstairs bedrooms, with a clever internal window perfectly placed to allow it to penetrate right through the house to keep the south-facing bathroom warm and dry.

Yet in the summer the house is engineered to give the opposite result – a cooler temperature than that outdoors. Wide eaves stop the high summer sun from entering the house, while the clerestory windows are kept permanently open to create a cooling upward flow of air.

A small balcony above the open-plan living area is central to these processes – in winter a thick thermal curtain is drawn across the back of the balcony to keep the warm air in the living area, while in summer the drape is opened to allow the warm air to rise through the house and be released through the clerestory windows.

“That’s why houses overheat,” says Frans. “The heat is trapped in the pitch roof space and can’t escape. In Auckland, when a house needs a heat pump for summer cooling the design has failed.”

Frans says various cultures have applied the principles of heating and cooling by design alone for more than 2000 years. “That’s why houses in hot climates have small windows and solid masonry. They use the mass as either coolant or heater.”

Although these ideas can be expressed in most architectural styles, his love is contemporary architecture because it frees him to use the gains permitted by 21st-century technology. “Villas are cute but, from a thermal point of view, in summer you cook and in winter you freeze. In 2011 we don’t expect to drive cars that look like Model T Fords, so why would we want to build houses that look like they were designed 100 years ago?”

But this colourful home is no dry exercise in architectural theory. It is a vibrant testament to more than 25 years of family life, filled with artworks and furnishings rich with meaning for this creative couple and their daughter Bianca.

The colour journey begins on the front porch, where a royal blue front door and veranda post echo the yellow, red and



Frans, Bianca and Lynne

## WHO LIVES HERE?

**Frans Kamermans** (architect), **Lynne Pascall** (landscape/interior designer) and daughter **Bianca**, 22.

### How did you end up in New Zealand?

**Frans:** “I grew up in the Netherlands in a province called Zeeland, and Lynne is from Cape Town, South Africa. We wanted a better climate, fewer people, more space and less pollution than Holland. We moved here when I’d just graduated with no careers or money to speak of. We came here cold – we thought we could always move across the ditch if we didn’t like it, but we like it very much!”

### Have you made many changes to the house over the past 25 years?

“Three years ago we redid the bathrooms and kitchen. Those are the things that wear fastest and need updating first. We’ve had much of the furniture for 25 years, but we had the couch and dining chairs reupholstered, and we stained the dining table and coffee tables dark so they matched the new colour scheme.”

## OUTDOOR ROOMS

Frans and Lynne didn’t have space to add a vegetable plot to their outdoor area, so they set up a communal garden with their neighbours. “One neighbour provided the land, Lynne and I designed and landscaped the garden, and the third provided the first lot of plants. There are no rules – just good behaviour from all the participants.”

*“I love the size, the comfort and the private garden. It’s easy to live in and easy to clean!”*



Clockwise from left Comfortable loungers provide a relaxing way to admire the lush planting that surrounds the house; colourful stools can be used inside and out and are handy when guests visit; Bianca, Frans and Lynne love relaxing in the outdoor courtyard; sliding doors open the lounge out onto the courtyard, allowing for an easy indoor/ outdoor entertaining space; the front entrance in primary shades gives guests a hint of how colour is used indoors.





“Throughout the house the theory was that you only highlight what you want to feature. It gets too much if it all competes”



CLEVER TRICKS

+ Place most of your glazing on the northern side of the building, with limited windows on the east and west to get a controlled amount of sunlight, and on the south side only small windows, just big enough to let light in and vent the room.

+ By including the guest bedroom, a guest toilet and a shower on the ground floor, the upper level is private space for the family.

+ The north-facing roof plane houses solar water heating panels, but the hot water cylinder also has a thermostat and an electric element that kicks in when the sun does not provide enough energy.

+ Hidden drawers make use of the dead corner space where the breakfast bar meets the wall.

POP

Set bright colour against a couch in a dark, rich shade. Pepo cushion cover, \$66.40, by CITA DESIGN. Pink, yellow, orange cushion, \$99, from REPUBLIC.

+ Decorative bowls look good whether they are filled or not. Green and turquoise tribal bowl, \$89, from REPUBLIC.

+ Wallpaper city guides, \$18.90 each, from IKO IKO.

MAKE IT WORK your way

CELEBRATE BOLD COLOUR IN MODERN PIECES, BOTH INDOORS AND OUT

green doors and posts of the other three identical houses in the row. This rainbow of primary colours glows in the stained glass windows at each home's entrance.

Frans and Lynne have been equally bold with colour inside, with each of the three double bedrooms featuring a wall of hot orange or red. In the open-plan living area, the glowing red glass splashback in the kitchen “speaks” to the multi-coloured patchwork-style rug in the living area, with bright jewel hues again featured in scatter cushions on the sofa.

Yet this riot of rich colour does not overwhelm the eye, kept in check as it is by off-white vertical surfaces in the walls and curtains, and dark horizontal surfaces in the dark slate tiles and sofa.

“Throughout the house the theory was that you only highlight what you want to feature,” says Frans. “It gets too much if it

all competes. You have a background and you have highlights, and it's a matter of finding the right balance.”

Although the house is only 115-square metres in floor area, it has been cleverly designed to feel much larger.

“I tried to limit the circulation areas like the hallways, and when I did have to have them, I made them work as spaces in their own right,” says Frans. “That's the difference between architecturally designed houses and draftsman-designed houses – every square metre is used in a good way. We've had parties here for 50 or more people and it's not crowded.”

Thoughtful use has also been made of the modest section, which is less than 300 square metres in size but “borrows” from the neighbouring properties. Rather than plonking the row of houses in the centre of the property, Frans located the shared

driveway down the southern boundary of the long, slender section, with the houses close up against that to leave maximum garden area to the north.

“I like to open houses up to the north, focus on the outdoor environment and limit the outlook on neighbours on both sides. In high-density urban design you pick the best angle for the site and frame your design around that, like a picture frame.”

As the rear house on the section, Frans and Lynne's home has the bonus of a steep green bush-clad bank to the east, which safeguards their privacy and helps frame their secluded outdoor living area, where mature plantings of palms, bromeliads, puka and ponga create a lush subtropical oasis in a valley echoing with tui song.

No wonder they never want to leave.

→ Find out how they got the look on PAGE 138.



Stockist details PAGE 141

+ Ned stools, \$489, each from REPUBLIC.

+ Sue Dasler tapa bowls, \$35 each, and dip dish, \$24, from TEXAN ART SCHOOLS.

Top left Upstairs, the south-facing main bathroom gets heated by sun penetrating the north-facing windows via an internal window. Top right Strong blocks of colour are a feature of the home. In the main bedroom a built-in bookshelf behind the bed in painted bold Resene 'Whizz Bang'.