

Paul and Rebecca Hawthorn, with their daughter Isabella, in their new kitchen that opens to a lush backyard, which acts as an outdoor room.

Paul & Rebecca's kitchen style is...
SLEEK AND CONTEMPORARY

Go with the flow

Entertaining is a breeze in Paul and Rebecca Hawthorn's new open-plan kitchen

Text by **Leanne Moore**. Photography by **Emily Andrews**.

Take one builder, add a wife with interior design flair, and the result is a winning combination.

Paul and Rebecca Hawthorn have created a modern family home from a tired and neglected Auckland cottage that badly needed some TLC lavished upon it.

The major makeover has created an open-plan kitchen/dining area that flows to a beautifully landscaped backyard through expansive bi-folding doors. It's the kind of living area where the line between the interior and exterior is blurred, creating an outdoor room that is ideal for entertaining.

"We've had a few gatherings out there, including our engagement party," says Rebecca, gesturing to the outdoor table and chairs.

The well designed layout is a far cry from the poky cottage that Paul bought six years ago when he was single. Having completed his first renovation – a two-bedroom apartment in Remuera – he was looking for a new challenge when he came across the former state house in Onehunga.

"As soon as I saw it I realised it had loads of potential. These homes were well built, but not designed for modern living, so I knew that it was a project I could get my teeth into," he says.

Not everyone shared his vision, though. "My Mum came to see it and she thought it was awful. She said it smelled of vomit and she was shocked at the state it was in.



There was even a hole in the front porch," he remembers. "She couldn't believe I was considering taking it on."

A few months after he bought the do-up, Rebecca arrived on the scene and the couple began stamping their style on the cottage. It soon became apparent that they worked well as a team, sharing similar tastes in everything, from the colours they chose for the interior to the plants they selected for the garden.

After studying interior design, Rebecca has developed a career in fashion, travelling overseas several times a year on buying trips, but interiors have remained one of her passions.

"Although, I discovered Paul had some very firm ideas about how he wanted the interior to look," she laughs.

High on their list of priorities was a new kitchen. "The original kitchen was really just a sink and an oven in a space not much bigger than a small hallway," says Rebecca.

When the couple were planning the light-filled extension to the rear of the house, they took care to ensure that the new kitchen and dining area did not look tacked on. They deliberately chose materials for the exterior and interior that linked the old and the new, including recycled rimu flooring to match the original rimu floors in the rest of the house.

As a builder, Paul relished the opportunity to try out some of his own ideas, without the need to get a client's approval. "I'm building every day but most of the time I have to conform to what other people want and it was great being able to

work on my own place. I loved having the freedom to experiment with ideas and try out new things," he says.

While Rebecca trained in interior design, she discovered early on that her husband had talent for being able to visualise complex designs in his head.

"I realised that he was very good at spatial planning," she says. "When we were designing the garden I was baffled at how all the different levels were going to come together, but Paul was always able to see how it would work, and – more importantly – he knew how to build it!"

In fact, he turned out to be such a dab hand at landscaping that he now includes that service as part of his business.

To further enhance the link between the old and the new, the couple used



who lives here?

Paul Hawthorn (owns building company Building Elements), **Rebecca Hawthorn** (fashion buyer/mother), and **Isabella**, 18 months, plus cats **Pixie** and **Hampstead**.

Rebecca, how would you describe your decorating personality? I like a contemporary look that's simple and uncluttered, but still homely. Even though we've gone for a modern look, I wanted our home to feel cosy.

You have used a lot of glass in the house – was that a conscious decision? No, but we both like glass as a material, which is why we've used it so often. We didn't consciously choose a lot of glass but it does add up: we've got a glass dining table, glass bathroom cabinets, glass splashback, glass kitchen cupboards and glass tiles in the toilet.

Have you found it easy working with your husband? Yes. Paul has been great to work with on this renovation because he is such a perfectionist. He is very conscious of the detail that goes into creating something that looks good. He is the kind of builder who believes a job should be done properly and the finishing in this house is beautiful.



Left Paul used macrocarpa sleepers to create defined edges in the garden. This photo Rebecca loves the sculptural lighting above the kitchen bench. Below This corner of the garden is one of Isabella's favourite play areas.



Top When it came to landscaping their backyard, Paul and Rebecca had a blank canvas to work with. The novice gardeners read plenty of books before they drew up their plan, which included a weatherboard retaining wall that tied the garden back to the main house. The lush sub-tropical plants contrast with the formality of the garden's clipped border.



tips and tricks

- ✦ **The one important lesson I learned during this renovation is...** that you should always choose things because you love them, not because they are in fashion. Trends come and go but if you fill your home with things you love your home will always have a cohesive look to it.
- ✦ **What I like best about our kitchen is...** the lights over the bench. They add drama at night to what is otherwise a very practical kitchen. They were a splurge worth every penny.
- ✦ **Invest in the best quality you can afford because...** you'll live with it every day.
- ✦ **Our outdoor space gets a lot of use because...** it feels like another room. The bi-fold doors create great flow and the barbecue becomes an extension of the kitchen in summer.
- ✦ **My favourite room in the house is...** the bathroom. Everything is tailor-made for us – from the super-deep bath to the twin basins.



similar colours in the original house and the extension. The couple settled on two colours in varying strengths; Resene 'Drought' (dusty taupe) and 'Lemon Grass' (lichen stone green) for the interior walls – after experimenting briefly with a much bolder colour.

"We painted one of the bedrooms a deep burgundy but it was too dark," says Rebecca. "We wanted something more restful and calm so we tried 'Lemon Grass' next and liked it so much that we used it in two of the three bedrooms."

When it came to renovating their bathroom, the couple thought long and hard about how they could make the most of the space. Initially, they were going to knock out the wall between the toilet and

Top left After experimenting with bold burgundy walls in one of the bedrooms, Paul and Rebecca chose an earthy colour scheme for their interior, including the lounge. **Top right** The couple revamped the existing fireplace, chipping off the old tiles and creating their own design, complete with custom-built shelves by Paul.

the bathroom to create a larger area, but Paul came up with a solution that allowed the two rooms to remain separate, while still giving them much-needed extra space in the bathroom.

"We shifted the toilet forward into what was dead space in the hall, and this gave us enough room to spin the bath around so we could fit in two basins," he says.

The couple were delighted when they found basins that were in keeping with the design of their bath, and their taste was once again in synch when they both fell in love with the same tapware.

"We ended up splurging on designer Italian basins and the bathroom tapware, but we couldn't find a vanity that we liked," says Paul.



Clever design allowed Paul and Rebecca to make the most of their bathroom space, giving it a luxurious feel with twin basins and an expansive benchtop.

Consider having bathroom cabinetry custom-built, as Paul and Rebecca did, if you can't find anything you like in the shops.



Above Splashes of pink give Isabella's bedroom a girly touch, though the decor could easily be transformed into a little boy's room. **Right** Team crisp white linen with restful colours such as Resene 'Lemon Grass'. **Below** Don't forget to add artwork and splashes of bright colour to enliven a child's room.



After hours of unsuccessful searching, he came to the conclusion he would have to create something himself. "I didn't really want to have to build it, but there was simply nothing out there that met our requirements."

The result is a luxurious-looking bathroom that has plenty of bench space. "We wanted a bathroom with clean lines and a spa-like feel," says Rebecca. "I love the way the design cleverly dovetails the bath under the bench."

After several years gradually working through their renovation checklist, the couple found they had a deadline to meet with the birth of their daughter Isabella almost two years ago. Paul built a fence to secure the property from the busy main road, and his office was moved into the spare bedroom. The bedroom they had been using as an office was transformed into Isabella's nursery.

The lounge was one of the last areas in the house to be revamped. Structurally,

it needed very little work, although the fireplace was given a complete makeover. After Paul chipped off the tiles, the couple made cardboard versions of their new-look fireplace to get the proportions correct.

"Once we were sure it would look right Paul boxed it up, poured the concrete, then we had it plastered," says Rebecca. Custom-made shelving adjoining the fireplace provides handy storage. "The great thing about having a husband who is a builder is that I can get him to build shelves to suit the size of my things, like vases and glasses."

The couple are so happy with the result of their renovation that they plan to do it all again. As this issue of *Your Home & Garden* went to print, Paul and Rebecca – who is pregnant – had sold their cottage and were about to move into a larger family home. "It needs a lot of work but we'll use lots of ideas from this house because it works really well, especially the kitchen," says Rebecca.

✦ Find out how they got the look on **PAGE 128**.