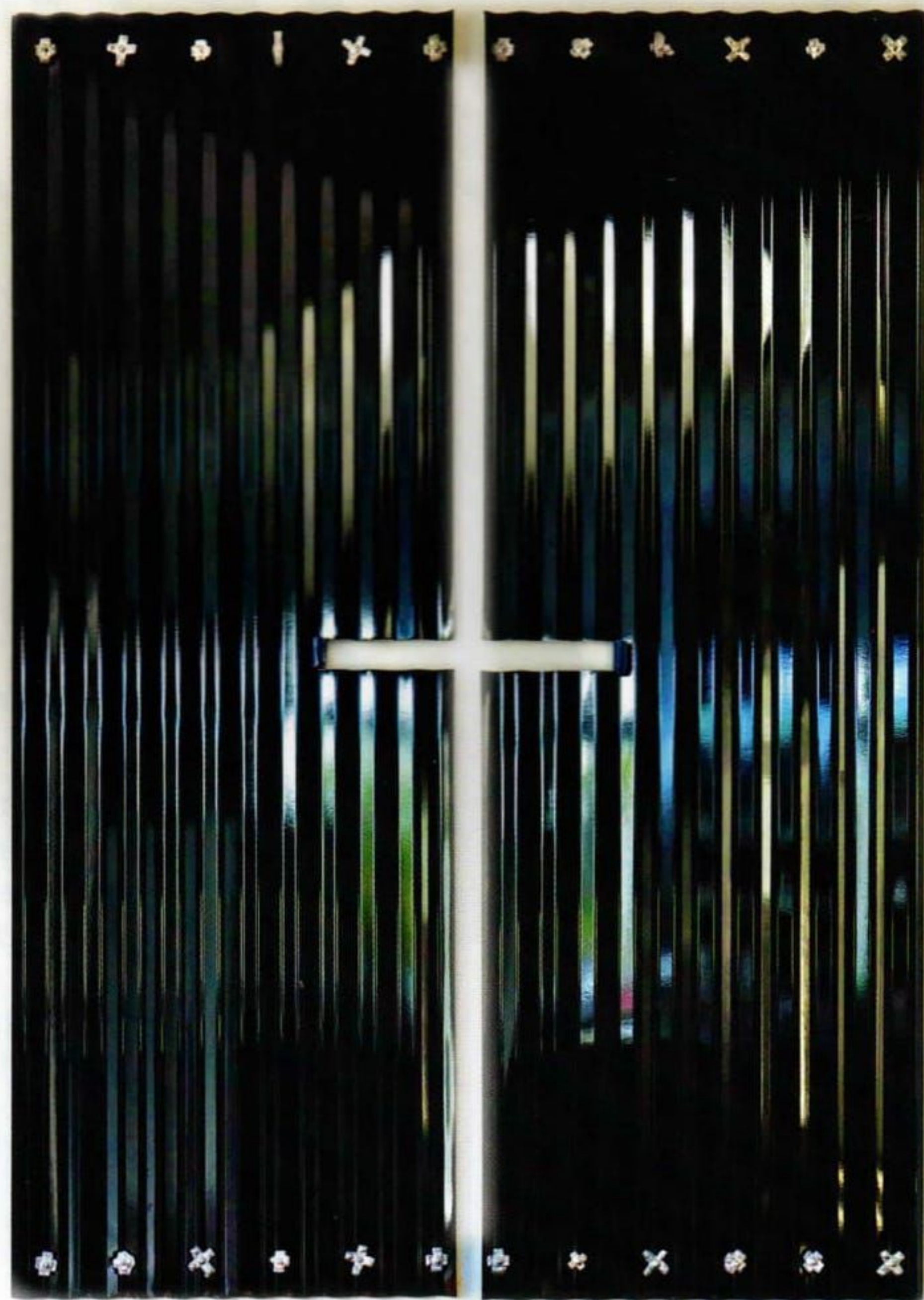


A MOVABLE FEAST

A pair of *art aficionados* live with an *ever-changing backdrop* of the work of top New Zealand *artists*

WORDS CAROLINE BOTTING
PHOTOGRAPHS JANE USSHER

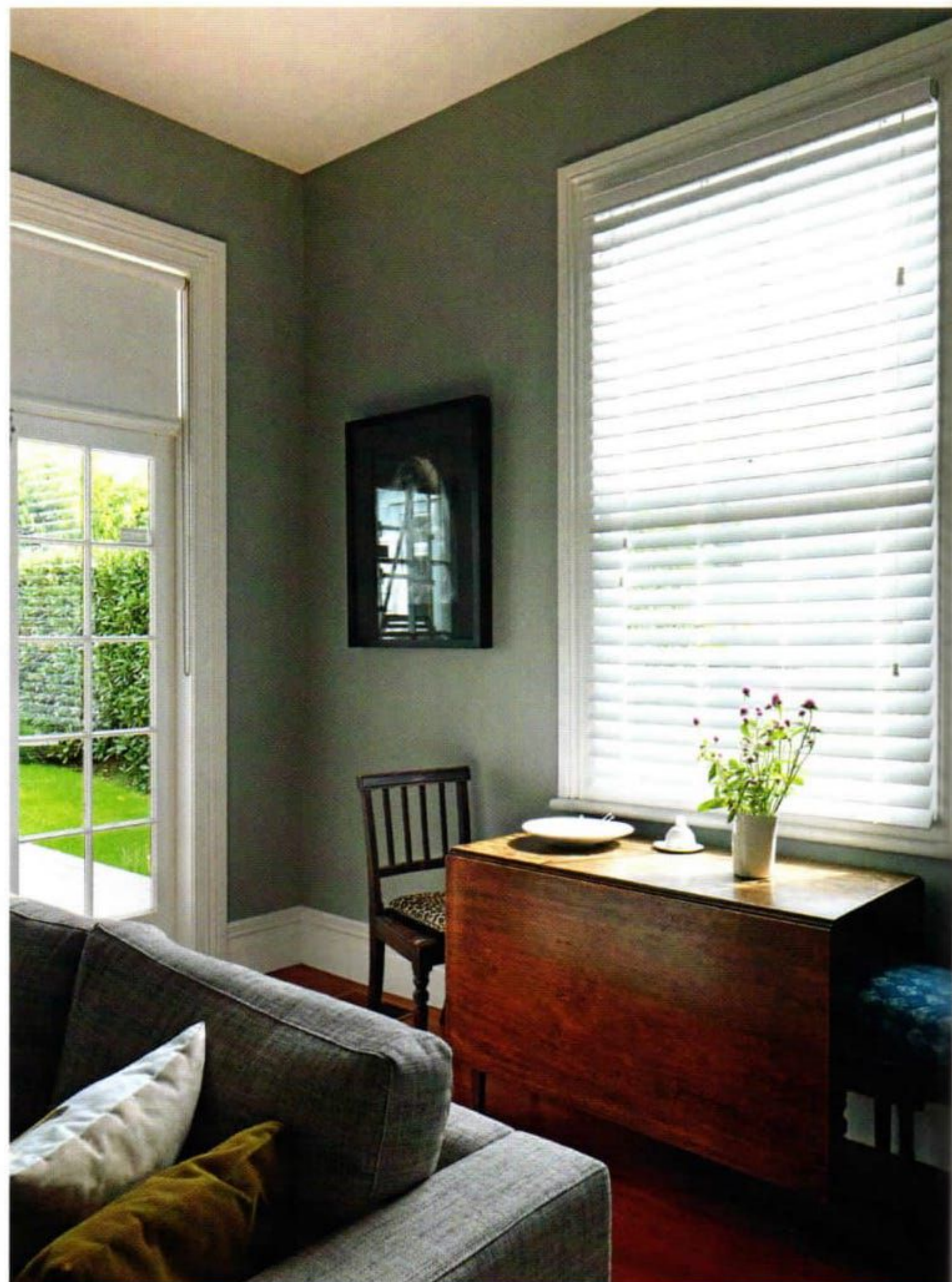


THIS PAGE In Lynn Whitfield and Simon Vodanovich's Auckland home, a Ralph Hotere installation can be viewed from the kitchen; a mustard, grey and white painting by Milan Mrkusich hangs in the background.

OPPOSITE The dining table was bought at a Christchurch antiques shop during the couple's honeymoon, the Arne Jacobsen chairs are from Bromhead Design; above the table hangs a painting by UK artist Martin Creed.



THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) A small artwork, such as Peter Robinson's *One for the Road*, can make a big statement, says Lynn. A new front verandah opens off the smaller of the family's two living rooms. The splashback tiles in the retro-inspired kitchen are from Artedomus; the BH1 Spinning pendant lights are from Design Denmark. **OPPOSITE** The striped rug in the smaller living room is from Source Mondial and the mirror and drawers were bought 25 years ago from a Wellington antiques dealer; the painting is an untitled Martin Basher oil on canvas.

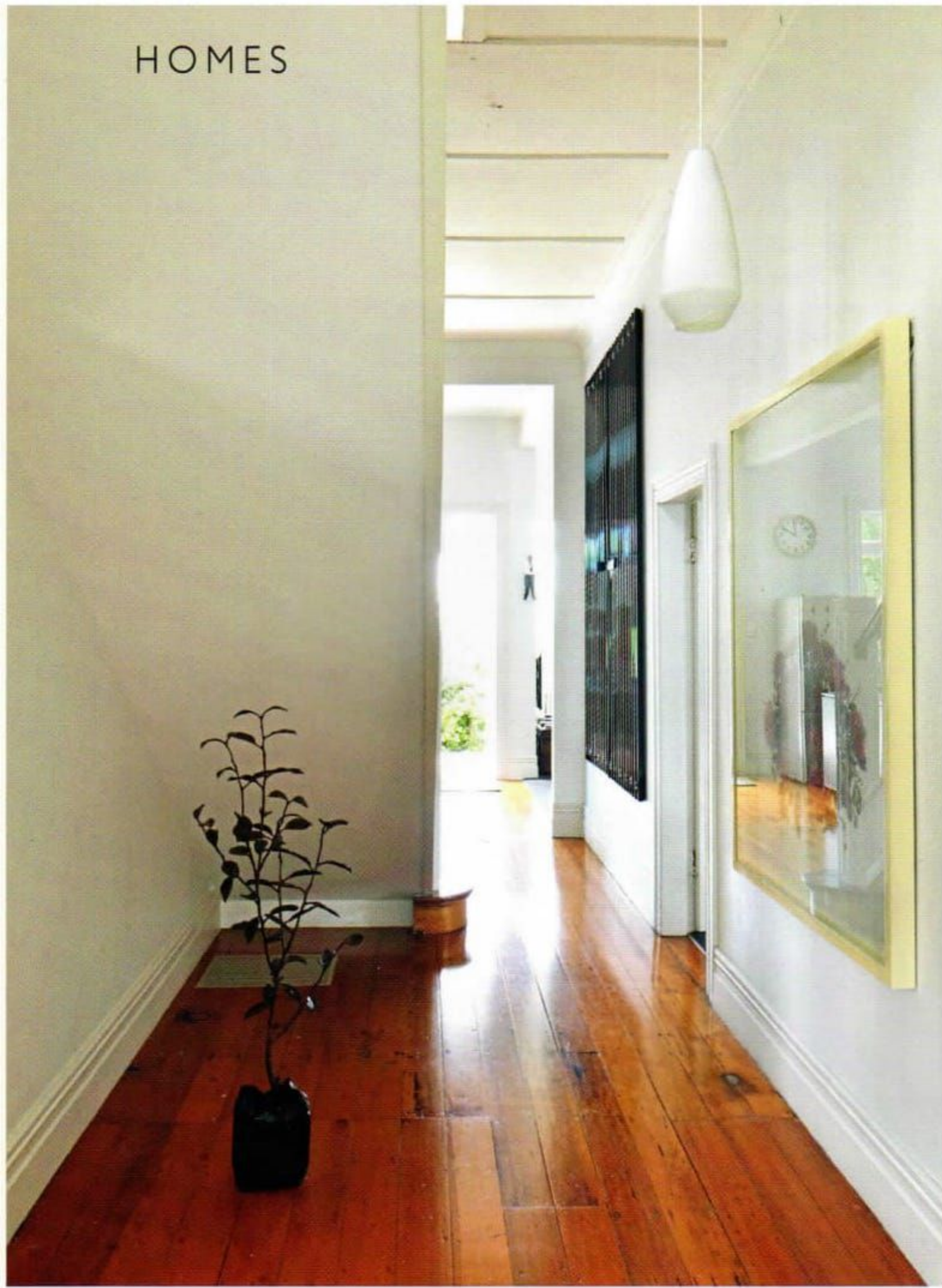


LYNN WHITFIELD AND SIMON VODANOVICH'S central Auckland home could easily be mistaken for a modern art gallery. Walls are filled by an impressive Ralph Hotere installation, a piece by Jacqueline Fraser, the signature half-human, half-bird creatures of Bill Hammond. But don't expect to see these works on your next visit.

Lynn and Simon are serious collectors and, although their passion for art is indulged on every surface of their home, it's not there simply for the family to admire. The couple own art leasing company Lemonbone and their late 19th century house provides plenty of space for their collection of some of New Zealand's greatest modern artists.

Clients often troop through their home, eyeing up the works on the wall and deciding what to take home. "I did wonder if it was very professional [running the business from home], but art tends to look better in a room than on a rack," Lynn says of her business, which was launched by an out-of-the-blue comment from the couple's accountant 16 years ago. >





"He wondered what the charges were for art storage, as pieces needed to be kept in certain conditions; we had a small house and a growing art collection. He suggested leasing him a piece for his boardroom," Lynn says. "We then started buying art specifically for the purpose of leasing, and set up Lemonbone in a rented gallery space behind Karangahape Road."

These days the couple have acres of wall space to hang their art. Their 350sqm Freemans Bay home was once owned by the Auckland District Health Board and used as a hostel called Rangi Marie for former mental health patients moving back into the community. Architect friends of the couple bought the home in the early 2000s and opened up the multitude of small poky rooms. The only physical reminders of the past that remain are old signs explaining the house rules and how to work the washing machine.

"It certainly has an interesting history and I do often wonder what's gone on here," Lynn says of the house she had often passed by in the almost 30 years she's lived in the area.

Lynn and Simon refurbished the property when they and their daughter Francesca, now 17, moved in six years ago. With the space to hang and house the more than 250 pieces in their collection, they moved the business in-house.

Although the home's generous size had been a key attraction, they decided they could do with more living and dining space. "When friends heard our plans to extend they asked, 'Isn't the house big enough?'" Lynn says with a laugh.

Award-winning architect Graeme Burgess was brought on board to design the extension and improve the home's flow, but also maintain its heritage. "I've been mindful of the fact it's an old traditional house and he [Graeme] wasn't going to put a blingy pop-out thing in the middle of it."

The generous living and dining room extension branching off the renovated kitchen makes the most of the spectacular view to Auckland city. "It is almost like a piece of artwork itself," Lynn says. >



THIS PAGE (from top) A lone brass lemon tree by Michael Parekowhai stands under the stairwell. A separate wing provides Lynn with the ideal office space: "I get dressed in the morning, and have a coffee with a friend up the road - when I come back, I'm at work," she says.

OPPOSITE Swarovski crystals are sewn into Louise Weaver's crocheted raccoon, sitting on top of Simon's grand piano; *Singer Songwriter 1* by Bill Hammond hangs above; the chain work is Peter Robinson's *Binary Code*.

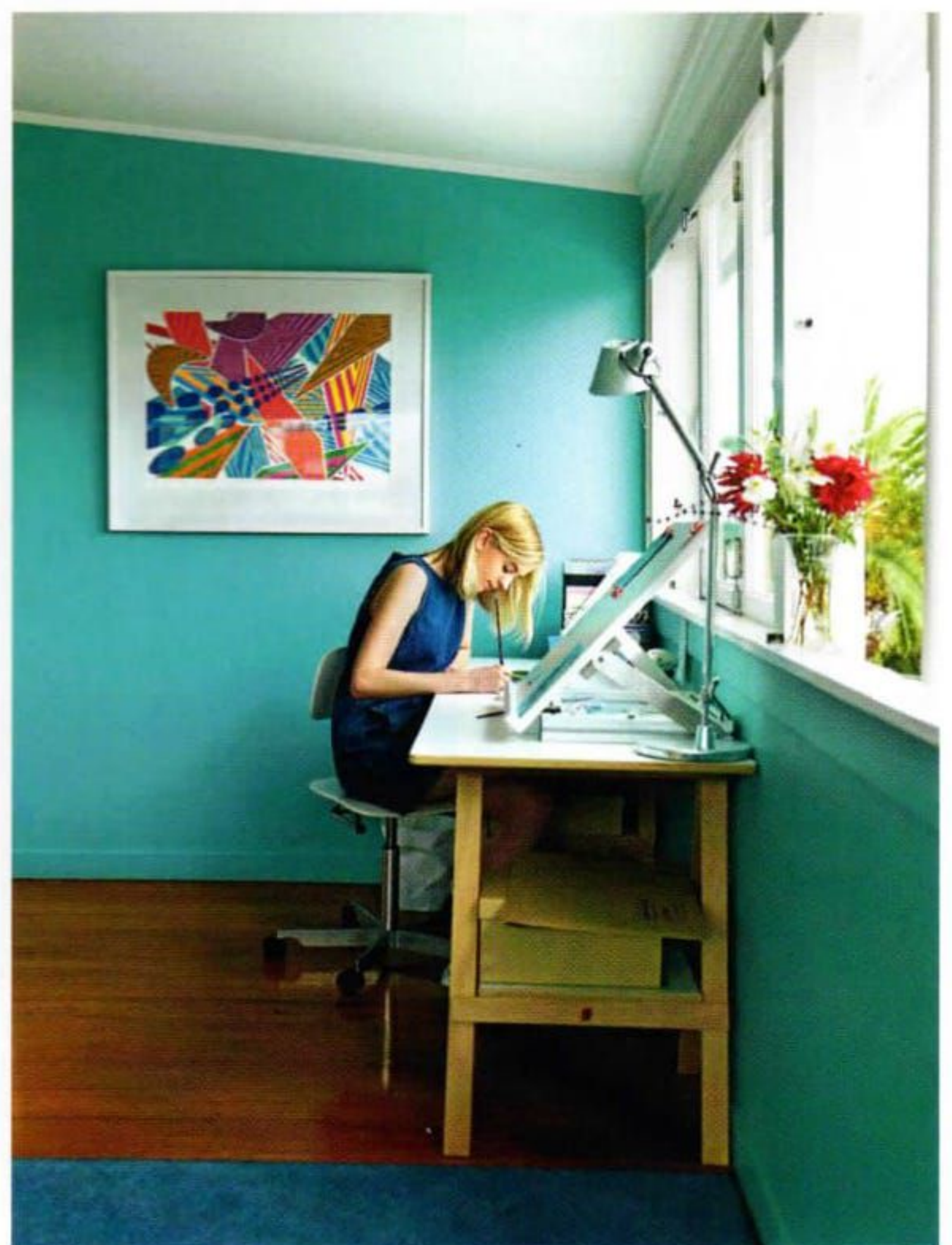


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One wall of the new extension is dedicated to the couple's latest acquisition, a piece by British artist Martin Creed. The couple have recently broadened their search for works to include contemporary international artists.

"People occasionally want to know the next artist to buy from an investment point of view," Lynn says. "I don't know if I'd just buy art from an investment perspective. I'd consider it, but it isn't the primary motivation for me. The advice I'd give people is make sure you really love the work."

Lynn suggests that someone who wants to buy art should have a good look around first. "People are a bit reluctant to go into dealer galleries, and I'll ask if they want to go with me. I happily take them in or go along to preview auctions."

Although they've never bought art to sell, ironically it was the sale of their first purchase, a piece by Elisabeth Rees, that kick-started their collection. "A dealer literally knocked on our door and said, 'We know you've bought this and we'd like to buy it.'" Elisabeth Rees had become very "hot", so they used the money from the sale to purchase more art for their collection.

"It was more money than we'd ever considered spending on art and we put the rest towards the mortgage – so sensible!

"At times people find it odd we spent money on art and yet people spend money on things I find quite extravagant. It's just about what you're interested in."

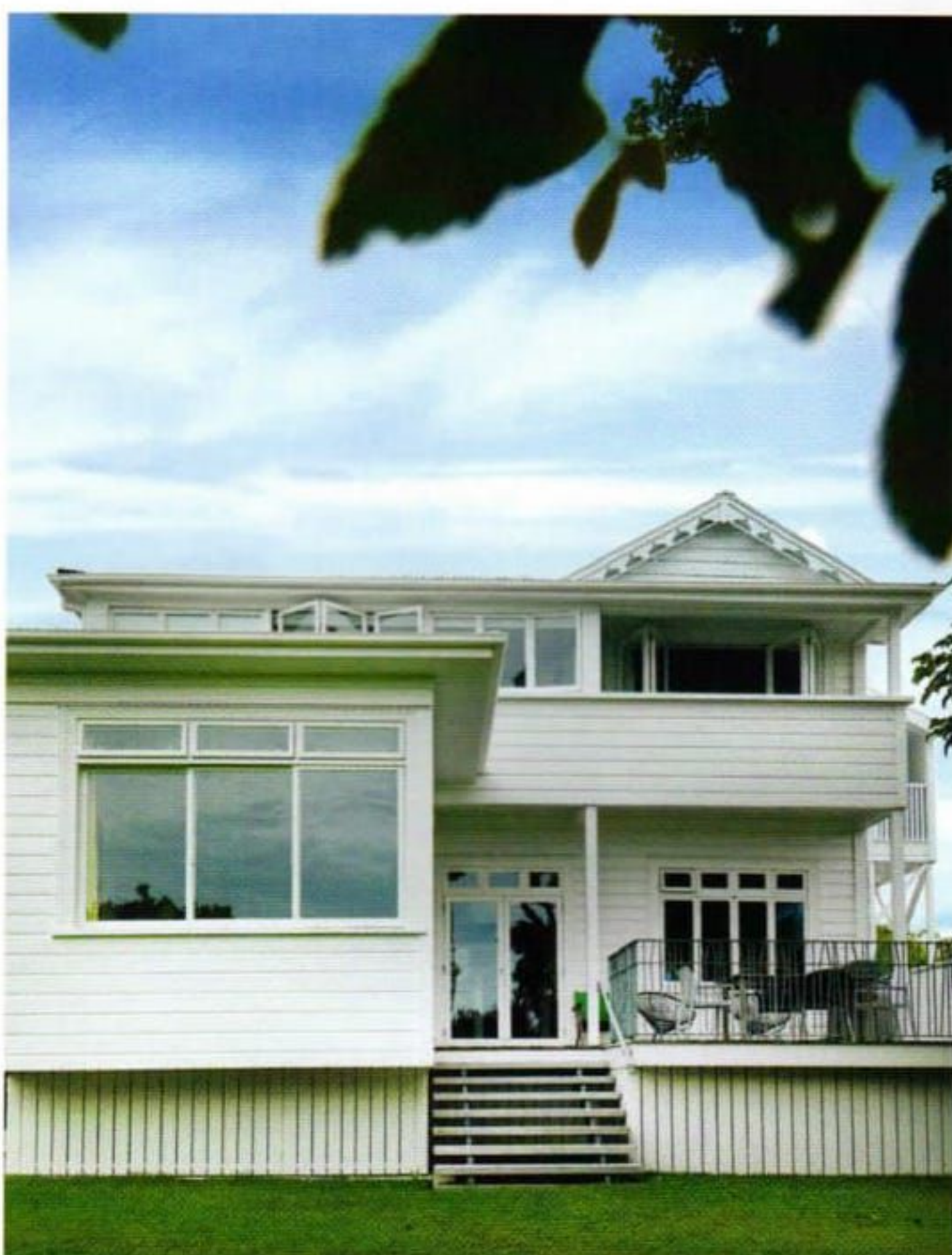
Although the vast majority of their collection is available for lease, there are a few personal pieces they will never lend out, particularly the abstract painting by New Zealand artist Milan Mrkusich, which hangs at the head of the dining table.

"I can't articulate why it would never go. We bought it about 15 years ago. Our intention wasn't to lease it," says Lynn, who is studying contemporary art and training to be a voluntary guide at Auckland Art Gallery. "You get very attached to things. There are also other works in our private collection that we don't lease out, as the insurance implications are too considerable – they fall into a price category that doesn't make it feasible." >

THIS PAGE (from top) A balcony with harbour views was created from what was once a fire escape from an upstairs flat. The master bathroom features Bisazza Italian glass mosaic tiles from Heritage Tiles.

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left) Bill Hammond's painting *Lemonbone Limbo Ledge* hangs in the master bedroom – it provided the inspiration for the business' name (with the artist's permission); the bedroom is painted in About Colour's 'Isolate', the chair is from Nood and the Sallée carpet is from Ian Hunt Flooring. Francesca works on her art in her teenage retreat, which is painted in Resene's 'Morning Glory'. Bright green mosaic tiles make a statement in the second bathroom.





THIS PAGE (from top) In the expansive foyer, an unusual egg and mouse sculpture *Ode Peu* by Seung Yul Oh sits below a triptych by German abstract artist Imi Knoebel. A fabric work by artist Jacqueline Fraser and a painting by Julian Dashper; the flooring is polished concrete. The house, as seen from the back garden, with the living room extension at left; it is painted in Resene 'Half Sea Fog'.

Which raises the obvious question – is art collecting only for the wealthy? “Definitely not. It’s important to have an interest, visit galleries, go to art schools’ end of year exhibitions,” Lynn says. “You’ve just got to keep looking.” Even if an artist’s originals are expensive you can pick up limited edition prints that are more affordable, says Lynn, pointing out a Judy Millar print. “Her acrylics on canvas are expensive, but this isn’t.”

With most of the art constantly revolving on their walls, the house is in a continual state of flux. But with each change comes a new surprise as pieces are returned, or space is created for an artwork waiting in the wings.

“Simon will sometimes return home and really notice a piece gone. Art changes any house. When we moved out of our old house and I went back in, it looked so bare,” says Lynn.

“I wouldn’t put art in to match furnishings but I’d always be considering where I would put art. When we moved in here, we put in a couple of couches, then ‘bang’ something was immediately up on the wall.” ■

Q&A

BEST THING ABOUT THE RENOVATION: Our new living room has three large windows facing the city with the Sky Tower smack in the middle. At night it looks amazing.

FAVOURITE TOOL: My laser level for hanging art in a straight line.

DURING OUR RENOVATION PLANNING: I was really worried about the size of our new covered verandah. Our architect Graeme Burgess said it needed to have muscle. It looked so huge during construction but it is fantastic and we spend heaps of time on it – eating and drinking wine mostly.

BEST PIECE OF ADVICE WE EVER RECEIVED: Graeme advised us through each renovation we’ve done to keep the style and scale that suits the house. So it’s a big traditional house and all the renovations we’ve done fit with that.

OUR NEXT RENOVATION PROJECT: We are in the process of putting in a swimming pool.

BIGGEST RENOVATION REGRET: My daughter would say not putting a pool in years ago.

Lynn Whitfield