

THIS PAGE In Hannah Skinner's Westmere home, designer pieces sit comfortably alongside vintage collectables; the black cane Zago chair was designed in 1993 by Ron Arad for Driade and is now discontinued; on the bookcase, the black and white photo by Peter Peryer is *Mother-in-law's Tongue*.

OPPOSITE An antique sofa paired with a classic Crown Lynn swan vase gives a homely feel to the lounge, which features a Yaschilan rug designed by Vittorio Locatelli for Driade; the pink Philippe Starck Clown side table has a tilting top: "I love it because it really shows his sense of humour," says Hannah.



ALL IN THE FAMILY

Good design is a way of life for Hannah Skinner and family

WORDS AND STYLING LEEANN YARE / PHOTOGRAPHS LARNIE NICOLSON





FROM THE ROADSIDE it's hard to believe there's a house at the Westmere, Auckland address Hannah Skinner calls home. But follow the pathway as it winds up the hill through lush green gardens and there, perched on the hill high above Cox's Bay, is a little (120sqm, including decks) three-bedroom cottage reminiscent of a seaside Kiwi bach, freshly dropped into its city location.

Hannah co-owns it with her sister Rebecca, an executive producer and partner in a Los Angeles film production company. The sisters stumbled on the property as Rebecca was about to fly back to LA after a family visit five years ago and, for Rebecca, it represented the chance to put down some Kiwi roots back home.

"We were driving down this street, saw the sign, stopped and had a look around the outside of the property," says Hannah. "It was a total last-minute discovery and Rebecca never even saw the inside. But she trusted me to secure her Kiwi bach. We both loved the windows from the outside and that love continued once I saw the interior. Light and air filled the rooms; there was a great stud height and a relaxed feel."

If that level of trust and aesthetic agreement seems unusual, even between sisters, the Skinner family background will shed some light. The pair grew up in a home bursting with creativity. Their parents, Hilary and Bryan Skinner, have been involved in various arts and design-related fields – co-owning an art gallery, importing furniture, establishing a soft furnishing manufacturing business and an interior design business. >

THIS PAGE (clockwise from above) "I love butterflies. This ceramic jug was a gift from my oldest friend – we have known each other since we were five years old," says Hannah. The Sarapis bar stool in the kitchen is a Philippe Starck design from the early 80s. Above the dining table is an artwork by Richard Maloy, on loan from Hannah's parents; the Lord Yo chairs with removable covers are also by Philippe Starck. **OPPOSITE** Hannah loves the glass overhead cupboards, which give a tantalising glimpse of her collection of glasses and china.





THIS PAGE (clockwise from left) Hannah uses her hall as a gallery, often moving the artworks around. A Kartell Bookworm adds a sculptural edge to Hannah's book collection. The master bedroom is a calming white: "I love the shutter features on the windows in the bedrooms, which we also repeated in the living rooms. They give a wonderful filtered light without losing the view of the garden."

OPPOSITE (from top) Space is tight in the bathroom so the Philippe Starck Bubu stools provide extra storage. The art deco bookcase in the entrance was a gift from friends moving overseas; the wooden rabbit was bought by Hannah's mother more than 30 years ago.



Hilary and Bryan now operate as residential and commercial design consultants for their company Skinner Design and Hannah runs their Ponsonby furniture showroom Indice, which imports furniture designed by the likes of Philippe Starck, Ron Arad and Patricia Urquiola. "I think it has been a process of osmosis," says Hannah. "I know I'm lucky to work in an area where you get to see and help create beautiful environments every day."

Not least of that luck is visiting Milan every April for the Milan Furniture Fair. "It's exhausting but inspiring," says Hannah. "There's so much going on in the city it's nearly impossible to see everything."

On her first visit to Italy in 1996, courtesy of a student loan, Hannah landed a job working for influential Italian design company Driade (now Indice's Italian suppliers) in their main showroom, so her first experience of the Milan fair was working at it. Now, as a visitor, she soaks up the innovation and technology on display, with a beautiful, ancient city as backdrop.

"It is easy to get swept up in the total sensory stimulation of it all. When I am ordering samples it is important to stay focused on the New Zealand market and the way we live here."

Hannah is a great believer in the value of investment pieces – the really special things you will have forever. "But it is true that good design doesn't always have to be expensive. For me it's about form and function. When that's right, a piece really works. I'd rather put one great chair in a room and wait until I find the next piece that will work with it than completely furnish a room just to feel like it is finished."

Fortunately the rest of the family share her design perspective. With Rebecca living offshore during renovations at "the bach", Hannah designed the kitchen herself, which was then imported from Driade. Bryan designed the bathroom, including the free-standing linen cupboard, and added much-needed storage, and Hilary sourced all the appliances, hardware, plumbing and tiles. "Everything to do with this house has been a family collaboration," says Hannah

Hannah's eclectic style sets the tone. "I like a bit of vintage mixed with very modern pieces, plus some African and Pacific style, and I really do like to change things around. I think great style is something that evolves over time. You wouldn't believe it to look at my house now but a year ago it was quite minimal!"

Whatever the mix, everything is always organised and uncluttered. "I do not find chaos very relaxing," says Hannah with a laugh. "When I look at my house I like it to appear soft and calm, with bursts of colour and the occasional Italianate pattern thrown in for good measure."

Whenever Rebecca and her family visit New Zealand, they revel in the tranquil holiday-home-in-the-city atmosphere. Lucky Hannah comes home to it at the end of every day. >





THIS PAGE (clockwise from above) Marimekko fabric makes a colourful tablecloth; built-in seating provides plenty of room for guests when entertaining. Blue and white wisteria covers the porch – the blue flowers first, followed by white. The foliage over the steps from the road to the house works well as a natural umbrella on rainy days.



Best money I ever spent: Using my student loan to go to Italy. After that I guess I knew I'd end up in the family business.

Best advice I ever received: Keep life simple, because complication will always find a way in.

Bravest thing I did around the house: Buying it in the first place. It doesn't have off-street parking, which for some people I guess is a deal breaker. But it is so nice to be separated from the street by garden, rather than having a driveway through the middle of it.

The home improvement that caused the most debate: It wasn't a debate as such, but it was sometimes difficult getting a decision with my sister living overseas.

I wish I was: A better gardener... read weeding. That's what I spend the most time doing! The old saying "One year seeding is seven years weeding" is so true.

In the next five or 10 years I'd like to: If we still have this house, I would want to get a new roof. The birds have taken to nesting in the eaves. I love having birds in the garden but they keep different hours from me and can be quite annoyingly noisy. Also I'd move the roof access. Whose great idea was it to put the access in the wardrobe? It really is a pain taking everything out of the closet every time you need to gain access to the roof.

The thing I want to change next around the house: I'd like to paint my bedroom. I'm thinking a dusty grey-green.

Our happiest day in this house: The first year we were in the house, we had our family Christmas in the garden. My parents have always put on a great day, so it was nice for my sister and me to return the favour.

Hannah Skinner

