

PERFECT PITCH

A Nelson home offers all the breezy joys of camping,
but none of the discomforts of life under canvas

WORDS SUE HOFFART / PHOTOGRAPHS DANIEL ALLEN



THIS PAGE A concertina window by the sink contributes to the casual, camping-like feel of the light, open kitchen in David Wallace and Caroline Marshall's Nelson home; the island bench was designed to fit with the living area decor – they liken it to a much-used farmhouse table.

OPPOSITE In the living area, the Indonesian teak coffee table doubles as a footstool for loungers admiring the Tahunanui Beach views; Caroline made the corner lamp from a surveyor's tripod topped with a Madder & Rouge fabric shade.





DAVID WALLACE IS not a camper. He's not fond of canvas or stretcher beds or the concept of carting water to cook and wash. The Nelson architect certainly didn't enjoy trying to fold his lanky frame inside the 1950s bubble caravan that his wife Caroline Marshall bought a couple of years ago.

Caroline, co-owner of Nelson's Red Gallery, laughs at the memory of her failed caravan experiment. "It didn't live up to the romantic dream," she says of her last-ditch, two-wheeled attempt to promote the joys of sleeping outside a house. "He couldn't fit longways in bed."

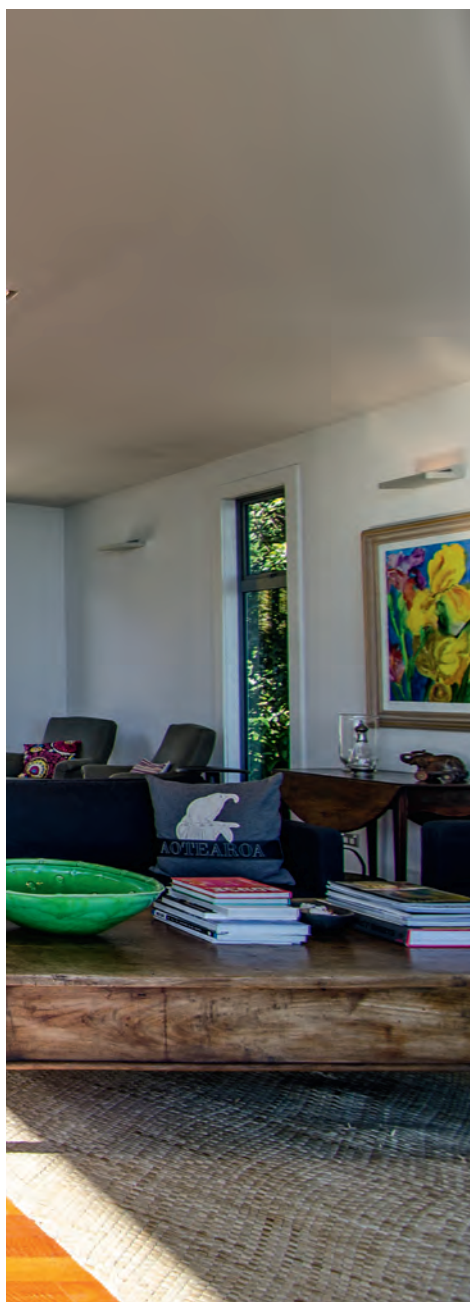
The couple's hillside home, a stone's throw from Tahunanui Beach and Tasman Bay, is testament to the powers of marital compromise. What the house lacks in tent pegs and portability is gained in the kind of wide-open, easygoing seaside living that would do a campsite proud.

In summer, doors and windows slide back on both sides of the main living area in what Caroline insists is a tent-like fashion.

David claims the building is more like a bach, with its cedar weatherboards and open-plan living space, so "everything happens in one room".

Either way, it neatly ended earlier debates over whether the couple should buy a beach house. While raising their three children in an 1868 character home across the city, Caroline periodically tried to talk her husband into buying a bach, but he was resistant. "I always found the idea of heading away at weekends difficult," he says. "I really like Nelson. I like being here and our friends are here."

Both agree their holiday-style seaside property is the perfect middle ground. It suits their shared casual approach to living, dining and entertaining and they both like to duck across the road for a swim at the end of every summer workday. >



THESE PAGES (clockwise from above) From the seaward side of the house, the open living area runs towards the back garden, which provides a quieter, more intimate space to read the paper or sip a morning cup of tea. Caroline and David had to resist their shared love of colour: "In our old house, lots of the walls were coloured. Here, there is so much light and such a strong view, the walls are really low key." A painting by Nelson artist Kathryn Furniss in the dining area.





David has a 10-minute cycle commute along the waterfront to his Arthouse Architecture firm each morning. Caroline tends to drive to the gallery but she also has a home office where she works on the stationery line she designs with her sister.

The ground-floor office, with adjoining bedroom and living area, doubles as extra space for guests. But, with their children now grown, the couple primarily live on the upper storey, facing Tahunanui Beach and the sweep of Tasman Bay.

The property, purchased in 2003, came with an old bungalow divided into two flats that were largely shut off from the outdoors and the view. For a year, the Marshall-Wallace offspring lived in one, next door to their parents in the other, while renovations were considered then discarded in favour of starting afresh.

The resident architect and interior designer – at that stage Caroline worked for her husband’s firm – collaborated to plan their ideal home. They decided the new abode needed high-level windows for light and ventilation. The garage had to move off the main road, up the driveway, closer to the house. Caroline wanted a light, open, central kitchen that allowed her to create feasts while chatting with guests.

Living in the original place helped, as the site revealed where best to admit sun or provide shade and which views deserved to be framed. With two teenage children on the cusp of leaving home and one child already at university, the couple realised they needed a flexible home. It had to fit two empty-nesters, yet expand to accommodate couples and future grandchildren and frequent larger gatherings of family or friends.

An en suite was deemed superfluous. “It would have been ridiculous to end up with three bathrooms when there are only two of us here 99 per cent of the time,” says David. “We didn’t want a big house and we did want to keep it simple, bach-like.”

The emphasis was on relaxed, sociable living spaces. >

THIS PAGE (from top) A short hallway connects the bedroom wing to the living areas. Caroline designed the cabinet below the desk in the guest bedroom – her etching was printed onto the cabinet’s ply face and is one of a series sold in her gallery.

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left) Pale turquoise glass tiles offer indoor echoes of sea and sky. The metal shelf unit turns books into sculptural art in the downstairs living area. Sally Burton’s art hangs in the downstairs living area. The desk in the master bedroom was inherited from Caroline’s grandmother: “She was a great letter writer.”





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“We do have quite a casual lifestyle. I think we’d rather have people for dinner than go out for a meal. We love being involved with people in our house. We have a big party deck.

“The doors are open a lot in summer. They all fold back so the whole wall is open for much of the day. The Nelson climate does let you do that.”

When the family return home for holidays or celebrations, they can peer over the deck to check sea and wind conditions before hauling out the resident kayak or blokart.

Both former North Islanders, Caroline and David delight in their adopted city’s diverse, multicultural population. After 25 years of living here, they still marvel at the creativity that surrounds them. Caroline, who long ago turned her back on a physiotherapy career, has studied textile design and photography in the city and worked in a friend’s hand-printed-bedlinen company before veering into interior design.

“We do miss our North Island friends and family but the lovely thing about Nelson is you feel inspired artistically,” says Caroline. And theirs is a house inspired by its environment.

“Being by the sea is an absolute joy. And once you’re in bed, those windows fold right open so it’s gorgeous in the afternoon or when you wake in the morning, looking out across the sea to the mountains. There’s absolutely nothing between you and the sea. This is as close as I could get Dave to camping.” ■

THIS PAGE In the original home, the couple had to crouch to see the view and access to the outdoors was limited; this house, on the same site, stands as a testament to the power of good architecture.

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left) Beside the *Eucalyptus saligna* staircase leading up to the main living area, a black wall repeats the exterior cladding: "It adds a lovely texture to the entry," says Caroline. Family and friends gather on the seaward deck. Topographical maps at the front door were a gift from the Wallace-Marshall children and show the top of the South Island.

Q&A

Our children are: All doing interesting things. Ben is back in Nelson, finishing his heli-pilot instructor training. Anna is working in an architecture firm in Melbourne. Jonty has been working as a beer brewer on the Isle of Skye but recently headed to Ghana to do volunteer work with disabled youth. They all like coming home. *(Caroline)*

We met: At Auckland University. Caroline was studying physiotherapy and I was doing architecture. We ended up in Nelson after we'd both travelled. *(David)*

The trouble with owning a gallery: Is the temptation to bring favourite pieces home. I can't always resist but, mostly, I just enjoy being surrounded by beautiful things at work. I also like the fact that Dave and I work in the same building – he's upstairs. *(Caroline)*

I have one traffic light: Between home and the office. If I come home along the waterfront at 5 o'clock, it's quicker to bike than drive. *(David)*

Nelson has: Lots of interesting people from a whole variety of backgrounds – Europeans and English and Americans. *(David)*

Caroline Marshall and David Wallace



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