

An expert eye on the renovations

KIWIS pride themselves on being do-it-yourselfers but not everyone wants to risk turning their happy family home into a house of horrors.

Such were the fears Sarah Thomas and James Fraser had about renovating their ex-state house in Avalon.

"We're not do-it-yourself people," Sarah says. "We can hang a picture frame but that's about it."

They'd also heard their friends' renovation horror stories, everything from cost over-runs and having to fire contractors to the tremendous stress it put on their relationships.

But with their young son Ryan approaching two and baby Bethany on the way, they knew the two-bedroom house they'd bought seven years earlier soon would be too small.

They were contemplating adding an upper storey when they

asked realtyRETURNS to investigate the feasibility and affordability of their plans.

It's a company that specialises in project managing renovations for people like James and Sarah, professionals who don't have time or expertise.

"They came to us needing to achieve more living space and better flow in their home to meet the needs of their growing family," realtyRETURNS' Fiona Ogilvie says.

"During the planning we came up with the idea of adding the extra living space at ground level and re-configuring the house by adding and taking away walls.

"We achieved what the clients wanted for considerably less than it would have cost to add a second storey."

A living/dining area was added to the back of the house, which gets more sun than the front, and a single bedroom and study were

turned into a family room.

Both the family room and living/dining area open to a new deck, the bathroom was renovated and extended to incorporate a bath, the original living room was turned into two bedrooms, and the kitchen was enlarged and re-oriented towards the living area.

"The clients didn't want to replace their kitchen completely, although its configuration didn't work for them and the space was limited," Fiona says.

"So, in consultation with the architectural designer and the joiner, we worked out a way to re-use what we could of the old kitchen in terms of cabinetry and cupboard fronts, and added contrasting cupboard fronts to the new cabinetry, changed the handles, added a new sink and new appliances and more storage."

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Low-key entrance: Beyond the frontage of Sarah Thomas and James Fraser's ex-state house is a beautifully spacious family living space.

Photos: JOHN NICHOLSON



Room to spread out: Doors from the generous living area open on to a wide deck and yard.



Lounging around: Furniture placement gives the TV area an intimate feel.



Arterial route: The corridor linking rooms.

Ex-state house transformed

"THE CLIENTS ended up with a more modern, spacious and functional family kitchen for a very reasonable cost."

Sarah says budgeting constraints necessitated the need to keep the kitchen.

"The great thing about realtyRETURNS is they really understood we were on a budget."

She also appreciated how hands-on Fiona was and how hands-off she and James could be.

"RealtyRETURNS organised all the tradespeople. If there were any little glitches, the tradespeople went to Fiona.

"She talked us through the consent process, she brought us samples, she did all the running around. She took care of all the hassles."

Fiona says the most challenging part of the seven-month renovation was minimising its impact on James and Sarah while they continued to live in the house.

"We worked out the best plan to cause the least inconvenience and upheaval was to build the deck, and close in the addition before we took out any walls within the house.

"This meant the clients had a functioning kitchen, bathroom and bedrooms for a large portion of the period of the renovation.

"It also meant we limited the amount of dust, dirt and associated mess penetrating the house as long as possible."

Sarah says realtyRETURNS' input was factored into the budget.

"We know it would have cost us a lot more financially, not to mention the cost in terms of time and stress, if we'd tried to do it ourselves, because we do not have the experience or the contacts."



Extensions: When the weather allows, the play area can extend outside.

Sarah knows this just from taking charge of choosing and organising the curtains for the living/dining area.

"After all the time I took to deciding which curtains I wanted and getting them hung, I could see the benefit of Fiona.

"She knows all the right people whereas we would have 'ummed' and 'ahhed' about what to do because we don't have the connections.

"Fiona has access to all the resources required for our renovation and also made little suggestions about things we should consider - that's what she's good at."

For instance, Sarah and Thomas thought they would forego gas when they threw out their gas fire.

"We thought we'd get a heat pump."

But Fiona convinced them to install gas central heating, and while it added to the budget, Sarah and Thomas don't regret the investment - and the running costs are minimal because with the extra sunlight streaming into the house, it's easier to heat.

"We've already found it's a much warmer home," Sarah says.

What most surprised her about the renovation?

"It's turned out just as I imagined it. It's what we wanted for the next 20 years. We love it."

For more information go to the realtyRETURNS stand at Home Exhibition Wellington on next weekend, starting Friday, at TSB Bank Arena or go to: realtyreturns.co.nz



Flow-on effect: Sarah Thomas with her seven-month-old baby Bethany on the new deck.



Kid space: The bedrooms have plenty of light.



Office space: The house was re-configured to add extra living space.



Workspace: The kitchen was good enough to stay, good news on a budget.