

THESE PAGES Visitors to Jo and Tim Cameron's North Canterbury farmhouse wend their way up the driveway past the Waikari Creek and stone walls built by the Camerons to separate the lawns and gardens from the drive; the exterior of the house is a mix of limestone and weatherboards painted in a light colour to match the stone.

HISTORY UNWRAPPED

During the restoration of a Canterbury homestead, happy discoveries were made and layers of its rich past uncovered

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IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT happy surprises are revealed during a renovation. Usually homeowners reel off expensive tales of treacherous wiring and collapsing foundations, but the Cameron family's most compelling renovation memories are of discoveries that delighted them.

When Jo and Tim Cameron moved into the 1883 farm homestead in the Waipara district, an hour north of Christchurch, 10 years ago, they had no idea what lay behind the plastered hallway walls. One evening, after a meeting with their architects to discuss their renovations plans, they started chipping away at the plaster and discovered an old limestone wall hidden beneath. That beautiful and unexpected wall would become a key feature of their kitchen, which is a category winner in the first *NZ House & Garden* Interior of the Year awards (and appears on our cover).

The Camerons' historic home is on a sheep and beef farm that has been in the family for two generations. Tim and Jo took it over from Tim's parents 10 years ago, moving in with their three children, Archie, 16, Freddie, 14, and Augusta (Gussie), 12. Jo describes the home as "a small cottage within a house", as over the years many layers have been added. >

THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) The oldest part of the house is a limestone cottage built in 1883 with two bedrooms added upstairs in 1899. There's always something to pick in the garden – two pots from Garden Classics in Christchurch hold 'Judith Leyster' tulips in spring. Gussie, Tim and Jo Cameron outside the original limestone cottage. **OPPOSITE** The east-facing verandah looks over a rose garden with box hedging; the verandah roof is lined with timber from old packing cases.





THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) The walls, ceiling and floorboards of the original wide hall are kauri; the hall was built in 1905 and opens to the garden; Tim and Jo bought the rugs in Turkey. The refectory table came from Tim's Irish grandparents and Jo carried the ginger jars back from Nepal in her backpack; the tall steel construction on the table was made by Bruce Downs, a local Hawarden craftsman and farmer. When parties in the drawing room are winding down, visitors often settle into the two-person inglenook seats by the fireplace; Tim spent his early years in County Meath, Ireland, and came to New Zealand as a five-year-old – the gold-leaf-framed mirror above the fireplace came with the family.

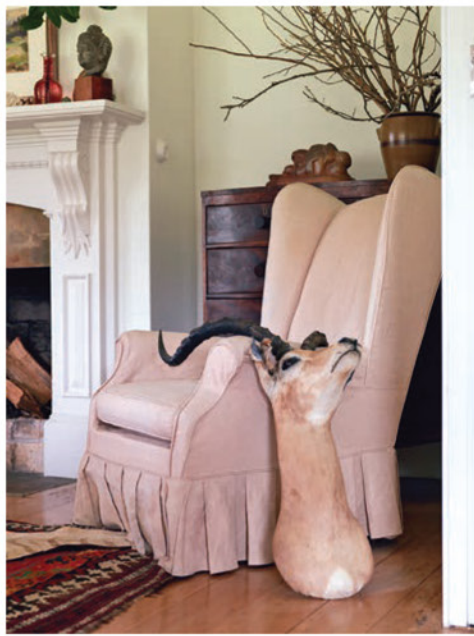
OPPOSITE The two chairs that sit by the drawing room window were junk shop finds; Jo painted them black.



The original limestone cottage was built in 1883; it was extended in 1899 and again in 1905, when a kauri hall, drawing room and bedrooms were added. In 2010, when the Camerons embarked on their renovations, proper heating was a top priority. "Before renovating, it could get down below 10 degrees. Even in the height of the summer, we were always putting clothes on to go inside not outside," recalls Tim. Now, a diesel-based heating system, augmented by a woodburner, keeps the house toasty. "We always have trees on the property to use up, thanks to Canterbury's many storms."

Jo loves the "airiness, light and space" of the newly renovated living room, study and kitchen, which has a cathedral ceiling – something she always wanted. >





Although the family revel in the modern comforts provided by their renovation, the historic aspects of the home give them just as much pleasure. The beautiful limestone walls were carefully dismantled, strengthened and reassembled by stonemason Peter Dunn. And an old well, discovered completely by accident, has been preserved. “We had no idea it was there. A builder nearly lost a crowbar in it when renewing the piles, so we decided to open it up, light it and glaze it to make it a feature. Most people get a bit of a shock and jump over it; it still has water in it,” says Tim (see it on page 63). In the bathroom, too, a chunky slab of limestone found on the farm is the base for their handbasin.

The home has a category two heritage listing so the design phase was slow going, but worth it, say the Camerons: “We wanted to preserve what was here. We like old houses, love the character of them – we redid all the skirting boards and door handles so everything complemented the rest of the house,” says Jo.

The family has ended up with oodles of space – six bedrooms and four living rooms – but it’s the new living areas off the kitchen that are used the most. “As much as I love open-plan I find it quite noisy. Everyone needs space. Now, we can make phone calls or chat without being on top of each other.”

Jo enjoyed watching the design unfold during the six-month renovation process. She was very hands-on, choosing all the light, neutral paint colours used throughout the house and even wielding a paintbrush herself. Acting as the builder’s right-hand woman, she was happy to clean up after them every night, set out their tools in the morning and keep their strength up with a steady supply of lemon muffins and savoury pinwheel scones. >



THIS PAGE Tim’s granny covered the shade on the study’s standard lamp in World War II and it has never been replaced: “It’s the most amazing fabric,” says Jo; the zebra skin was a TradeMe purchase and a river scene by Austen Deans hangs over the fireplace.

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left) A tulip from the garden. Jo’s taxidermied bird collection includes this rosella; two vintage soda siphons sit in the background. The impala head was bought on the West Coast and will ultimately be mounted on the wall; the Llew Summers sculpture on the chest behind was a wedding present. A corner of the family room with a view through to the study; the boar’s head was rescued from Amberley’s recycling centre and Jo bought the little rush-seat chair when she was first married.



Jo is well known in the district for her full cake tins and “world famous” bacon and egg pie. “Family and friends are always staying or passing through so we often have visitors dropping in. In the country you have to be reasonably organised – I don’t have shops just five minutes away – so I always try to keep enough in the pantry to rustle up an unexpected meal.

“We grow most of our summer vegetables and have two great bakers in the area, plus a local farmers’ market that’s a huge help. Tim supplies most of the beef and lamb from the farm and if we’re lucky we might get a duck or two plucked from the annual duck shoot on the property.”

Living in the country also means Jo hardly ever needs to buy flowers. The garden is filled with her favourites: roses, peonies, violets, winter sweet and cherry blossom.

The dry North Canterbury summers make gardening a challenge. Sometimes there’s little rain for six months and the stock have first dibs on water. However, the established oaks, eucalypts and pines are a real asset and, when water is plentiful, the house is surrounded by a meticulously manicured lawn. >

THIS PAGE Archie’s bedroom was previously used as maids’ quarters, as was his brother Freddie’s – both rooms are upstairs in what was the old limestone cottage; above Archie’s bed is a Christchurch map dated 1868 and two old steamer trunks sit between the beds as a table.

OPPOSITE (from top) The new kitchen has a 6m stud, skylights and a woodburner that’s stoked up for most of the winter; the French elm workbench is from Holliday & Sons antiques in Christchurch and the rugs were bought in Syria 20 years ago. A limestone slab found on the farm and carted home on the back of a tractor has been reshaped and used as the base for the handbasin.



THESE PAGES (clockwise from top left) Freddie’s bedroom is upstairs in what was originally the old limestone cottage. The laundry is used for arranging flowers, dealing with farm meat and the endless laundry a big house creates. Jo in the garden; one of the joys of living in the country is always being able to pick flowers from the garden, she says. The stairs lead up to the boys’ bedrooms.

Jo’s creative touch is seen throughout the house – she was responsible for all the interior design. She scours magazines for ideas, loves Georgian antiques and always has one eye on TradeMe for a recycled bargain or, as she describes it, “preserving what others discard”.

She also admits to a slight obsession with taxidermy, particularly birds, which are dotted throughout the house. “I just love their feathers, textures and colours and I can’t resist picking up road kill victims. I love the fact they are so quirky and interesting.” Gussie, however, shudders to think what dead birds her mum might have stashed in the freezer, awaiting their turn at the local taxidermist.

Although style is important, Jo says this is above all a family home. “We live on a farm after all and, as much as I love white sofas, they wouldn’t be practical. We wanted fabrics that are durable and can cope with everything family life throws at them.

“I wanted the house to look great but, more importantly, it needed to be comfortable and not too precious.” ■

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Q&A

My decorating style is: An eclectic mix of traditional and modern. But, most importantly, it’s comfortable. *(Jo)*

Best decorating tip: Good lighting. It completely changes the mood of a room and dimmers are essential. *(Jo)*

Best money we ever spent: Central heating, as the house used to be like a fridge. *(Tim)*

The home improvement that caused the most debate: Definitely the second dishwasher. Jo was right! *(Tim)*

Next on the renovation list: I am working on the old stable block and I have installed a tack room and am about to pave a yard area. *(Jo)*

We love this part of New Zealand because: You can really see the seasons. It’s only an hour from the city and great for skiing, rivers and walking, and the wine and food is fabulous. *(Both)*

Best-kept secret about this area: Food-wise we can get everything we need: good bread from Frickers Bread and Rachel Scott, great coffee and art at the Rocking Frog and fabulous pinot gris from Tiki Wines. *(Both)*

Jo and Tim Cameron

