



**THIS PAGE** Entry to Rebecca and Harry Kain's Christchurch house is via this gallery with two staircases – the far one leads to the children's bedrooms, while the quirky, freestanding spiral leads down to a wine cellar and up to the visitors' bedroom. **OPPOSITE** Darling, a Tibetan spaniel, looks the other way as Maddy, 12, and George, seven, play a board game by the marble-topped fireplace; rimu boards frame the double-height ceiling; side tables from Citta sit beside the four-seater sofas.



# A SOLID HISTORY

Many imagine themselves living in homes they spot in the pages of a magazine; this homeowner made it happen

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**THIS PAGE** (from above) Asta, 10, and Darling beside a recreation of Picasso's iconic *Guernica* by Harry's cousin Henry Hope that dominates the entrance hall: "We love this hallway it's always light and welcoming," says Rebecca. George, Maddy, Rebecca and Asta hang out in the library/TV room. **OPPOSITE** The Regency oak dining table is paired with Chippendale chairs: "We spend a lot of time here and in the kitchen, it can often feel like central station," Rebecca says; above the sofa with its striped Mokum linen upholstery are three French military figure drawings from Murdoch McLennan Antiques; a portrait of Rebecca's grandmother hangs above the Georgian chest of drawers.

**R**EBECA KAIN PICTURED herself living in her Sir Miles Warren-designed masterpiece in Fendalton the first time she laid eyes on it – in the pages of *NZ House & Garden* magazine (April 2003). She was immediately drawn to this substantial piece of Christchurch's architectural heritage, imagining how the imposing, concrete home would be light and lovely to live in.

But it was another seven years before the chance arose.

"We had sold at the time and were renting when the real estate agent rang me and said: 'The most beautiful house has come on the market.' I knew exactly which house the agent was referring to."

Not only did it embody the best of the chunky, "brutalist" style of architecture, its large, secluded site and sunny north-facing aspect meant the house ticked all the boxes for a family with three young children.

Concealed down a driveway and surrounded by trees, the unusually wide section originally accommodated three homes, but in 1976 they were removed and their sections amalgamated to create a flat 2800sqm building site sitting on the edge of the Wairarapa Stream. "I remember thinking when I read the original magazine article – those people would be able to sit by

the pool looking at the garden and wouldn't be able to see any other houses," says Rebecca.

"Many people have described this house as the finest example of Sir Miles Warren's domestic work, and it certainly stands out in Christchurch where it's surrounded by more traditional houses. It feels completely timeless; it looks modern but is in fact nearly 40 years old.

"When I first saw it, I realised what an architecturally important house it would be to live in, it was quite substantial and needed nothing altered... it just needed more comfortable furniture."

Both Rebecca, co-founder of the Redcurrent homeware chain, and her husband Harry Kain, a Christchurch restaurateur, felt a sense of responsibility to redecorate in a style true to its architect's intentions. With enormously high ceilings, concrete block walls, white interiors and three staircases (two of which are spiral) it presented considerable design challenges.

Collecting the right furniture for what Rebecca describes as "quite austere, masculine rooms" took four years. The scale was crucial – everything needed to be oversized. Existing furniture was sold and delivery men groaned as large-scale pieces were delivered – even the artworks and mirrors needed to be huge. >



In the sitting room, the ceiling height is twice that of the other rooms. “It doesn’t need a lot of furniture but smaller sofas looked out of place and had to go,” recalls Rebecca. They were replaced with two oversized couches – even the gold damask cushions scattered on them are giants. “I had to pare everything back... but I wanted to make it warm and comfortable and fill it with the things I love.

“Furnishing this house really made me refine my sense of style. There was a lot of trial and error.” The interior colours, too, required a change of taste – Rebecca’s previous home was Georgian style and she’d favoured pinks, greens and blues. In her new home the dark-lacquered meranti doors, which are repeated throughout the house, set the tone – browns, golds, greens and navy worked best. Rebecca hung material scraps in different hues all round the house until she felt she had a sense of the colours she should choose.

The pool first captured Rebecca’s attention and it was a smash hit with their three children: Maddy, 12, Asta, 10, and George, seven. They had never had a pool before and revelled in swimming after school although, sadly, this was short-lived. The Christchurch earthquakes wrecked the pool and it has been unusable for two years now – the Kain trio and friends can still burn off energy on the generous lawn.

“We feel lucky compared to many others in the city who have lost their homes altogether,” Rebecca says. >

*“The fact that in the 1970s Sir Miles Warren was able to visualise and design a house that was both avant-garde yet quickly became a classic is exceptional”*

**THIS PAGE** (from left) Asta and Rebecca catch the sun streaming through the double-height windows. The stools are from Asko Design. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top) Rebecca enjoys the changing seasonal views from her home office; the mirror, with its Marie Antoinette detail, was a find from Wayne Wright Antiques. The main bedroom combines Rebecca’s love of classic and contemporary: a chrome bedside table from French Country Collections sits below an antique mirror. The two ceramic birds are from Redcurrent.





Since the earthquakes, Rebecca has worked from home more than ever; she lost her Victoria Street office in the first earthquake. Luckily, the light, open house is a pleasure to work in: "It keeps me uplifted and inspired," she says.

For work purposes, it's also handy to be so close to the city, but Rebecca says her home feels more like a spacious country house. "We always have loads of friends and family staying so we needed more bedrooms and outdoor space. Quite often we have 10 adults and 10 children here for a Saturday night dinner and the house accommodates everyone well. There are so many choices of places to eat or entertain in."

That space and ease of living all goes back to its architect: "The fact that in the early 1970s he was able to visualise and design a house that was both avant-garde yet quickly became a classic is exceptional. It matches my love of anything timeless and classic. I don't like fuss: I like to keep food, entertaining and interiors simple. We wanted the house to be a reflection of our life and we feel we have honoured the house but made it feel more lived in," she says. ■

**THESE PAGES** (clockwise from top left) Maddy and Harry enjoy a cup of tea on the terrace, a perfect place to eat during the warmer months. By night the outdoor fire is a popular setting for drinks or dinner by candlelight at the teak table. Asta ascends the pre-cast concrete spiral staircase leading to an upstairs balcony and children's playroom. Concrete beams top concrete block walls in this Sir Miles Warren masterpiece; the pool remains empty because of earthquake damage.

## Q&A

**The thing I've learned about interiors is:** The value of layering. Creating an inviting and friendly home takes years. Layer up the photos and the pieces you love, make it inviting and comfortable. When we first came here the house felt cold and austere. I feel I've made it more of a home.

**The style of the house is:** I guess it's brutal modernism. It's timeless. Even though the house is 37 years old it feels as if it was built yesterday.

**I'm inspired by:** Ralph Lauren – his classic style.

**Now that the house is finished:** I've been writing a book called *Faded Glamour*, which will be in Redcurrent stores in September. It's essentially about a way of living and creating an inviting and comfortable home.

**Favourite part of the rebuild so far:** The Colombo. It's divine. Not just because we've opened a Redcurrent store there – it's just inspiring to see it up and running. And they've opened the Academy Gold Cinema there, which shows art-house movies – I missed the cinema at the Arts Centre so much.

**It might seem silly:** But I'm just so pleased our local dairy has reopened after the earthquakes. I never cried during the earthquakes, it was when I took the children down the road to get an ice cream and found the dairy closed that I shed a few tears. It's the little things that really affect you.

Rebecca Kain

