



THEIR KIND OF CASTLE

A creative Christchurch couple have turned an 1900s cottage into a family citadel designed for entertaining

WORDS GEORGI WADDY / PHOTOGRAPHS PAUL McCREDIE







T WASN'T EXACTLY love at first sight for Glen Senior when, in 2004, he first clapped eyes on what was to become his family home. For years, his wife Kate had walked past the early 1900s wooden cottage, which everyone called "an ugly duckling", in the Christchurch suburb of Fendalton. Intrigued by what could be seen from the road, she was dying to explore the rest.

When it eventually came on the market, the couple were living in the UK with their girls – Bella, now 18, Phoebe, 16, Molly, 13, and Sam, nine. Glen was back in New Zealand briefly on business when he decided to look at the house on Kate's behalf, along with Kate's sister. A non-starter, they both thought, and they were sure she would too. How wrong they were.

Two months later, Kate was back in Christchurch, revisiting the house and, once inside, "something grabbed her". She had officially fallen in love with it. She loved its quirkiness, its lack of a fence or even a driveway, the huge north-facing section (more than 1000sqm) and mature trees – especially the pink rhododendron trees at the back of the section. It offered privacy and space – the perfect backdrop for entertaining and bringing up their four young daughters (all then under 10). Living here would be just like living in the country. >

THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) Kate can see "everything downstairs and the pool" from the island in the open-plan kitchen; washing-up and food preparation is done in a back kitchen. The tiny wire birds were found in Melbourne by Kate's mother. The photo above table shows Kate's grandfather John Steele Guthrie, a well-known New Zealand rower after whom she named her jewellery business; the photo above that is by Kate's sister-in-law, name here?.

OPPOSITE The dining table is a side-of-the-road find refurbished by Kate – "perfect for art projects, homework and family dinners".







But first there was the matter of the cottage itself. Glen considered the old wooden cottage a knockdown and wanted to design a new house. But Kate wanted to renovate. And so, in the best traditions of marital compromise, they did a bit of both (though there was rather more new than old in the finished design). With restoration in mind, Kate worked out a plan for their new home, Google-sketched the design and used original features, such as the hand-carved fireplace in the living room and its high ceilings, as the building blocks for her design.

With the help of "fantastic" draughtsman Craig Johnston of Blueprint Architecture, she was confident about taking on the challenge: "My parents always had great design magazines around when I was young; they've been a big source of my inspiration. Both my parents were 'serial renovators' and because we moved around with their teaching jobs they were always painting or renovating every house we lived in and then doing it again." >



THIS PAGE (clockwise from top) Phoebe relaxes in the Union Jack egg chair, a birthday present to Kate from Glen. This cabinet sits near the entrance, with a framed eagle cross-stitched by Glen's mother overhead; the swords, helmets and shield are evidence of Glen's passion for medieval armoury. A balsa wood Eiffel tower, made by Kate's father, towers over an arrangement that includes an old pewter jug with fresh roses from the garden. OPPOSITE The living room runs off the dining room; beneath the cowhides is a Parisian scene that's actually a shower curtain: "But no one can tell," says Kate.







THIS PAGE In the older part of the house, the main bedroom opens to the garden, where Kate has placed a stone cross from a salvage yard. Sam's bedroom feature wall is in 'Genius Pink Genius' from Hudson Paint's chalkboard paint collection. **OPPOSITE** Sam and her cousin Maggie in the entryway; Kate designed and painted the lockers to hold the children's school bags and scooters; in the background is one of Glen's favourite finds - chainmail from the Royal Armoury in Leeds, UK - with two swords handmade by New Zealand knife-maker Peter Lorimer. Kate used pink and white wallpaper stripes to make the two upstairs bathrooms feel bigger. Phoebe's feature wall colour is Hudson's 'Aquagirl Blue'.

Both Kate and Glen wanted to build over two levels, so that the house felt protective, like their own private castle, but they also needed a friendly entrance, a glimpse of life behind. The key to the design was memories of a trip to France, where they walked past medieval entrances in rural villages. They began to see how the effect they wanted could be achieved with a gate section pierced by windows and a large front door that opens through into a central courtyard behind.

The house is built around this courtyard in a U-shape, with every living area on the ground floor opening onto it. "We wanted to preserve what was here and build a house sheltered from the wind," says Glen. "Christchurch has a great climate but is well known for the offshore easterly that can ruin a sunny day. With this design and an outdoor fire, we can be outside in all weathers – even snow. It's great for entertaining, which we do a lot."

Eldest daughter Bella recently held her 18th birthday party here, with hot pink paper pompoms strewn across the courtyard, and Kate, who runs a jewellery business from home, frequently joins up with friends to host a market day.

Hedges are kept trimmed and buxus balls manicured; lawns are kept to a minimum and there are large stretches of kwila decking. "With four children, a dog [Ted, a Cavalier King Charles/standard poodle cross] and two jobs, our lives are fairly busy so we keep the garden simple and user-friendly," says Glen.

Upstairs the girls all have their own bedrooms with two bathrooms to share. Kate has added a different-coloured chalkboard-painted wall to each bedroom but the rest is left up to its inhabitant's creative impulses. "I love it that sometimes I don't even need to go upstairs, so I don't have to think about untidy bedrooms," says Kate. >



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Q&A

During the February earthquake: I still can't believe what I saw – the water in our pool was forced straight up in the air and went as high as the roof of the outdoor room. Our big front door was twisted and jammed shut. It stuck every time you opened it until the June earthquake and was then twisted back into shape. (Kate)

One clever idea that's particularly useful: I put in a locker for each of the girls at the front entrance so all their school bags and scooters go straight in there rather than all over the floor. Well, most of the time. (Kate)

The first thing I do when I get home from work: I work at home but the first thing I do when I leave my workroom is wash my face. Working with silver and polish, I usually end up looking like a chimney sweep! (Kate) Check who is home (often there are numerous extras) and make sure I eyeball any strange boys (and welcome them, usually). With four daughters I like to know who may be hiding around the corners. (Glen)

Favourite shop: It has to be Whisky Galore in Victoria Street; Michael and his team are fantastic hosts. I'm partial to the Irish Middleton Old Rare. (*Glen*)

Kate and Glen Senior





"The design allows us all room to breathe without being on top of each other. People say it's a very calm house so I think this formula has worked for us. And, as I work from home, I have to be flexible. I can deal with a sick child at home, the girls can walk or bike to friends and school, and we are very central."

Now the children are older, Kate has shifted her focus from interiors to her jewellery business (guthrieandsteele.com). She and her mother design and make jewellery from silver, bronze and copper, working out of a room at the back of the house.

But sometimes Kate still finds her thoughts drifting to the next house project. At moments like that, Glen quickly reminds her how much she *loves* her present house. And so she does: "It's like being on holiday but in a city."

THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) A bust on an empty wine barrel provides a garden focal point. Kate runs her jewellery business from a space at the back of the house. Cavoodle Ted with Sam at the front door; the south-facing rendered concrete gate section shelters the courtyard behind it.

OPPOSITE (from top) The outdoor living area features kwila decking: "This is the heart of the house," says Kate. The sheltered garden on the original north-facing side of the house is unchanged.



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