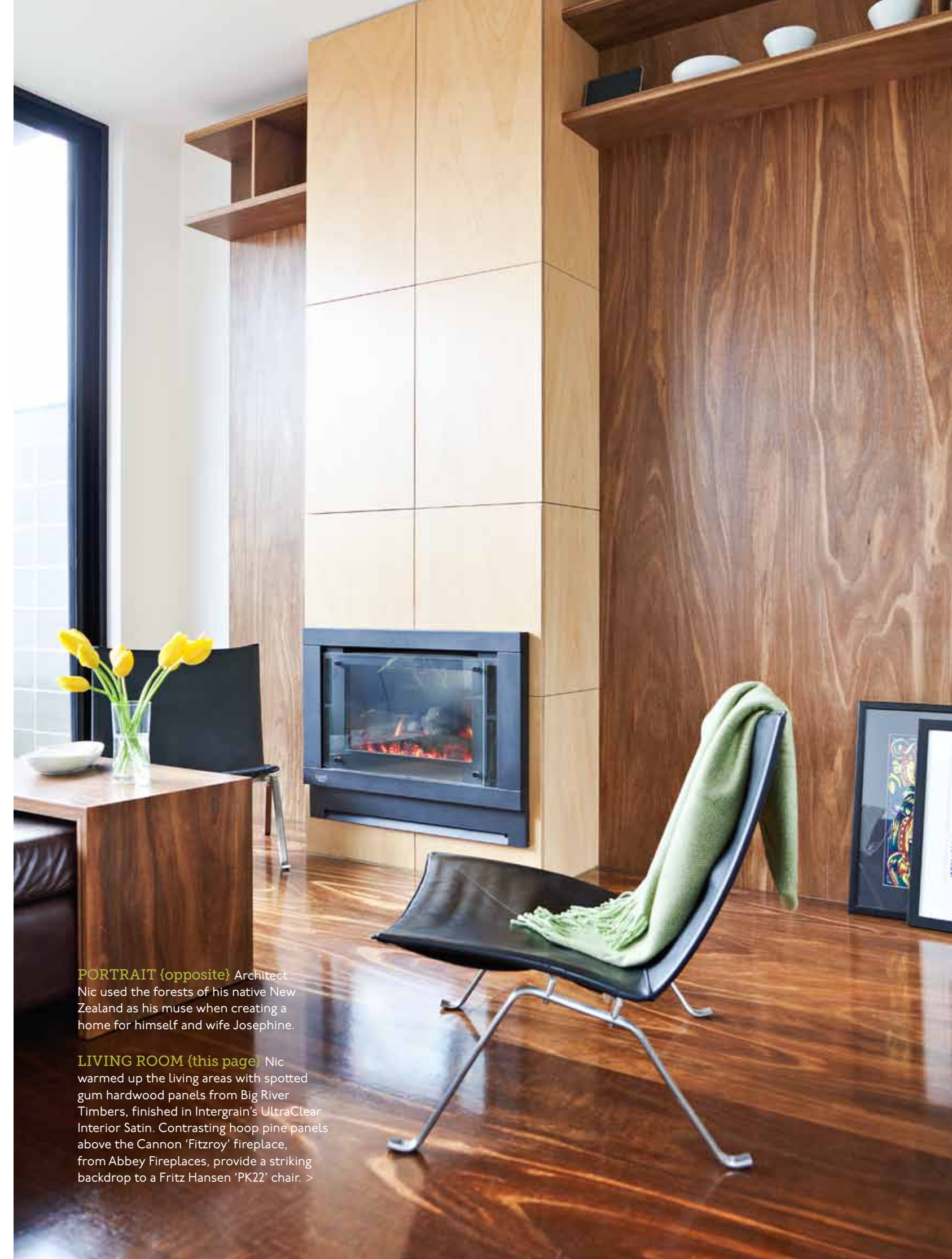




CITY SLICKER

A creative couple takes inspiration from nature to give their Melbourne cottage a fresh new look

STORY & STYLING RUTH WELSBY PHOTOGRAPHY RHIANNON SLATTER



PORTRAIT (opposite) Architect Nic used the forests of his native New Zealand as his muse when creating a home for himself and wife Josephine.

LIVING ROOM (this page) Nic warmed up the living areas with spotted gum hardwood panels from Big River Timbers, finished in Intergrain's UltraClear Interior Satin. Contrasting hoop pine panels above the Cannon 'Fitzroy' fireplace, from Abbey Fireplaces, provide a striking backdrop to a Fritz Hansen 'PK22' chair. >



Nic dressed the interiors in vibrant greens and warming timbers to create an internal forest amid the concrete jungle

MOST ARCHITECTS LIKE a challenge, so when Nic, a Melbourne-based architect, and his wife Josephine, an artist, were on the lookout for a new home, nothing short of a wreck would do. It wasn't long before the couple stumbled across a tiny, run-down cottage, built in 1866, in their preferred inner-city Melbourne suburb. Having been rented out for years, the two-bedroom, single-storey house had an empty, unloved atmosphere, made worse by an awkward layout. Heritage restrictions put off many developers, while the building's position on a noisy corner had dispensed with the remaining interest, much to the couple's delight.

Strict regulations were imposed on altering the front of the house, but Nic was unruffled by the complex task. "We knew we'd have to shift our designs around the building's heritage listing, so we submitted plans early to allow time for changes," he explains. Initial plans to only renovate the rear of the home soon escalated to include a first floor, with an open-plan living zone and terrace. "I work from home so space was important," explains Nic. "We needed to squeeze in several new rooms, so adding a level was our only option."

Taking up residence at the front of the house, Nic's office has prime position in one of the home's two heritage-listed rooms, while next

door is the master bedroom. The contemporary bathroom is joined by a second bedroom and rear garage, completing the ground floor renovation, while upstairs the full scale of the extension is realised in the open-plan kitchen/dining/living room.

Nic employed every designer trick in the book to eke out all available space from the restricted site. "I like to call it caravan design," he says with a laugh. "To maintain clean lines, the kitchen is fully integrated and the living room has built-in cupboards to hide clutter." At the rear, a bank of retractable glass doors open up the space, inviting the outside in and bathing the room in light.

With a lack of foliage in the home's immediate vicinity, Nic dressed the interiors in vibrant greens and warming timbers to create an internal forest amid the concrete jungle of inner-city life. "I love the use of wood in buildings; it's very common in New Zealand, where I grew up," he says. "The main type used here is spotted gum, which is local, so it's a thumbs up for the environment, too."

Tackling heritage overlays in a confined city plot is not for the faint-hearted, but Nic says, "Having restrictions to work around is more enjoyable than an easy plot. Making the most of small spaces is a great challenge and it's satisfying when everything comes together."

KITCHEN (left) The compact kitchen was designed with efficiency in mind. Handle-free drawers offer a clean look, while practical prep areas and storage zones are hidden behind a bank of floor-to-ceiling cupboards. Smartstone countertops in Absolute Blanc and high-gloss finishes help bounce extra light around, while flourishes of spotted gum veneer link the space to the rest of the room.

Inside story

Who lives here?

Nic, an architect, and his wife Josephine, an artist.

Was this your first renovation?

Nic: "Of my own house, yes, and I've learnt a lot through it. It's good that I've experienced some of the concerns that my clients go through."

Your top tip for first-time renovators?

"Always get the professionals in, and make sure you like the work of the architect you employ. Like any creative person, architects don't like being pushed in directions they don't want to go. You build up a relationship over the project and it should be enjoyable."

Did you design a lot of the furniture yourself?

"The bed, coffee table and dining table are all my designs but the dining table is my favourite. If we ever move, it will be a great reminder of our first home together."

LIVING/DINING Nic and Josephine added an extra level to allow room for a spacious open-plan living, dining and kitchen area. Playful green accents, in glassware and accessories, and skylights trimmed in Resene 'Limeade', balance the timber finishes. The dining table, designed by Nic, is flanked by Eames chairs with Eiffel bases, while a pendant designed by Nic and Josephine (for details, see page 110) makes a glamorous feature. >



we love

the restful green bedroom

The couple brought a touch of nature to their bedroom with green, a colour that represents growth and renewal. The EC-Group 'Studio' carpet in Cadmium Green, from Inner City Floorworld, evokes a lush lawn, while a strip of Resene 'Forest Green' paint extends up the wall and along the ceiling to suggest a forest canopy.

MASTER BEDROOM As a nod to the home's history, Nic and Josephine chose not to plaster over a ragged section of the wall that exposed the heritage brickwork, making it a textural feature. Nic designed the bed with the same spotted gum used in the rest of the house.



“Making the most of *small spaces* is a great challenge and it's satisfying when everything comes together”



KITCHEN (top left) Made from recycled bottles, the green glassware is by Tord Boontje for Artecnic. **BATHROOM (top right)** Spotted gum panelling finished in Intergrain UltraClear Interior Satin conceals the linen store, while 'Monaco' 300mm x 600mm porcelain tiles in White from Signorino Tile Gallery complete the clean, modern look. **STAIRCASE (bottom left)** Slim-line cabinetry adds extra storage and display space. **BEDROOM (bottom right)** To emphasise the soaring ceiling, the couple opted for a low-profile bed and tables – seek similar at Planet. >

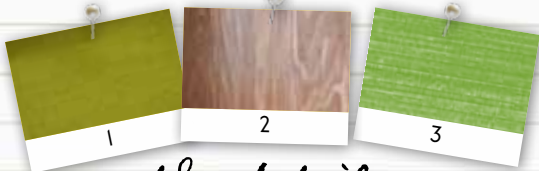
style notes



BATHROOM Phoenix 'Kubus' showerheads from Reece and a coat of Resene 'Christi' on the ceiling add to the home's rainforest feel.



DINING AREA The lightbulb pendant was designed by Nic and Josephine. "We asked an electrician to wire up the cables and then played with the light placements," says Nic. "We wanted to create a focal point in the room that visually divided the open-plan space, but wasn't too expensive. It's economical, contemporary and adjustable." Find a similar light at Mondo Luce.



the details

- 1 Carpet** EC-Group 'Studio' carpet in Cadmium Green, from \$65/sqm, Inner City Floorworld.
 - 2 Wooden panels** ArmourPanel spotted gum hardwood plywood, \$70/sqm (unfinished), Big River Timbers.
 - 3 Bathroom ceiling paint** SpaceCote low-sheen paint in Christi, \$85/4 litres, Resene.
- CONTACT** Nic Owen Architects, (03) 9347 1140, nicowenarchitects.com.au.
Stockists, page 221

"The main type of wood used here is *spotted gum*, which is local, so it's a thumbs up for the environment"



KITCHEN Cabinetry from The Cabinet & Furniture Workshop conceals clutter.

