



at home with...

Philly Smyth

Wellington-based interior designer Philly Smyth's hillside Kilbirnie home is a colourful, relaxed space for living and working

Text by Sharon Stephenson. Photography by Nicola Edmonds.

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"A house has to suit those who are using it. It has to be practical and somewhere you feel comfortable"

There are no prizes for guessing this house belongs to an interior designer.

From the minute you walk in the door, your eyes are massaged by beautiful items, expertly curated. But then Philly Smyth has been in the interiors business since she graduated years ago from the then Wellington Polytech with a qualification in textile design. After a career doing everything from selling china to designing wallpaper, Philly started her own consultancy, Bow and Arrows Interiors, 15 years ago.

She moved the business into a room of her hillside Kilbirnie house four years ago.

With its sweeping views of the Wellington coastline and airport – you could almost reach out and touch a plane – the two-storey home is barely recognisable from the 1918 workingman's cottage that Philly and her ex-husband, sculptor Kingsley Baird, bought 25 years ago. These days it's home to Philly and their children William (19), daughter Pearl (14), elderly dog Maggie, two cats, a rabbit and frogs.

Along with finds that once stood in Philly's store, artwork, sculpture and ceramics cover almost every surface, including many pieces from Philly's sister, renowned potter

Katherine Smyth. But there's no room for preciousness in this household. "A house has to suit those who are using it. It has to be practical and somewhere you feel

Opposite Art, textiles and quirky objet d'art make Wellington-based designer Philly Smyth's home a "collage of colour and inspiration". Above left The bold artwork above the living room couch, 'Pakeha', is by Philly's ex-husband Kingsley Baird and is made from painted timber. Above right The two antique Chinese ginger jars were bequeathed to Philly by her uncle when he died last year; they were bought in China by his father. The artwork above the table is a Pat Hanly print.



*"I love being surrounded by...
the art in this house"*

comfortable, rather than being scared to sit down or relax," says Philly.

Philly: "I love living here because... of the house's proximity to everything, such as the airport and the beach where I walk Maggie every day. It's also very private, and has the most fantastic light and views.

I like working from home because... it gives me flexibility for other things that are important, such as the children and my large family. It also means I can work in my pyjamas if I want to!

I've changed the house significantly... turning it from a 90-square-metre cottage into a 250-square-metre home, knocking out walls, relocating the kitchen and bathroom, adding two decks, a bedroom, removing an ugly spiral staircase and replacing it with an internal staircase, and digging into the bank to create a laundry and bathroom downstairs.

I get my inspiration from... the wall of photos and postcards just inside the front door, of places I've been, people I know and fabrics and textures I love. Initially I put them up to hide marks on the wall, but eventually it turned into this fabulous collage of colour and beauty and inspiration.

My favourite room is... my bedroom. It's my sanctuary. It's also filled with fun things I've collected or been given over the years, such as the bust that Kingsley sculpted of me that now holds my necklaces. I'm also partial to the old Salter scales I found in a building that was being demolished. They make a great side table.

My favourite item is... the two yellow urns that my uncle, who was also my godfather, left me when he died last year. Apart from the sentimental value, they add a pop of colour and tie in with my yellow chair.

One design rule I teach my clients is... small things in small spaces make the space feel small. If you add a few larger items, it can give the illusion of size.

I try to encourage clients to move out of their comfort zone by saying... paint timber! Kiwis love timber and hate to paint it out. But a recent client had wooden ceiling beams and I suggested they paint them out. Once they saw how much cleaner and bigger it made the space, they were sold!" ♦

Above left The black and white ceramic piece is entitled 'Tower of Babel' and was made by Philly's daughter Pearl when she was four, with the help of her aunt, Wellington potter Katherine Smyth. **Above right** The Balinese wooden figures were a gift, while the artwork on the left is called 'View from a Window' and is by Australian artist Gabrielle Caplice.



Clockwise from top left Philly made the cream woven throw rug in her bedroom when she was a textile student. The black and white cushion is by Martin Poppelwell; a bust in Philly's image in her bedroom holds her collection of necklaces; a snapshot of the outside deck; this tall black vase includes the print 'Tangata Whenua' by Robyn Kahukiwa and the painting 'Richmond York' by Eric Collett; Philly's large art collection and the 'Farm Implement' sculpture is by John Middleditch; Philly's bedside table is fashioned from a vintage scale; this vintage snare drum was found in an antique store in Bulls and was bought because it had the name 'P. Smyth' written on it ["It was a sign," jokes Philly].