

"The biggest compliment is when someone says: 'This feels really restful'"

get that?" To the disappointment of the curious, her answer is inevitably: second-hand, and self-customised. Because not only does Te Paa style the spaces and objects that give her home its distinctive feel, she also renovates, sources and remodels them – then generously shares her sources or the steps behind a redesign.

Though collecting and recreating has been innate since Te Paa's childhood – she cites her grandmother's ingenuity as an early inspiration – it was just over five years ago that she began to channel her skills into the

project that would elevate her to design-world acclaim. When her husband, Joe, came across the listing for their late mid-century home, it was in a dilapidated state, complete with green carpet and citrus-hued walls. Despite this, the couple immediately saw its potential. Having been built in 1968 by an esteemed local architect, the care that had gone into its original construction – as evidenced by unique architectural features such as the timber ceiling – won them over instantly.

Since they moved in, right before Te Paa gave birth to their first child, the architectural gem has steadily evolved from neglected dwelling to tranquil, light-filled sanctuary. In her early days as a new mother, renovation transcended its status as pure necessity; it became an outlet for creative expression. "I spent a lot of time looking at the walls," she notes, "and then I started to think about how to change the rooms, and decided I would start sharing on Instagram – as a personal creative release." As her account's popularity has blossomed, her approach to posting has remained true: somewhat irregular, devoid of hashtags, refreshingly non-sponsored and above all guided by instinct.

Instinct is equally a guiding force in Te Paa's renovation process from concept to realisation. "I see [the rooms] coming together in my head, then I try to connect the dots between what I'm envisaging and what is possible," she says. With that process of connection comes the element of chance, thanks to her commitment to sourcing almost exclusively second-hand and vintage – largely online through Trade Me, New Zealand's loved version of eBay. It's partly due to her love for the thrill of finding unique pieces to make her own, and partly due to necessity, given New Zealand's remoteness and small ☺



← The living room in the main house

Living room in
the Akito Studio



design market. "We just don't have the same access as if we were overseas," she explains. "I have to see the potential in a piece, whether it's from the year 2005 or 1975. If you can do that, nothing is out of reach."

Together with her eye for potential, a resourcefulness and willingness to get stuck in to new and unfamiliar projects is evidently paying off, as the stories behind some of her most iconic pieces reveal. Like the semi-circular lamp base that shattered upon falling from her car boot, which she subsequently glued back and replastered to achieve a rich textural finish. Or the constructivist Tatlin sofa by Mario Cananzi and Roberto Semprini for Edra that she bought second-hand for the equivalent of £150 – "looking so magnificently odd next to a pile of shoes in someone's garage" – and reupholstered from maroon velvet to a grey-beige before discovering its history, not to mention its actual value.

The care Te Paa takes in remodeling each object she acquires extends equally to the overall atmosphere she wants to create as the oasis for her vibrant family life: "Calm, even if life isn't that way – because it just isn't. I always look for an opportunity to create an interior that feels soft and easy to live in," she says. "I think the biggest compliment is when someone says: 'This feels really restful.'"

With two kids under five, function and form need to align: in addition to their visual allure, rounded corners are conducive to energetic escapades around the living room, while sturdy textured materials are easy to clean after hosting bare feet straight from outdoor adventures. Overlooking a gully filled with lush native trees, the garden leads out to a guest house, Ākito Studio – meaning 'to be slow' in



Māori – to which Te Paa has applied her serene touch, tempering a crisp white palette with warm wooden furniture and organic forms.

With the government having sealed off the country's borders on the advent of Covid-19 – part of a strategy that has kept community transmission to a minimum – and hosting overseas visitors off the agenda this year, the value of the local in this small island nation has come into sharp focus for Te Paa, as it has for many New Zealanders. Inspired by the emergence of a return to handcraft – pottery, candle-making – and a renewed women-led entrepreneurial spirit rippling through the country, she's about to launch her next endeavour: expanding her talent for repurposing to create an online store of custom furniture and objects. Many an Instagram follower curious about her objects' origins will be happy to hear it. ■

"I have to see the potential in a piece, whether it's from the year 2005 or 1975. If you can do that, nothing is out of reach"