

WINDOW ON THE WORLD

Years of gathering inspiration from all corners of the globe culminated in this Auckland villa renovation

Words **BEA TAYLOR**
Photographs **JANE USSHER**

THIS PAGE A painting by Aboriginal artist Jeannie Petyarre hangs on the wall above the Forma sofa in Nicki and John Kelly's Herne Bay villa; they got it for their first wedding anniversary which traditionally includes a paper gift; Tom Dixon brass vases and a black candleholder sit on the coffee table, all from Corso de' Fiori. **OPPOSITE** The kitchen's marble splashback from Granite Workshop is the perfect balancing element between the seamless white cabinetry – Nicki says she moves too quickly to have handles on cupboards, lest she get caught – and the black island bench; a Tom Dixon bowl sits on the island and the Donna Hay fruit platter, gifted to Nicki by an aunty, has travelled the world with her and John.



THESE PAGES Nicki saw the gridded window design in a Poliform advertisement and fell in love; the brand is one of Nicki's favourites and she knew the design would work perfectly in their open-plan living space; the pendant light is from Douglas & Bec; the fig tree thrives indoors, says Kelly: "I don't have a green finger, otherwise I would have a lot more indoor plants."





Nicki and John Kelly's Auckland villa is filled with reminders of their globe-trotting past. Nicki, from Bondi originally, has also called Amsterdam, California, Melbourne, Barcelona, San Francisco, Los Angeles and now New Zealand home. But what really played muse to their villa renovation was not Sydney's coastal-chic interiors nor the American craftsman style of California, it was the glamorous old dame, Europe.

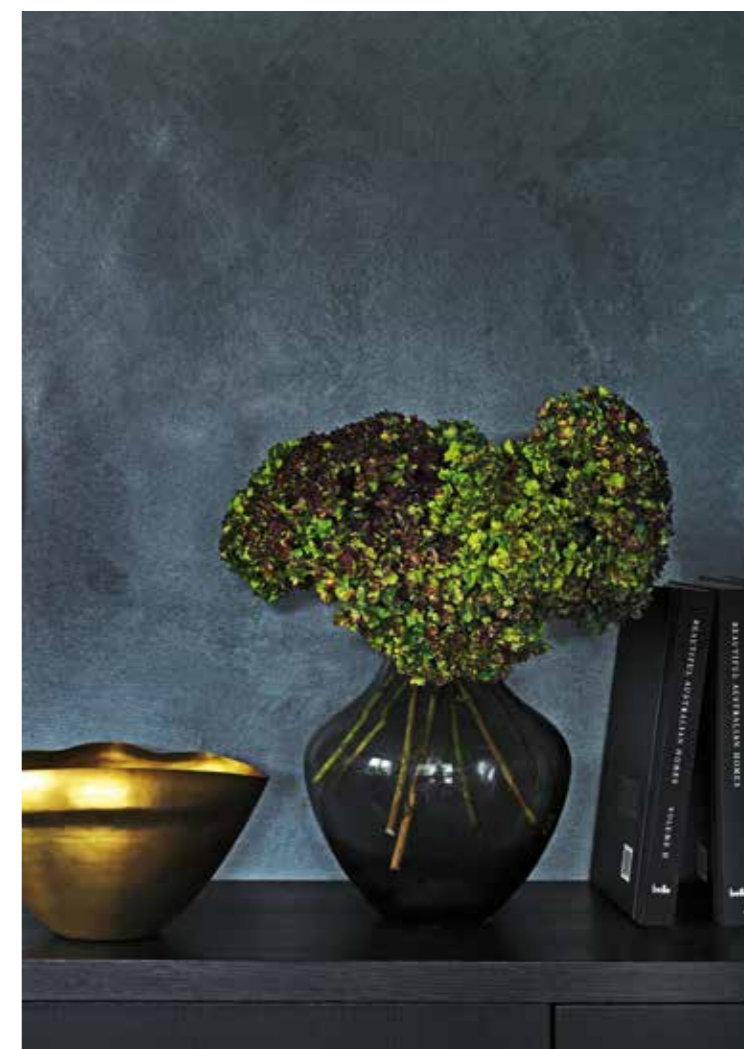
"When I lived in Amsterdam, I saw some architecture that I've never seen before and the beauty of it is incredible. That's where I fell in love

with marble," Nicki says. The inspiration board she created features big Parisian apartments and beautiful Dutch homes, with high ceilings, pillars and ornate details. Nicki has taken this essence – crisp whites with edgy black details, soft greys, brass and gold accents, and beautiful furniture – and applied it to her New Zealand setting.

"What houses in Europe do so well is combine the old and the new. Here we've gone quite modern, but that's why the villa front works so well, it's so beautiful and old. It has that heritage feeling to it but when you walk in it's super modern and spacious."

In fact, there are old pieces in the house, they're just so lovingly cared for that you wouldn't know.

THESE PAGES (clockwise from above) Nicki's favourite two chairs are from Studio Italia and sit near the kitchen: "They are the most sat on place in the house; they get tea in the morning and wine in the evening and there's always a child, friend or husband in the second chair." Nicki in a Poliform chair by Marcel Wanders from Studio Italia; behind, the doors to the garden are always open in summer, says Nicki who is a self-professed "summer girl". A Tom Dixon bowl sits beside a glass vase from Country Road in the formal lounge.



‘It has that heritage feeling to it but when you walk in it’s super modern’



The bespoke 17-year-old dining table has moved with the couple for all of their overseas stints. It was commissioned after they saw a similar one at their favourite Sydney cafe and is made from 100-year-old oak with a Carrara marble top.

Spanish influence comes in the form of a plastered fireplace surround. “I had a screenshot from a Spanish magazine and just had to have the same finish,” says Nicki. At the time, 2015, there were no such products on the market, so Nicki’s painter used a photo and YouTube videos to work out how to achieve the same look.

One of his attempts, mixing crushed pewter with the paint, didn’t quite work for the fireplace but Nicki was so entranced with its beautiful mottled effect that she used it to paint the formal lounge. “It

was a really bold move. I don’t know where I got it from because I’m not brave, but I wanted a different vibe for that room and not bright. It worked so well.”

If there’s one thing Nicki knows, it’s how to get things done. The entrepreneur’s list of business achievements includes moving Icebreaker into international department stores, starting an award-winning blow-dry bar, founding her own sustainable haircare company, Beauty Dust Co, with John, and co-owning Papinelle Sleepwear – all while raising three children: Lily, 16, Gemma, 14 and Jack, 10.

So it’s no surprise that the Kellys’ renovation was a snappy six-month job, helped by an unusually good run of winter weather. “Up until we put the roof on, we had no rain,” she says.

Their square-front villa is exactly what Nicki

LEFT The first thing Nicki bought for this room was the Torchon pendant light by Nat Cheshire and she was thrilled when it worked so beautifully with the mottled-paint effect on the walls; the Poliform chairs are from Studio Italia, the sofa is from Forma and the cushions are from Thread Design. **RIGHT** The hallway shows the seamless transition from the original front part of the villa to the remodelled back part; the pendant light is from Douglas & Bec.



THIS PAGE “Lily loves feminine, soft, fluffy textures so I knew we could do pinks and a more feminine palette for her room,” says Nicki of her 16-year-old daughter; John’s mum gifted him the Raymond Ching artwork on the wall to the right. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) Nicki’s Beauty Dust products sit in the ensuite; she found the stone benchtop at Artedomus and designed both bathrooms around it: “I had so much trouble trying to match the other tiles because it’s an unusual colour.” Budding drummer Jack has an electronic drum kit in his room (all the fun, without the noise); the skateboards on the wall are from Superette and the rhino and zebra heads are from Urban Outfitters. Daughter Gemma is a complete minimalist, says Nicki: “She likes things clean and simple.” A pairing of marble and cement tiles from European Ceramics is used in the family bathroom.



wanted: “They’re my favourite type of New Zealand house.” She got to know the previous homeowner through a mutual friend and, like any good businesswoman, expressed her interest early. “I planted the seed that if they were going to sell, I would love to be talked to first.”

As with most old villas, this one had beautiful bones but a tired interior. While the Kellys kept the front in its original condition, the back was subjected to a total overhaul with a new light-filled, open-plan kitchen, living and dining space and a separate formal lounge. They also added a family bathroom, powder room and an upstairs main bedroom with office, store room, ensuite and closet.

Nicki’s design vision was set in stone. “I had picture after picture in my home folder, and when it was time to do it, I was ready,” she says. Part of her steadfast concept came from knowing what did

THESE PAGES Nicki says her bedroom, painted in Resene Powder Blue, is her favourite room: "I'm very happy in here, it's calm, it's beautiful, it's where I meditate, it's just a peaceful nook. The kids are always in here with me because it's so light and warm"; she struggles to find bedding for their California king bed: "No one sells bedding that size here so I have to order it from the US."



HOMES

THIS PAGE (from top) Nicki's home office is in a light-filled lean-to at the top of the stairs; it's from here that she runs her businesses Beauty Dust Co and Papinelle Sleepwear. A persimmon tree in the front garden is laden with fruit in autumn; unfortunately none of the Kelly family like persimmons so the birds and the neighbours get to reap its rewards.

– and didn't – work in her previous home, one street over. "It was almost like my practice house. I figured out exactly what I wanted, so for this home I knew exactly what I was doing."

The kitchen was part of this reckoning. "I don't like black in my cooking workspace, but I knew from my previous all-white kitchen that I needed some black to make it a little grunter and more established," she says. The solution was a striking black island. The parquet flooring concept also made its way from the old house to the new but with one hiccup: "I wanted chevron and I got herringbone, which was a little mistake, but it's okay because I like both," she says.

Light is an important element for Nicki, who describes herself as solar powered. "I would only ever be in a home that has beautiful light and that's why we didn't renovate immediately. I needed to feel where the pockets were and from there decide where the windows would go."

Lockdown gave Nicki a respite from busy travelling and work schedules that had almost depleted her energy resources. Now, she's getting itchy feet: "I don't think I can find a better house than this because it ticks every box, but I would love to do another project." ■

Q&A

Biggest renovation drama: It's like giving birth, you forget how hard it was at the time... but there was a lot of drama around the tiles. We ordered these stunning tiles from Italy that I fell in love with, but they were delayed and I had to find new ones at the last minute.

Best seat in the house: In winter we always lounge on the grey sofa in front of the fire. Funnily enough, in summer we don't go near that sofa. We sit more upright in the Studio Italia chairs with the doors open. I call them my cup-of-tea or rosé chairs.

Favourite kitchen appliance: A commercial-grade Blendtec blender. We are all big smoothie fans, especially in the morning, so it's used multiple times a day.

Best work from home tip: I have everything on my desk at my fingertips to make it pleasurable throughout the day: beauty teas, hand cream, face serums, collagen powders, lip gloss, candles and a litre water bottle. Happy.

Nicki Kelly

