



Coasting along

From a high rise apartment in Hong Kong to a light-filled Auckland villa, Nicola and Alex Webster are enjoying their new lifestyle where the indoors and the outside merge

Text by Nicole Curin-Birch. Photography by Matthew Williams.



Opposite and this photo
After pulling up the carpet in the hall and dining room, Nicola and Alex discovered bora had been munching away on the floorboards for years. To disguise the patchiness of the wood they stained the floors black, which Nicola loves the look of but says she has to work hard to keep clean – especially with three young boys in the house.





This photo With the help of designer Emma Kate Bamford, the couple repositioned the kitchen to face the sun and also opened the space up to create better flow. **Inset** Producing comfy outdoor furniture is Nicola and Alex Webster's speciality. The Coast sofa and bean bag (which Gus is lounging on) are so stylish they get used indoors, too.

As soon as you step out onto their deck it's easy to see why guests have a hard time leaving Nicola and Alex Webster's Herne Bay villa. Laying in wait, like giant marshmallows, is a vast array of oversized beanbags ready for plonking into. Once in, it's difficult to find a reason to get out.

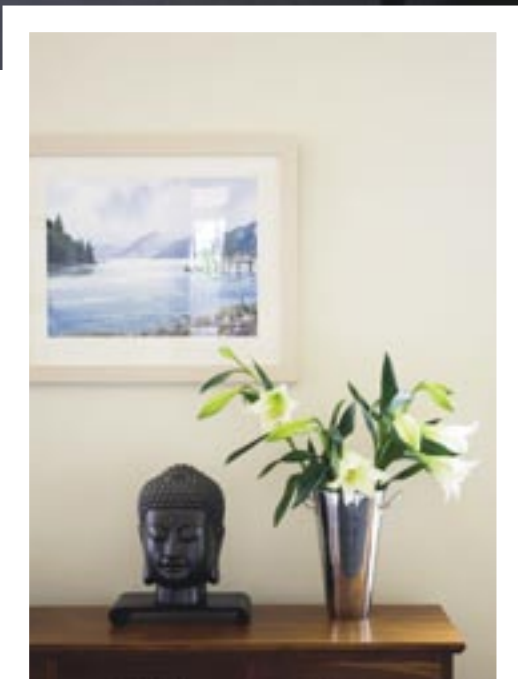
"We do spend a lot of time out here," says Nicola. "It has become like a second living room and in summer we do all our eating at the table, which means a lot less mess when you have kids. We all just relax on the beanbags and sofa and chat and read. Sometimes we don't move for hours."

It's Nicola's and Alex's job to know all about comfort. As the owners of Coast New Zealand they have perfected the art of resort living through their range of marine beanbags, outdoor furniture and luggage. And it's this feeling of a smartly casual lifestyle that they have injected into their family home.

Behind the gorgeous 100-year-old façade of their villa it's not unusual to find the couple's three young boys, twins Toby and Gus, three,



Left This stunning lily painting is by Australian artist Sarah Bishop. Like many of the couple's objects, the painting was an overseas discovery. **Below** The window seat is a favourite spot for the family. Often the boys will sit there for hours looking at books or watching the world go by outside. The cushions were made by Emma Kate Bamford. **Inset** Another find from overseas, this Buddha head statue originated in Vietnam. **Opposite** The boys' room. **Opposite right** The whole family in the kitchen.



and 20-month-old Jono, running around and playing games. Much of the interior has been decorated with objects picked up on the couple's extensive travels. A Buddha head on a sideboard was found in Vietnam and the breathtaking painting of a Blenheim vineyard in the hallway was a birthday gift from Alex for Nicola's 30th birthday.

With just two bedrooms, space is tight, but the family has made the most of the room they do have. "I guess we could really have three bedrooms, but we decided it was much easier to use the downstairs room as a toy room and play area for the boys so they wouldn't be dragging everything through the house," says Nicola.

Villas and suburban life are fairly new experiences for the couple. Their last home was a high rise apartment in Hong Kong, but Nicola,

a Kiwi, had always envisioned bringing up her family in New Zealand. She didn't have too hard a task convincing English-born Alex that the idea was a good one.

"We came back here to get married and because we had always wanted to start our own business, though at that stage we hadn't decided yet what we were going to do, we thought now was as good a time as any."

Because they had spent most of their time together living in apartments, they decided to go ahead and have the full Kiwi experience of buying an old doer-upper. Which is where the Herne Bay villa comes in, says Nicola.

"We loved that it was an older style, had an overgrown garden and gave us something to play with. Most importantly it has a high ceiling. Alex is 6ft 4 so he likes to have a bit of space



* With Toby, Gus and Jono all sharing a bedroom, having plenty of storage space is crucial. Every last square inch of the boys' closet has shelves and storage boxes stacked from floor to ceiling.

tip

above him and we have the most beautiful high stud here.”

Like many an old villa, inside it was more akin to a rabbit warren than a modern family home. Fortunately one of Nicola's close friends is interior designer Emma Kate Bamford who was more than willing to lend the couple some much-needed renovation advice.

“She really helped us to open up the space. There was a funny old hallway down the middle with a storage unit attached. We repositioned the kitchen so we could have a good flow between the living area – you need that when you have young children – so that it also opened easily onto the deck.

“But the floors were a bit of a disaster. When you open up these old houses they are full of surprises and when we lifted the carpet

we found that there had been a bit of bora in the floor boards. As a consequence we stained them really dark, which I love now but they are a pain to clean.” Downstairs is the children's playroom which opens out to the garden.

Nicola and Alex are certainly not a pair to do anything by halves. Initially they worked on Coast, a concept born out of Alex's passion for sailing, from a tiny room tucked off the end of the hall. By the time the renovations had started Nicola was running around after 10-month-old twins while also helping Alex out with the business which was booming. “It was a crazy time, especially with the twins. I don't think anything really prepares you for it.”

Once the interior had been given the make-over treatment it was the garden's turn. To best



Who lives here

Nicola and Alex Webster (owners of Coast New Zealand) and their three sons. Twins Gus and Toby, 3, and Jono, 20 months.

Where is it? Herne Bay, Auckland

I always shop at... Eon, Auckland. They have a fantastic selection of New Zealand-made furniture, accessories, homeware, clothes, and gifts – all under one roof. Super knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff make it a pleasure.

If money were no object my dream house would be... by the sea with stunning views and lots of space inside and out for little boys to have lots of adventures.

My favourite room in the house is... the kitchen/dining and living area – it's light, airy and has a lovely outlook and flow to the outside. It's designed so the deck becomes an outdoor room.

My favourite way to spend a summer evening is ... eating outside listening to the barbecue sizzling and the sea.



Nicola's decorating tips

* Flow-on effect

Porches and wide eaves create an easy, graduated transition from inside to out and allow you to keep doors and windows open to the fresh air even when it rains.

* Sun beats down

We tend to forget that it's the sun, as much as the rain, that drives us indoors. Shade sails and awnings increase flow between interior and exterior living and make it comfortable outside.

* Night time ambience

At night traditional lamps and candles are relaxing and will allow you to see the stars – still possible in New Zealand, even in the major centres. You may need some electrical lighting (over the barbecue or along stairs), but reserve spotlights for the driveway.

* Keen beans

Outdoor beanbags and cushions are a great option to connect your colour scheme from the indoor to the outdoor space. They are super comfortable and can be used indoors.

* Material matters

No material is immune from the rigours of the New Zealand climate, but some are more resilient: properly constructed and maintained, wooden furniture will last for decades and is comparatively simple to rejuvenate and restore.

* Choosing soft furnishings

Be sure to use high-quality fabrics such as Sunbrella that are specifically designed for outdoor use, yet soft to the touch. Cheaper fabrics such as nylon and polyester can be hot and uncomfortable and will deteriorate rapidly.



This photo Nicola has an easy-care subtropical garden which looks wonderful and frees up her time. **Top** Nicola at the front door. **Opposite** Summer is spent almost entirely outdoors. The family eat at this table and then relax afterwards on bean bags scattered around the deck.

utilise the space the couple leveled the sloping back lawn, edged it with retaining walls filled with lush tropical plants and added a courtyard for the boys to ride their bikes around.

By this time Nicola was pregnant with Jono and she has great memories of seeing the twins delight in the backyard building. "They would sit on the window seat and watch for hours. It was a great opportunity for me to put my feet up."

A new driveway was put in and a tropical garden. Initially Nicola says she had big ideas of getting out there and maintaining a traditional cottage garden, but with the boys, business and husband to look after she knew she would never achieve it.

"I'm really happy with the way the garden looks now and to be honest it's pretty much self-care. That's the great thing about all of those tropical plants, they are pretty tough."

Soon she'll have even less time. With baby number four on the way things look set to change again. The couple are house-hunting, looking for somewhere to fit their expanding family. "We've already got three in the one bedroom which is pushing it, so we are looking for a much bigger family home. Alex has dreams of going rural; it's the Englishman in him, he wants a bit of land. I'm quite happy here in suburbia so it'll be interesting to see where we end up," says Nicola.

➡ For more details see our fact files on page 140

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