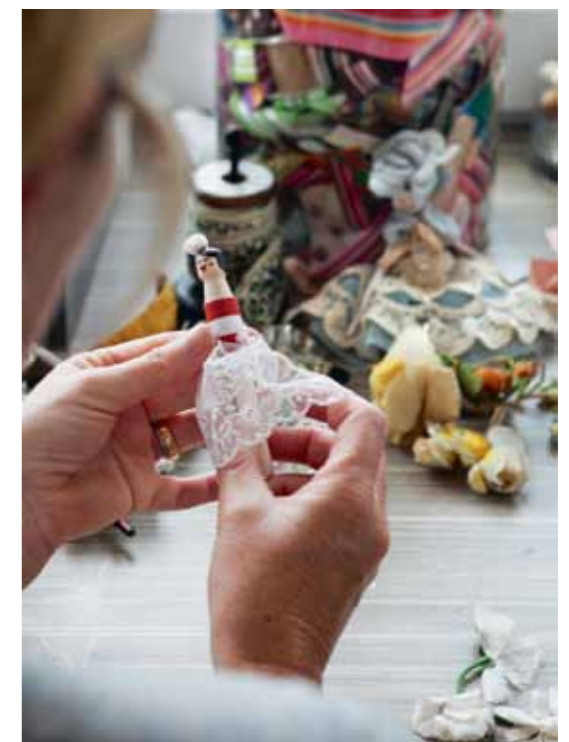


# MAKING GOOD

They came to Waiheke Island to make wine and the creative zeal hasn't stopped there

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**THESE PAGES** In Anna and Luc Desbonnets' kitchen, which appears on this issue's cover, a trio of Tolix stools frequently hold hungry children devouring home baking: "It's as easy to whip up a batch of biscuits as it is to go to the shop and buy them," Anna says; some of her cookbooks line a shelf on the antique Spanish storage unit from Bashford Antiques; the black metal lights are from CC Interiors.



**A**LTHOUGH IT ISN'T fair to call Anna Desbonnets a gunslinger, she is certainly well armed for creativity. The Waiheke Island interior designer is so fiercely attached to her hot glue gun, it featured prominently in her home renovation plans.

"My one wish was to have the hot glue gun plugged in permanently," she says. "To have a space here for it."

So chez Desbonnets now sports a purpose-built bench and adjacent power outlet for her favoured craft weapon. Not to mention providing a family home for Anna's winemaker husband Luc and the couple's children Olive, 11, Charlie, nine, and Alfie, four, as well as display space for the results of Anna's diverse artistic endeavours.

Aside from her framed paintings, decorative mosaic balls and hand-painted shoe lasts, that's her tapestry atop the ottoman.

The button-strung lampshade in Olive's room is Anna's work too. She designed and made most of the cushions in the house and found scarves to frame and hang at the end of the hallway. In Anna's hands, an old handkerchief from the Good Hope charity store will become a miniature dress for one of the exquisitely detailed, leggy dolls she sells or gives away. Each tiny woman is decked in snippets of vintage fabric and flowers, then named, photographed and assigned a biography.

"I can stay up till midnight doing them," the Whitecliffe art school graduate says of her dolls. "I'm a craft-aholic. In our last house, I used to have the dining table covered with lace and paint and broken bits of china."

Her current dwelling now has dedicated storage and workspace for baskets and boxes of ribbons and buttons, fabrics, paints, thread and feathers.

Despite its "charmless, basic layout – a three-bedroom rectangle" when Anna and Luc bought it seven years ago, Luc could see potential in the north-facing slopes that spread out below the house and Anna knew she could turn the house into something lovely. The horse paddocks and bare land have given way to neat rows of grapes and a grove of 300 olive trees. A wetland area at the foot of their 5ha Frenchman's Hill Estate property has been cleared and laced with walkways. >

**THESE PAGES** (clockwise from above) Anna loves "the pink inside and black outside" of the Cavit & Co desk in the living room – it was a gift from her mother; the cushion fabrics came from Atelier Textiles: "I do like cushions. They give a room a bit of personality." Anna bought the antique tapestry on the wall behind her from a client who was heading overseas. Anna makes exquisitely detailed dolls as well as these peg dolls, which are sold at Veranda store on the island.



**THIS PAGE** A double-sided Warmington fireplace allows both diners and loungers to enjoy heat and ambience; the French armoire, another gift from Anna's mother, stores tablecloths, place mats, wine glasses and candles. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) A chandelier from LA Imports hangs over an antique French walnut dining table, teamed with Lusty's Lloyd Loom painted cane chairs. The rustic-topped round table has a mechanism to adjust its height. Old urns, collected during Luc and Anna's travels, are teamed with a bird bought in Sydney.



These days, the Desbonnets' kitchen is stocked with home-produced honey and olive oil and this autumn there were figs and apples from their orchard.

The house itself has also been transformed. A nine-month renovation project reworked every room and more than doubled living space on the main floor. Retaining walls and excavation added a lower-level garage, a guest living space, a study and a wine cellar that includes bottles bearing Luc's Expatrius label.

"Most of our living is done on one level," says Anna of the house they have occupied for almost three years now. "Everything flows. I'm not up and down stairs and the laundry is big – it was the old kitchen – with loads of storage. Plus it faces exactly north so I've got sun all day long. I'm never cold. If I were designing a house from scratch, I'd do it the same."

Over summer, in between fostering an extra child, Anna took on another renovation project. The "foul and disgusting" studio apartment in an old implement shed has become a cottage for paying guests. Synthetic carpet, chipped blue walls and a grotty old toilet are long gone, leaving a charming two-bedroomed guest house (see more at [frenchmanshillestate.co.nz](http://frenchmanshillestate.co.nz)) with plenty of Anna's trademark quirky touches, such as the crocodile skin on the bathroom floor.

The skin came from her taxidermist brother Peter Wells, who is also responsible for the hand-crafted walking sticks in the main house, as well as an assortment of bone-handled cheese knives and wine openers and a ceiling fan made from wooden oars. >



**THIS PAGE** Olive reads to Alfie while Charlie grabs his own sofa in the children's living area where the large cushions are designed to be thrown on the floor and lounged on; four of the floral artworks were painted by Anna's great-grandmother; the rocking horse was a second-hand store find when Olive was a baby. **OPPOSITE** A pinboard in Anna's craft area displays family photos, favourite buttons, vintage peg dolls and cards and snippets of fabric and ribbon; the doll sitting in the pink high chair was a gift from Anna's grandmother, bought because it is made from vintage fabrics. >





**THIS PAGE** (clockwise from left) Alfie's bedroom walls are painted in Resene 'Paris White' and the old wrought-iron bed is piled with a mixture of old and new quilts, topped with a tapestry soldier Anna made. A pair of oars are propped in a corner of the boys' bathroom, which is fitted with a clawfoot bath from Robertson. Anna created the lampshade in Olive's bedroom by stringing buttons onto wire using jewellery-making tools.

**OPPOSITE** In the master bedroom, a carpet bag from La Cigale sits at the foot of the bed; the pressed tin pelmet above the door (there's a matching one in the kitchen) came from European Antiques.



Next on the agenda for the Desbonnets is a small shop for wine-tasting and sales of Anna's wares.

In the meantime, Luc, who began his wine career in France after studying viticulture and winemaking in Bordeaux, grows grapes and makes wine while managing and developing vineyards for other island clients. Most of Anna's design work is on the island too.

When the couple moved to Waiheke as newlyweds 12 years ago, she commuted to Auckland five days a week for work.

"We came to Waiheke because of the wine. I'd been here twice before we moved but I didn't really know what to expect. I didn't know a soul here.

"Now I have the hugest network of friends. There are some incredible people here and it's just so friendly. That sounds a bit corny but, really, it is easy and friendly and nothing's a drama. We have cool neighbours. Every second Wednesday night, five of us get together and have our craft night." >



**THIS PAGE** Roll-down plastic sides ensure the verandah, with its estuary and vineyard views, can be used in all weather; the chairs came from Perfect Pieces and the grape puncheon barrels are antique.  
**OPPOSITE** (from top) Dining and living room doors let the outside in. A ladder-back antique chair stands at the entrance to Frenchman's Hill Estate guest house; the concrete mushrooms are from the Red Shed art gallery on the island.

Anna is equally content creating in the kitchen. “When I was brought up, every Saturday morning I’d wake up to the noise of Mum’s cake mixer. Subconsciously I’ve fallen into that. I’ve usually got something either in the pantry or in the oven, which I’ve got to try to resist eating.”

She and Luc, who was born in New Zealand to a French father and New Zealand mother, were raised in similar homes, where antiques and good food were treasured and both their mothers made an art of homemaking. Anna and Luc aim to raise their own children in the same kind of environment.

“I grew up in one house, in Rotorua, and never moved,” says Anna. “And we needed to create a home here for the kids. I love cooking, making it cosy for people. I don’t even mind cleaning – I’m quite quick and good at it – and I don’t begrudge making a casserole or a slice. I actually like domestic chores.”

“My cousin calls me Martha Stewart, though I haven’t ended up in jail,” she says, laughingly referring to the American famous for both her criminal conviction and a global business built on domestic perfection.

“But then, I think home detention would be fantastic. I love everything about being home.” ■

**more ONLINE** See more at [nzhouseandgarden.co.nz](http://nzhouseandgarden.co.nz)



## Q&A

**This house works for children because:** They have their own end of the house. They can make a mess and we can shut the door if we want to. It’s also pretty robust with hard-wearing carpet but the kids are quite respectful. Okay, they jump on the couches occasionally but I’ve never moved an ornament or altered anything as they were growing up.

**I’m currently using my hot glue gun to:** Make cards and peg dolls, which I sell at a couple of local shops.

**My favourite store on the island is:** Victorian Gilt at Oneroa. When I was at art school they were at the top of Ponsonby Road and I used to buy old lace bloomers from them and wear them.

**Before we renovated:** I must admit I’d go to sleep at night and visualise areas and know exactly how they’d be when we were finished. And that’s exactly the way it looks.

**Now we’re done:** I’m always rearranging things or finding old bits of junk like the little white distressed corner cabinet that I put the loo paper in. Luc’s great. He gets it. His mum used to do the same thing. Luc is better outside and I’m better inside and we try to stick with that.

**We’re currently eating:** Roasted fresh figs from our property, stuffed with blue cheese, topped with a walnut, wrapped in bacon and baked. We eat them with a glass of Expatrius syrah.

*Anna Desbonnets*

