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## Rebirth for city cottage



Inside is light and spacious, with a mix of rimu floors and teal carpet.



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**W**ITH its gracious old homes and historic feel, upper Gover St, New Plymouth, is a pleasant environment.

At the top of the hill is the racecourse, Boys' High and the TSB Stadium. Further down, turning westward onto Fillis St, it's only a short step to the main gates of the city's iconic Pukekura Park; and at the bottom of the hill you are in the heart of the bustling CBD.

Bordered by Pukekura's serene bush, the house at No 98 Gover St started life more humbly, albeit earlier, than many of its neighbours.

Over the ensuing decades, the 1898 two-room cottage grew somewhat haphazardly, until about 13 years ago, thanks to its current owners, Murray and Gillian Grimwood, it slowly began undergoing metamorphosis.

Much like the tale of the ugly duckling turning into a swan, it has ultimately emerged as an elegant, contemporary home, with loads of panache and magnificent sea and city views.

The couple treated me to an intimate history of the charming property as well as its subsequent renovations, when I dropped by to see them this week.

The Grimwoods have been unable to discover who built the cottage originally, but in the late 1920s it was bought by a farming family from Urenui.

A year or so back, while they were still in the midst of refurbishment, they invited Mavis Smith, a daughter of that family and now well into her 90s, to

visit. "She told us she and her sister were in their teens when the family moved in here and that the two girls used to sleep on an open veranda under canvas," says Murray.

The next owners were the Hughson's of Hughson's Hardware.

"Their daughter Lois, who is now in her 80s, married Charlie Clement who worked for the company and Lois and Charlie moved into this house when their parents built on the tennis court, which was on the frontage of what is now the corner of Gover and Fillis streets."

Later it passed into the Henry Brown family who owned timber yards.

At one stage the property was being used as a rental, and there's a quirky tale — courtesy of Mavis Smith — about one of the tenants, a free-spirited French woman, who enjoyed a spot of tennis.

It so happened that a neighbouring house had a window over-looking the court and at that time it was occupied by Lord Ernest Rutherford's parents.

So the story goes, Mrs Rutherford looked out of her window one day and there was the lady and her companions playing tennis in the nude. She called out to her husband: "Jim, come and have a look at this . . . just once, mind!"

"We've actually only been living in the house for seven years," Gillian says.

"We bought it because of the view; we thought we'd do it up and it became a much bigger job than we ever intended; a huge reconstruction job."

"The original cottage spanned what's now the kitchen through to the back of the house where we've got the garage," says Murray.

"It was about nine metres long by four



Renovation has created an elegant, contemporary home, with loads of panache and magnificent sea and city views.

metres wide. Bits had been added on all over the place and it lacked any real cohesion.

"You had to go through a bedroom to get to the bathroom and it certainly didn't take advantage of the view."

However, with free labour — ie, Murray, a former joiner and carpenter, turned secondary school teacher — the couple could see all sorts of possibilities.

"Because of the various stages of development, the ceiling heights were all over the place.

"There was a 12ft stud in the living room, where the kitchen now is there was a 10 ft stud, and what had been the kitchen had a sloping ceiling which came down to under eight feet. I levelled the ceilings through at nine feet and put floor joists above which would allow you to build on top."

Murray has re-clad the house with new weatherboards, relined interior walls and put in insulation. It has been re-piled and there's new plumbing and wiring.

Everything, including the painting — a job Murray admits he hates — has been done meticulously.

"We were doing this for our retirement and he's very fussy," his wife says fondly.

But plans change. The couple have now bought an old farmhouse with an acre of land attached, in Levin, from Gillian's brother. "Instead of the sea we'll be watching sheep and cows," she laughs.

After initial attempts to come up with an interior design that worked proved elusive, the couple called upon the expertise of architect Ian Speirs. The structural engineering was done by John Chapman and decor themes were co-ordinated by interior designer, Helen Peters.

Nestled into the hillside, the facade is a pleasing mix of creamy taupe weatherboards and steel blue aluminium joinery. A trim, easy-care strip of landscaping, with pavers, river stones, raised beds and lawn, bounded by neat fencing, wraps around the contours.

A shallow arc of steps and black tiling graces the exterior entrance.

The interior is airy, light and spacious.

Warm, buttery cream walls accented by deeper-toned door frames, are complemented by pale, polished rimu floors and deep teal carpets.

The colour of the carpeting is re-interpreted in a feature wall in the foyer

where sunlight filters in through a two-dimensional skylight. Here, an antique wrought iron light fitting is suspended on a chain from the ceiling. The rest of the interior lighting is in the form of contemporary down lights.

A huge floor-to-ceiling bay window of curved glass panels, framing an ever-changing seascape, forms the focus of the expansive, north-west facing, open-plan living space. Doors on both sides open out to timber decking bordered by Venetian trellising.

A rimu-topped bar counter separates the well-planned kitchen off at the rear. An office-cum-study space opposite, accessed through cavity sliders would make an ideal dining room.

Three large bedrooms, including a master ensuite with walk-in robe, a main bathroom with corner spa, separate loo and laundry complete this stunning package.

Steve Beaven of Beaven Realty Ltd Professionals is conducting an open home at 98 Gover St, tomorrow from 1.45 to 2.30pm.

Price to be set by tender, closing March 6 at 4pm, unless sold prior. Marketed by Beaven Realty Ltd Professionals.