



HOME AT LAST

After living for years in houses with businesses attached, this Canterbury couple is relishing living in a place that's purely home

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THIS PAGE In Steve and Michelle Lassche's Sheffield, Canterbury home, the kitchen and dining area by the entrance is the first thing guests see: "Height is important to ensure it feels bright and airy," says Steve of the 5m pitched ceilings.

OPPOSITE Michelle's Crown Lynn swan collection: "I've always collected it because it's white, light and simple," she says.



THIS PAGE Lining the living room walls is vintage sporting paraphernalia salvaged from one of the Lassches' old houses (except for the snowshoes, which were bought on TradeMe); Steve made the coffee table from oak cut on the property. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top) "The kitchen benches are primarily used in the mornings, when the sun streams in," says Michelle. "And if Steve's been in the garden, we can eat out there with the windows open so he doesn't have to take off his boots"; the outdoor setting comes from the range of woven furniture imported from Scandinavia by Michelle's company WovenVeranda. Michelle is especially pleased with the rounded-down shape of the pewter kitchen handles; the walls are painted in Dulux 'Dannevirke'. The papier mâché gecko above the kitchen bench was made by a student who walked into the Arthur's Pass Store (then owned by the Lassches) selling art.



ALMOST EVERY HOUSE the Lassche family has ever owned has been a workplace first and a home second. "We've spent our lives buying businesses and doing them up," says Steve Lassche, husband of Michelle and father to Samantha and James. "We've owned a craft shop, motels in Hanmer Springs, a garden centre in Darfield and the Arthur's Pass Store." Adds Michelle: "Every house we've owned has had a business attached to it. This is the first time we've had a home."

That home – a three-year restoration project – is a 1939 three-bedroom weatherboard house near Sheffield in the Selwyn District of Canterbury. The couple bought it in 1999, but left it unrenovated for 10 years while they worked and lived elsewhere. "It was full of dust and birds were living in it," says Michelle. But, adds Steve, "we did come back to mow the lawns!"

Knowing their children would soon leave home, the Lassches kept their house to a manageable size, faithfully following the original footprint. Today, it's home to just the pair of them, plus their 14-year-old dog Floss. "We did have a turkey until last week," says Steve. "But he's in the freezer now." Adds Michelle: "If you woke up to that gobbling at 5am, you'd do it too."

Steve took care of most of the building and construction work himself and Michelle supervised the interior design, but they did use tradespeople when required. Those electricians, plumbers, drape-makers and other trades were all local. Community is important to them; in fact, their most memorable day in this house, soon after they shifted in, revolved around a party thrown to mark the end of the holidays (and return to boarding school) for the local children. >



THIS PAGE (clockwise from left) Family hats hang on an antique mirror by the front door. Irregular shaped tiles from The Tile Shoppe in the “boot bathroom” off the front entrance. The walls of this spare bedroom are painted in Dulux ‘Pukaki’. **OPPOSITE** (from top) The framed eastern view down the hallway is a favourite with the Lassches. The lampshade gracing this corner of the living room is covered in a Homebase Collections fabric chosen to match Michelle’s Crown Lynn swans.



“We love timber huts... but they’re dark. We wanted the woody feel, but it had to be whitewashed”



“It was a sunny January day,” recalls Michelle, “until about five o’clock, when a southerly rolled in and brought buckets of hail down on us. We all ran for cover indoors, muddy shoes and all. Not sure how I’d feel about doing that now!”

The new house came together over three summers. “It was too cold to work on it during winters,” says Steve. Scandinavian simplicity was the inspiration for the interior. “We love timber huts and have lived in them many times in places like Arthur’s Pass,” says Michelle. “But they’re dark. We wanted the woody feel, but it had to be whitewashed.”

From the entrance the house opens into a large open-plan living/kitchen/dining area. The original ceiling was taken out and whitewashed tongue and groove boards now slope up to a lofty peak of five metres.

“I remember being up there painting them – no easy task,” says Steve. It was right in the middle of summer and he reports steaming in the sauna-like atmosphere.

As in most country houses, the kitchen is the heart of the home. There’s a creamy Caesarstone-topped island and a long bench under the window, which looks out to a magnificent garden and expanse of lawn, sloping away to the north. >





THIS PAGE Among the trees beyond the lawn and the garden pond are a small weeping mulberry and a *Nyssa sylvatica*, "which has to live near water," says Michelle. "They look gorgeous in the autumn."

OPPOSITE (from top) From the bottom of the lawn's sloping gradient, amid 100-year-old trees, the Lassche house appears perched atop a small hill: "A great lawn for a water slide," says Michelle. The outdoor swing seat is from WovenVeranda, which Michelle calls "my little hobby company".



The kitchen is a place where visitors congregate. "Sheffield is a good 40 minutes out from Christchurch," says Michelle. "When people come over, they're not just popping in for a few minutes, so I love making meals to share with them."

The Lassches take food seriously: "We often sit down to eat and think, 'Everything on this table is homegrown,'" says Michelle. "We grow every vegetable possible in the garden, bake our own bread, get honey from our beehive, walnuts from the forest and make spreads from the orchard fruit. We've got sheep and chickens, and whitebaiting has become Steve's new hobby." "I've got almost enough for one patty," says Steve drily.

The Lassches are also a sporty lot. Keen mountaineers, skiers and rowers, their interests are reflected in the decor. Antique skis and ice axes are displayed in the living room and "just about every artwork in the house is a mountain scene," says Michelle.

A "light and airy" neutral palette accented with pale blue hues contributes to the Scandinavian feel. Honey-toned New Zealand maple floors run throughout the house and imperfect white Italian tiles feature in the kitchen and all three bathrooms. "The consistency keeps the house flowing," says Michelle.

The exterior of the house is half old, half new. "The old parts of the house are rimu weatherboards and the newly clad bits are pine. Now that they're painted, they are almost indistinguishable from each other," says Steve. >





THIS PAGE (from top) Steve on daily vege garden duties: “When the kids are home, they come down here and choose what they want to eat – raspberries, potatoes, tomatoes...” says Michelle. Michelle and Floss walk back from the vegetable garden.

The Lassches aim to stay in this house (and on its 4ha) “as long as possible”, so they’ve thought hard about sustainability. “We knew water would be an issue on the Canterbury Plains,” says Michelle, “so we wanted a well and water race.” Interior heating was the next step. “The wood-fired boiler feeds the central heating throughout the house and provides hot water,” says Steve. “All our energy is renewable, so power bills are minimal.”

From its position atop a gentle slope the house looks down towards century-old clusters of trees. A herbaceous border surrounds the lawn, with kowhai to attract the birds and, of course, there’s a rose garden. The Gertrude Jekyll-inspired design is based on a cross shape with three colour areas.

Though they’re not retired, tending to their property is the couple’s current focus. Says Michelle: “Steve always says, ‘A wealthy person is a person who can choose what they do with their day.’ He’s been telling the kids that for years. Now it’s finally true for us.” ■

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Q&A

Our house is: Clean, easy, sustainable and permanent. *(Michelle)*

Favourite original feature: The hallway arches. When you look down the hall to the western window and out onto the pastures it looks like a picture. *(Steve)*

Favourite design detail: The pewter kitchen handles. They’re rounded down so they don’t catch on pockets or aprons and they can be easily cleaned. *(Michelle)*

Favourite furniture: An oak coffee table and macrocarpa dining table I made with trees from the property. *(Steve)*

When the kids come home: They request two things, venison schnitzel and rhubarb butterscotch pie. They grew up with them – it’s the taste of home. *(Michelle)*

It’s a relief that: We haven’t had to clean the wagon-wheel chandelier in the living area. Because there’s no fire in the house, it remains quite dust-free. *(Michelle)*

This house is eco-friendly because: We collect most of our own water and compost everything. We just get our recyclables picked up once every few months. *(Michelle)*

Michelle and Steve Lassche

