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### Tuscan Touches

*Words by Catherine Wells/Photographs by Paul McCredie*

Wellington Real Estate Agent Maria Deane applied her understanding of property and house design to her own home and imbued it with the spirit Italy.

As you approach Eric and Maria Deane's elegant home in the heart of Karori you are transported to the Italian countryside. A magical combination of an Italianate courtyard overflowing with lavender and herbs, limestone paving, wooden shutters and the heavy stucco finish used to renovate the exterior of what was originally Chapman-Taylor cottage, is welcoming.



The sun colours everything and the charming wooden tower of nearby St. Mary's Anglican church is visible through the trees, making the whole scene like a postcard from Tuscany.

The sophisticated ambiance the Deanes have created was born out of a desire to own a home which would provide a restful retreat from the pressures of business.



A sense of country tranquility permeates the whole property, in spite of its situation in one of Wellington's most developed suburbs. The interior is open and spacious with the characteristic Chapman-Taylor windows affording glimpses of the informal gardens, designed with the help of landscape gardener Philip Roche.

"When I first came here," said Maria, "I thought I'd have one of those immaculate gardens on the terrace with just five lemon trees in pots, that kind of thing. But the house lent itself toward more relaxed planting. Now it is completely informal. An abundance of trees and plants blend together in casual harmony".

Maria prefers not to cut the grass too often so the daisies and dandelions can flower, and even the vegetable garden has become a feature with cabbages and beans adding a practical charm to a picturesque scene.

Maria and Eric bought the house just over two years ago. It was love at first sight for Maria, who had lived in a formal Georgian-style home for some years. She took a few steps down the drive and decided this was the one.

Inspiration for the renovation came, initially, from memories of a time spent in a villa north of Florence. "I wanted an informal house which allowed the sun inside," said Maria.

"The house appeared very dark initially with low ceilings. It just didn't capture the sun and make the living areas of the house appealing in the way I felt the hub of a home should."

"We started by taking out the ceiling in the family room, opening it up to the rafters and beams. The rest of the house was opened up in a similar way and then the tower wing was added, encompassing three bedrooms, bathrooms and a study."

With the help of friend and artist Gail Wilson, the interior walls were painted with three washes of Resene colour. The last coat was applied with an almost dry brush for a soft, aged finish. Gail also embellished the hall leading to the bedroom wing with trompe l'oeil treatments around the light fittings.

The main living room of the house is impressive. Seventy guests can be comfortably accommodated for drinks and at least twenty can be seated. Some of the furniture in this room came from Maria's previous home and other pieces were bought specially. Maria likes practical and useful wooden furniture, in particular oak, pine and fruit woods. Painted furniture is also a favorite because it gets better with age.

Maria admires the taste of Wairarapa antique expert Joanna Holmes, and has bought several of her favorite pieces from her. (Joanna's garden was featured in NZ House & Garden, July 1995). "Joanna has a brilliant eye".

Bottles of herbs, preserves, oils and vinegars are placed on trays and shelves within easy reach.

The house has beautiful outlooks from all windows. Many of the window fixtures required to match the original Chapman-Taylor windows were imported from Devon in the United Kingdom, where they were cast in special sand moulds.

The balcony which extends from the master bedroom on the tower wing gives the house a romantic quality and was commissioned from Wellington iron-mason Ran B Engineering.

It is not surprising that the Deanes chose to holiday at home last Christmas. Who needs Tuscany when you own a house and garden that is so utterly relaxing and pleasing to the eye when viewed from any direction?