

VILLA

THE

AN AUCKLAND ARCHITECT SWITCHES UP THE FORMULA ON THE VICTORIAN VILLAS THAT POPULATE HIS NEIGHBORHOOD.

TEXT BY Sam Eichblatt PHOTOS BY Pippa Drummond

PEOPLE



The house that Richard Naish of RTA Studio created for his family in Grey Lynn, Auckland (opposite), is a series of pavilions and courtyards designed to make the most of the narrow site and the area's mild weather. The kitchen and dining room is lined in knotty cedar planks (below). A pair of Danish modern chairs face a cowhide rug—a family heirloom.





Grey Lynn, an inner-city suburb in Auckland, New Zealand, is known for its steep terrain, tree-shaded streets, and late-19th-century timber villas, often clustered in groups of three or more by the same builder. Within this heritage residential zone now rises a newcomer: an angular, steel-roofed house that is radically different, yet subtly shares some of its neighbors' DNA.

Designed by architect Richard Naish for his own family, the house is not a single structure, but three separate two-story pavilions that march upward from the

street along a gentle slope, connected by a stepped hall that ascends up one side.

"Essentially, a villa is a square box with a four-sided pyramid roof," says Rich, founder of local firm RTA Studio. "We sliced that into quarters and spread them out to give the house a familiar roofline that's only slightly abstracted and repeats that cluster of three found in the area."

The pavilions each have a footprint of roughly 385 square feet and are separated by small courtyards and "garden rooms," allowing for both excellent solar gain in winter and ample cross-ventilation during

the warmer months. The layout is the antithesis of an open plan. Instead, it offers individual spaces for Rich and his family—his wife, Andrea, and their three children ages 16, 14, and 10—to find privacy. RTA Studio often explores what Rich calls "the distributed plan," pulling houses apart into smaller segments and taking advantage of New Zealand's mild climate by creating interstitial outdoor spaces.

The Naishes' house is a prime example. The first courtyard lies between the kitchen, on the top floor of the lowest pavilion, and the living room, on the first >

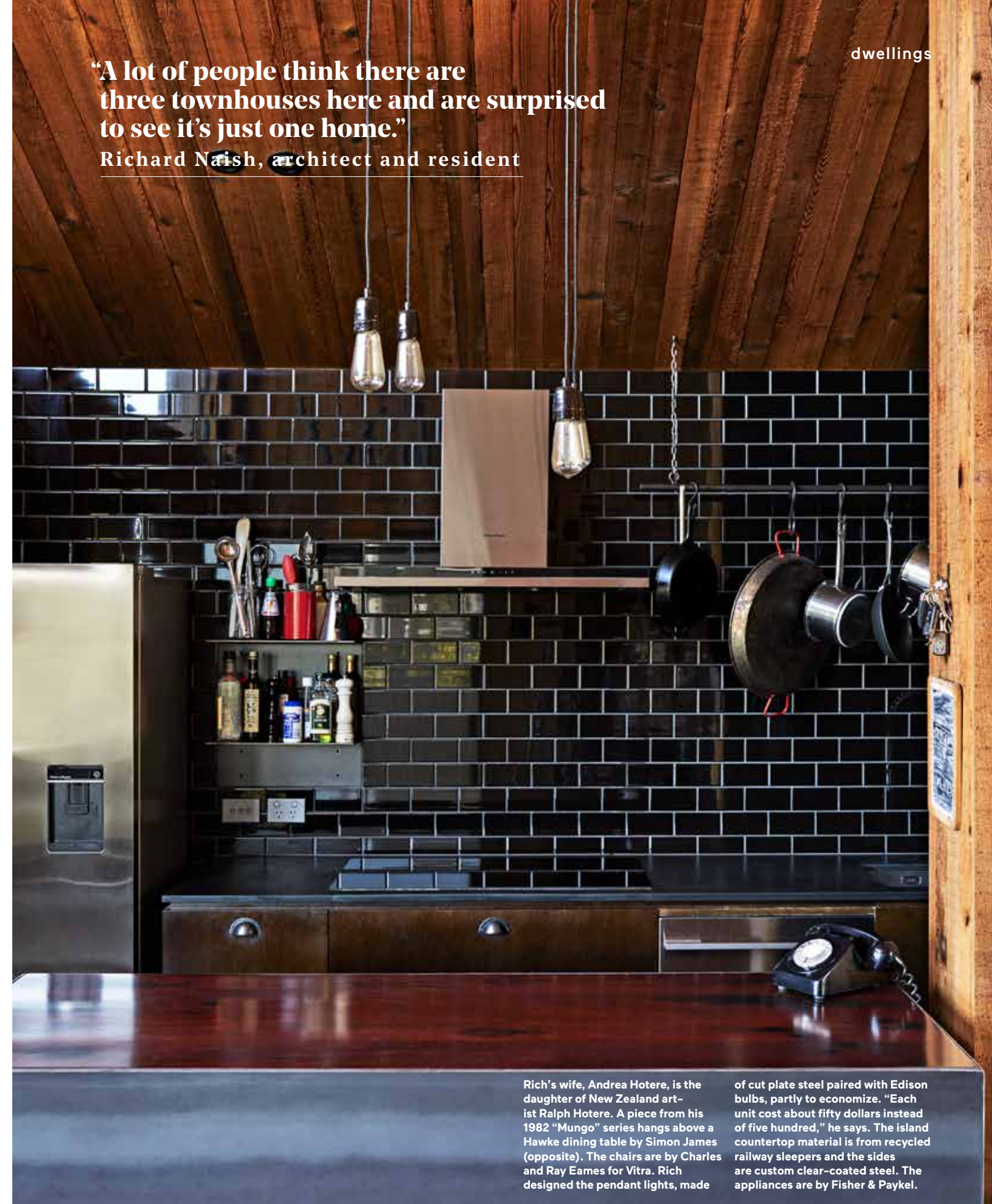
Buffalo Construction and engineering firm HFC Group worked with Rich to build the 3,000-square-foot home. The exterior is clad in western red cedar and the roofs are black factory-painted galvanized corrugated steel. The front entrance (opposite, top right) leads to the house's "circulation spine" (opposite, top left), a concrete-block-lined hallway that connects the pavilions. The rope door pulls (opposite, bottom left) are Rich's creation; ample greenery in the courtyards softens the neutral material palette (opposite, bottom right).





“A lot of people think there are three townhouses here and are surprised to see it’s just one home.”

Richard Nash, architect and resident



Rich’s wife, Andrea Hotere, is the daughter of New Zealand artist Ralph Hotere. A piece from his 1982 “Mungo” series hangs above a Hawke dining table by Simon James (opposite). The chairs are by Charles and Ray Eames for Vitra. Rich designed the pendant lights, made

of cut plate steel paired with Edison bulbs, partly to economize. “Each unit cost about fifty dollars instead of five hundred,” he says. The island countertop material is from recycled railway sleepers and the sides are custom clear-coated steel. The appliances are by Fisher & Paykel.

floor of the middle one. With sliding doors open on all three sides, this collection of indoor and outdoor spaces becomes a single whole. The second courtyard flows from the master bedroom on the top floor of the middle pavilion to the bottom level of the third, which is the children's domain.

The courtyards extend well past and alongside the pavilions, with a secluded outdoor dining area set up on the first level. "When we looked at the second outdoor space, we found a real sun-trap on the northern side of the top hut, which was the obvious place for the swimming pool," says Rich. "The kids can be up there doing their thing while we have a reasonable separation on the level below."

An outdoor stair connects the two courtyards, skirts the pool, and then rises to what Rich has christened "the backyard," a third outdoor space at the summit of the property that catches the last rays of the sun and features reclaimed bluestone paving, fruit trees, and an edible garden.

Despite its sprawl, the house also contains intimate spaces for the family to come together. The kitchen/dining room, situated over the garage and entryway in the first pavilion, forms the social hub of the home.

This space holds special significance for the residents. Andrea's late father was Ralph Hotere, one of New Zealand's leading modern artists, and the couple have fond memories of the kitchen in her childhood home, which was lined in native Kauri tongue-in-groove boards and warmed by a wood-burning stove. For seating, there was a church pew. Above the dining table hung one of Hotere's groundbreaking stainless steel works.

Today the piece hangs in the family's new dining area, which is also heated by a stove, but the pew has been replaced by a built-in bench seat, and the walls and angled ceiling are clad in knotty cedar planks. "There's something comforting in creating a sense of continuity and an autobiographical arrangement of materials and spaces," says Rich. "We wanted to evoke the same feeling as that old villa."

And like those old timber villas, the new home has a kind of provincial charm. "We often think of it as a little village," says Rich. "The main spine is the metaphorical street, the courtyards and garden rooms are all nominally exterior spaces, and then to go inside, you enter a small timber hut. We were looking at new ways to occupy these narrow Grey Lynn sites, and this has given us a lot of options." ■



"The beauty of the house is that everyone can find an area to be alone, but the spaces are generous enough that you can come together as well."

Richard Naish



A small pool (opposite, top) is positioned at the side of the third pavilion. Stairs lead up to a lounge area and edible garden. "That spot catches the last rays of the sun, so it's a great place for a gin and tonic at the end of the day," says Rich. "You get this nice layered view all the way down the site and across to Grey Lynn Park." In the ivy-covered garden on the first level (opposite, bottom left), Alice, 16, sits near "Rakaia 2," a rock sculpture by New Zealand artist Chris Booth. The western red cedar used for the exterior and some of the interior (opposite, bottom right) is clear-coated in Dryden's Wood Oil. The windows throughout the house are by Architectural Profiles Limited. In the master bedroom (left and far left) the high triangular window is "excellent for star-gazing," says Rich.

E-Type House



ARCHITECT **RTA Studio** LOCATION **Grey Lynn, Auckland, New Zealand**

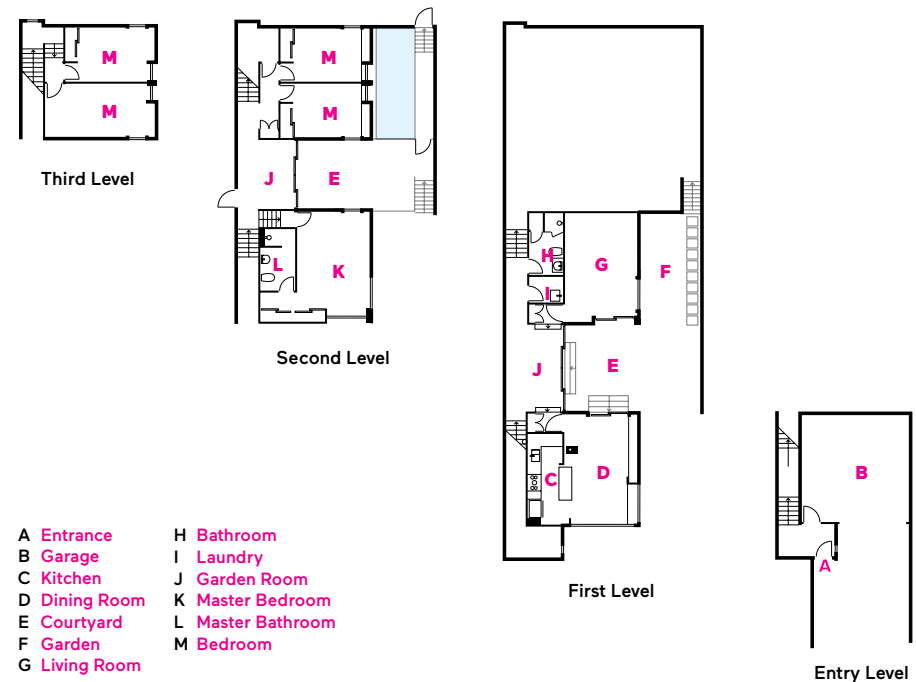


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