

AT HOME WITH... Claire Beynon

Renovating a character villa in Dunedin sees this popular artist merge history with creativity.

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IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT CLAIRE Beynon describes herself as a private person when she immediately puts others at ease. Seated around her rustic dining table it was very easy to pass an entire afternoon away with her while being immersed in a warm, friendly and artistic vibe.

Several years ago Claire stumbled across a slightly run down Dunedin villa and instantly knew that it had to be hers; months later it was. After using the villa and on site 'shed' as her studio for a length of time, fate stepped in and forced Claire to make it her home.

"After working late in my studio one rainy night, I walked into the main house to discover water streaming through every crack and crease in the house." After what has become known as the "flood" Claire spent hours gathering and scouring local junk shops and demolition yards to find the perfect materials to restore her house to a home. "It's a lot of old bits and pieces coming together from all over at a low cost. The house was built in 1882 and

TOP RIGHT In 1870 the first morse code in New Zealand was sent from the front door steps of Claire's home. The steps look out across the Otago Peninsula to Portobello, where the message was received.
OPPOSITE PAGE "The spine and nervous system of the home is my studio. I was lucky enough to come across a radiator fill from an old factory which now stands in the studio, running from floor to ceiling and contains all the wiring for the home."

as I am only the fifth owner I wanted to restore it to some of its former glory and in a way that was sympathetic to its age." That was just over four years ago and the final result is a home which has been thought-out to the very last detail.
"When I bought the house the toilet was outside through a covered courtyard." To prevent chilly outdoor excursions in the middle of the night Claire enclosed the courtyard and turned it into her studio. Once the courtyard was enclosed, a wall was knocked down creating an open plan studio which looks through the kitchen and out into the garden.

FAVOURITE THINGS

Find inspiration in... "sitting at my writing desk in my bedroom. I can see the birds playing in the bird feeder and the water from here."

Enjoy... "escaping from the world into the loft which overlooks the studio. It is a great place to retreat and get an overview of the work I'm in the middle of below."

Love most... "that I was able to renovate my home based on musical proportions or the golden ratio. The same proportions re-occur in music, art, architecture and nature and I was lucky enough to find an architect who worked with me and was sympathetic to this request and help me create my personal sanctuary." The golden ratio is believed to be more aesthetically pleasing.



A tribute to the history of the house is the “writing wall” in the hallway, which has been left exposed to show the water damage caused during the “flood”. The wall is used by Claire to write notes, inspirational quotes and to doodle on when needed.

It is however the open plan kitchen and studio which instantly grabs your attention. Moving to New Zealand from South Africa in the early nineties, Claire has an established artistic career in both countries, and hence this is the hub of her home. Her own beautiful art work adorns the kitchen wall and is a symbol of the transition and impact migrating to New Zealand had on her and her family. “It’s one of those pieces that is like a page from a diary for me; it’s an important piece that I just needed to hold on to.”

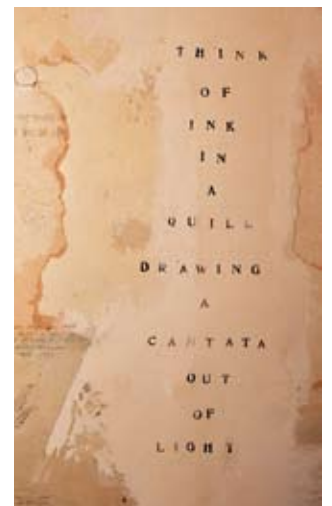
Creating large scale paintings which play with abstract forms, Claire’s works are the quintessential embodiment of serenity and evoke notions of a calming stillness, with deeper undertones. Her latest body of work ‘Question of Balance’, explores ideas of balance and poise, and that no matter how fast life moves we all search for and seek stillness and balance. Each body of work allows Claire to expand and explore areas of creativity, with large scale sculptural pieces and installations.

After a series of odd encounters and chance meetings Claire found herself working with American scientists and part of a science-art collaboration



ABOVE By extending her kitchen benchtop in width, Claire was able to create a single large working space for cooking and a perfect place for her to display her vast collection of books, including her own poetry and images collection, Open Book.

TOP & BELOW LEFT – Claire’s writing desk in her bedroom is a place of constant inspiration.
BELOW Part of the “writing wall” in the hallway which is covered in quotes, sayings and snippets.



in Antarctica. Venturing twice to the glacial continent has had a huge impact on Claire’s work and has led to various other artistic collaborations like that of ceramic vases, created with South African contemporary Katherine Glenday. Experimenting with notions of abstraction and sound the vases can be played with a soft head drum stick to produce beautiful and varying pitches and tones. The vases were made by Katherine, painted by Claire and transported to Scott Base to experiment with sound in a large empty vast space.

Working in what could be described as muted and dark colours, Claire’s

work takes on a monochromatic feel which draws you in, captivates and allows you to view and experience the hidden messages, colours and tones. “Drawing is my passion but I love all surfaces and the way that art allows you to communicate with a huge range of people” and it is certainly this love and passion for all that is associated with creativity which sets her apart from the crowd. ■

For more on Claire’s work visit www.clairebeynon.co.nz. Alternatively you can see her latest collaborative body of work with Kate Alterio, at Gallery 33 Wanaka from 20 November – 11 December.