

After receiving an unthinkable prognosis, this homeowner threw his arms around his family in the biggest, most beautiful way.

# I'LL BE LOVING YOU

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When life gives you lemons, most people make lemonade, but not New Plymouth's Brooke and Lucie Wolfe. When served the sourest variety of all, they decided to make a house.

Two years before Brooke was dealt the devastating diagnosis of a brain tumour, the couple (who've been together for 17 years and have two children, Millie and Oscar) had bought a house just around the corner from their home to rent out while making long-term plans. "Then after Brooke had his surgery, he was given the horrible news that he'd likely have two years max," says Lucie. "I remember he rang me in a mess saying, 'Let's build a house.'"

"I'd renovated before and had always wanted to build, so it was just like, well, there's no better opportunity," says Brooke. "I can't sit back and do nothing — I'm going to build a house for my family."

"To be honest, it sounded a bit crazy, like how are we going to fit all this in?" says Lucie. "But it was actually good for making us forget about other things."

Heart set, the hard-working owner for 11 years of New Plymouth's Burger Fuel franchise threw himself into designing a rough floorplan for a house to replace the existing rented-out dwelling, drawing on his and Lucie's love of the mid-century Palm Springs aesthetic. The next step was to engage architect Richard Furze, a childhood friend

who ultimately became family when his brother married Brooke's sister. Making this very much the house that love built, two of their nephews also joined the project team, as a builder and a labourer.

"Chooky and Lucie have great style, and it was good to work with friends who were keen to do something a little different," says Richard. "The site predominately drove the layout, with a key aim being to gain as much sun and as many views of the mountain as possible. We wanted to use the expanse of the site, include a loft above the garage and a big outdoor space, and use concrete blocks, so it was cool to be able to incorporate the raw blocks internally and externally to make a feature of a product most people see as cheap."

"Neither of us wanted a grand house or one that looked new," says Lucie. "We wanted something that kept everyone together and felt lived-in straight away." The upshot is an L-shaped abode that maximises the full width of the long, narrow section, with a wing down the side housing the bedrooms and bathrooms. The cinder-block wall is its backbone and adjoins the self-contained loft where Lucie's sister lives with her husband and their toddler, having recently moved from Auckland to join the rest of the whanau and provide extra support for Brooke and Lucie. >

**ABOVE** Some of the original 1950s dwelling's solar blocks were retained and reused for the front wall, and the wrought-iron poles that held up the awning at the front have also been saved and may get a new lease on life in the pool area out the back. **OPPOSITE** White bricks on the front of the kitchen island provide another textural link to the home's exterior. Pictured on the left wall here is a photo by US photographer Slim Aarons, whose work was a key inspiration for the home. For their first Christmas here, Brooke bought Lucie this shot taken in Palm Springs in 1970 at the Kaufmann House designed by Richard Neutra in 1946. **PREVIOUS PAGE** The couple went with cedar for the outdoor areas and Vitex hardwood decking. The built-in seating on the front deck was designed by Brooke and meticulously finished by builder Brad Stokell, a former joiner. The garden is gradually being filled with easy-care plants, including, says Lucie, "lemon and lime trees for the gin and tonics".



## THE PROJECT

Former Burger Fuel owner Brooke Wolfe and his teacher wife Lucie built this three-bedrooms-plus-loft home in New Plymouth's Welbourn for themselves and their children Millie (10) and Oscar (8).



**KITCHEN** Designer Annika Rowson created a mid-century-style kitchen that teams the herringbone floor with keruing timber, white-grey cabinetry, Corian benching and Fisher & Paykel appliances. A horizontal splashback window lets in natural light and a beautiful green view, and there's also a scullery nook that caters for food storage and coffee prep.

Other standout features of the build include the elegant herringbone floor, on which the couple cleverly cut costs by opting for vinyl planking, and the huge skylight in the open-plan living area, one of several well-placed windows that create pockets from which to gain glimpses of the outside and stay connected to everyone inside – which Brooke says is all fun and games until he tries to sneak a biscuit from the pantry without being caught.

“We’re hard up against a couple of houses, but the way the house is designed, you barely notice the neighbours,” he says. “You can see the moon coming up in the kitchen, though, and big pohutukawa trees through the skylight, or all of a sudden a flock of birds flying overhead.”

Emotions run high as Brooke and Lucie recall the dedication of their builders, LA Homes, led by owners Kurt Lines and Rob Aim and foreman Brad Stokell, as well as electrician Brad Nagle, plumber Richard Bryant, Annika and Brad Rowson of Rowson Kitchens, Blair Gemmell of Company of Tiles and bricklayer Peter Leach. They all “absolutely slogged their guts out” to get the Wolfes into their new home days before a very special extended-family Christmas.

“Everyone was in tune and we’re just so grateful,” says Brooke. “I’d trip over walking around the site sometimes and the builders would pick me up off the ground. We’ve been very humbled by the whole experience.”

With the help of their “phenomenal” crew and “priceless” family, this project of a lifetime has been a real joy, and a testament to the pair’s simpatico bond. “Everyone tells you, ‘Don’t be stressed, give your brain a rest’, but you’ve got to seize the moment,” says Brooke. “The beauty of it was that me and Lucie are pretty much on the same page with everything, so that made it really easy.”

“We’re a bloody good team,” says Lucie. “I think my measure of what a great job we’ve done is that I could just stay at home all day every day now. I love walking through the front door with the kauri doorknob Brooke made – just another way in which he’ll always be in this house.”

“I’m just so proud of being able to provide for my family with a house they can live in forever,” says Brooke. And if these beautiful walls could talk, they’d surely say the same: ever thine, ever mine, ever ours. ♣



**ABOVE** Mid-century furniture and other unique finds have been the order of the day here, much specified by Lucie then cleverly sourced by Brooke, who’s always had a thing for retro stuff and enjoys hunting out just the right one-off pieces at just the right price, like the olive sofa and gold chairs he had sent up from Nelson’s Junk Style. The Persian rug was a Vintage Industries find, as were the pendant lights in the kitchen. **LEFT** The couple elevated the cinder-block wall with a bit of detail appropriate for an interior look, incorporating full and half bricks into the design. “This main spine wall [visually] links the interior and exterior,” says Richard. “It’s also a great heat sink in winter to keep the house warm in the evening.” The home’s common areas are painted in Resene Karen Walker Wan White.

**LIVING** Lucie loves the way the home’s sight lines create a feeling of togetherness by allowing the family to see where everyone is. Meanwhile, glorious Mount Taranaki can be spotted “from the lounge, from the hallway, from our bedroom, from upstairs – and from the toilet,” says Brooke.



**MASTER BEDROOM** Painted in Resene Karen Walker Foggy Grey, the couple's room is a treasured haven. "Most of all, I'm extremely proud of Brooke and how hard he worked for so long," says Lucie. "I think about all the hours he put into his business — and now what saddens me is that he can't reap what he's worked so hard for, to provide for us. All those times when I'd tell him to stop working a million hours a week, and now we've got this — and I'll forever be grateful for that."



**LEFT** The powder room's personality is defined by the Cole & Son Palm Leaves wallpaper from Artisan. **ABOVE** Recycled glass tiles from Tile Space feature in various shapes, colours and sizes in the main bathroom, laundry and ensuite; these are Mini Dots. **BELOW** Oscar's room is painted in Resene Shadowy Blue. "The kids loved our old house and couldn't see why we needed to move," says Lucie. "But the other night Oscar was lying in bed and said, 'Look at my bedroom — I'm the luckiest kid in the world.'"

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**MAIN BATHROOM** Brooke devised the bathrooms using Lego to create the layouts to scale. Hero items he and Lucie opted for here include a Joska & Sons mirror custom-made to match the length of the oak vanity from Plumblin, a basin from Stone Baths and Buddy tapware from Plumblin.



**DESIGN DETAILS**

**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE** Line light, \$398, douglasandbec.com. Poolside Party by Slim Aarons photographic print, from \$820, greenwithenvy.co.nz. Paradise City potted plant, \$90, silllife.co.nz. Wrap stool, from \$450, timwebberdesign.com. Seagrass belly basket, \$50, shutthefrontdoor.co.nz. Frederick three-seater sofa, \$3399; Zoe cushion, \$80, achomestore.co.nz. Brass planter by Lightly, \$139, superette.co.nz. Mini Drum ottoman, \$495, meandmytrend.com.

