

Riccarton ritz



A Riccarton home has all the trimmings.

A stone's toss from Riccarton House is a warm and bright family home that offers every modern convenience.

Riccarton Ritz by Rosa Shiels

In a high-tech house opposite Deans Bush, there are no dangling electrical leads to trip over, no unnecessary light switches, and no overstuffed wardrobes. Every practicality has been accommodated, and with style.

The home of Sarah and Stu Lassche-Jones and their two young daughters is comfortable and uncluttered, courtesy of built-in wardrobes, clever panelling, and hotel-style features: lights, security, heating and music controlled by Smart-HDL automation, and centralised vacuuming. There are also secret spaces.

It could be said that insider knowledge was at play. Sarah qualified as an interior designer nearly 20 years ago. These days, she works in architectural specification.

"I'll get a plan and specify from the ground up everything you see and touch - the cladding systems, the roofing, right down to the last plughole. Everything you see in here, I've designed - cabinetry and so on," she says. "And it's all as cutting-edge as I could source at the time."

The north-west facing house, completed by architectural designer Murray Brown and Daniel Huggins Builders, stretches deep into the 759sqm block.

The first "room" you come to is an outdoor-indoor porch. With its rolled-arm bamboo sofas, gas fire and overhead radiant heaters; it is the perfect place to relax and watch the weekend market comings and goings. With the heaters roaring, Sarah says, "it's like Brisbane out there".



Sarah Lassche-Jones designed a home as cutting-edge as possible.

Bi-fold aluminium sliders open into the family room and kitchen. The slate greys, earthy hues and a "white that throws green" background are enhanced with textures and splashes of colour. There's a bench top in Caesarstone Raven with high-gloss enamel sides, horizontal-grain oak pantry doors and metal panelling to hide the ducted air-conditioning system, vibrant striped cushions, a spot lit scarlet vase, Hawaiian reef-stone fireplace and a shaggy, schnauzer-grey rug.

A bar-leaner, topped with a thick slab of leather-look granite, is a wink at Kiwi pub culture. Made for adults to lean or sit at, it required an extra foundation for support.

The main support device is an exposed, black-painted metal beam, which frames the kitchen. When the June aftershocks hit, Sarah was outside talking to a painter. While he ran outside, she ran back in and grabbed hold of the beam. "The house is over-engineered - thankfully," she says. "To be fair, the ground would be in its favour as well. It seems a little bit stonier here. We were pretty lucky, really."

While the house has proven strong against big shakes so far, you can see evidence of destruction from their previous home in a small courtyard off the family room, where shards from a broken Venetian glass mirror and other former fragile favourites catch the light in Sarah's mosaic pathway.

Native birdsong emanates frequently from the bush opposite, so aesthetic details have been tailored to suit the location. The skylight above the hefty doors of recycled Canadian Oregon in the formal two-storey entranceway has been printed with a photograph of Deans Bush. "We picked the best photo, amped up the colour and blotted out the sky, so what you see is the real sky coming through."

Open the double-cavity sliders near the front door and you step inside an art deco-influenced home cinema. The ochre ceiling, claret-red wallpaper, floral dado, gilt cherub sconces and mini-chandelier recall movie houses of old. A large screen drops from the ceiling when required and the Indian walnut hardwood floor, which continues into the hallway, downstairs toilet and pristine white-on-white laundry, enhances the acoustics.

The guest room shines in silver and glossy blacks, with textured wallpaper matching the metallic princess bed and Kylie Minogue bed linen. In the ensuite, the Spanish-made black vanity is paired with embossed black shower tiles. A mermaid plaque by Lynn Waldegrave overlooks proceedings.

"It's all about mixing it up," Sarah says. "We wanted opulence, like being in a European hotel." A suitcase holder in the wardrobe completes the allusion.

If Sarah can't find a particular item in New Zealand, she will source it and import it. The spectacular amber-glass, Czechoslovakian chandelier above the stairwell is a case in point. "It was my big indulgence." Lit or unlit, the chandelier casts magical prismatic beams across the walls and stairwell.

Upstairs, the master bedroom is spacious and uncluttered. Stu and Sarah both have walk-in wardrobes and an arched picture window frames the entrance to Riccarton House opposite. The ceiling light throws out diamond sparkles and double-glazing and interior shutters (featured throughout the house) provide extra security, warmth and noise control.

The ensuite has a paler version of the guest bathroom's tiles, with heated-glass towel rails ("hot off the press") and an oval double-width basin. A skylight helps open up the canted ceiling and halogen downlighting illuminates the shower rainhead.

The office is also sky lit to counter the slanted roofline, and has a clubby feel with traditional public-service desk and striped, flocked wallpaper dado to give it height.

Six-year-old Lucy's room is bright and jazzy, with pink flocked wallpaper and matching chandelier, built-in cabinetry and a big bunk bed with a double below and a single deck above.

Amy, 10, has a more formal room, with décor matched to the blue-glass-drop chandelier; blue wallpaper with gilt flourishes, duck-egg blue walls, cream Kylie bed linen and shiny turquoise pillow.

And herein are the secret spaces: inside each of the girls' rooms is an extra door. Behind the extra door is a spangly beaded curtain and beyond the curtain is the secret room-within-a-room. Lucy's hideaway is papered with over scale Buddha and butterflies, while Anna has a big-city nightlife skyline, both sourced by Sarah from the *National Geographic* book of wallpaper.

Movement-sensor lighting features throughout the house and is a good electricity saver in the girls' toilet and black-and-white bathroom, with its oval bath and sink, black glitter vanity tiles and iridescent Cubica porcelain wall tiles.

Along the hallway there is a colourful alcove where orange plexiglass shelving stores toys and books, and a fluffy rug delineates the area as the children's hobby corner.

The end of the hall opens on to an all-ages retro-look games room in red, white, black and chrome, with its bar, disco ball, vinyl milk-bar booth, TV and PlayStation, treadmill, foosball table and Warhol's Marilyn Monroe print on the wall.

Outside stairs double as a fire escape and lead down to the garden area, with its raised vegetable beds and large garage to accommodate two cars and Stu's hot-rod hobby re-build. Windows in the side wall and double doors maximise light, and the carpet is stain and water-resistant.

A place for everything and everything in its place. "My style is all about purpose; about defining a space for how you want to feel in it," Sarah says.

She has achieved this by tailoring the rooms to suit the family's individual personalities and combined needs, and by pairing old-fashioned warmth and comfort with state-of-the-art mechanisms. Now, no more shakes, please.

