

Flexible and versatile

Transformed kauri villa close to Ponsonby is ready for its next family, writes Donna Fleming

Weekend Herald 6 Jan 2018

Maurice Mehlhopt is often told how lucky he is to live just a stone's throw from Ponsonby Rd. But that wasn't the case when he first moved into his kauri villa in 1978. Back then the inner city suburbs of Freemans Bay and Ponsonby were considered less than desirable. Many of the homes had become run-down and unloved, and the shops and eateries in Ponsonby Rd were a far cry from the trendy boutiques, bars and restaurants there today.

"There was a fish cannery around the corner that stunk to high heaven," says Maurice. "When it came to restaurants, you had Ivan's, which did steak and egg and chips. It was very different to today."

Maurice originally rented the house, which had recently been renovated, from its owner and when the opportunity arose to buy it two years later for

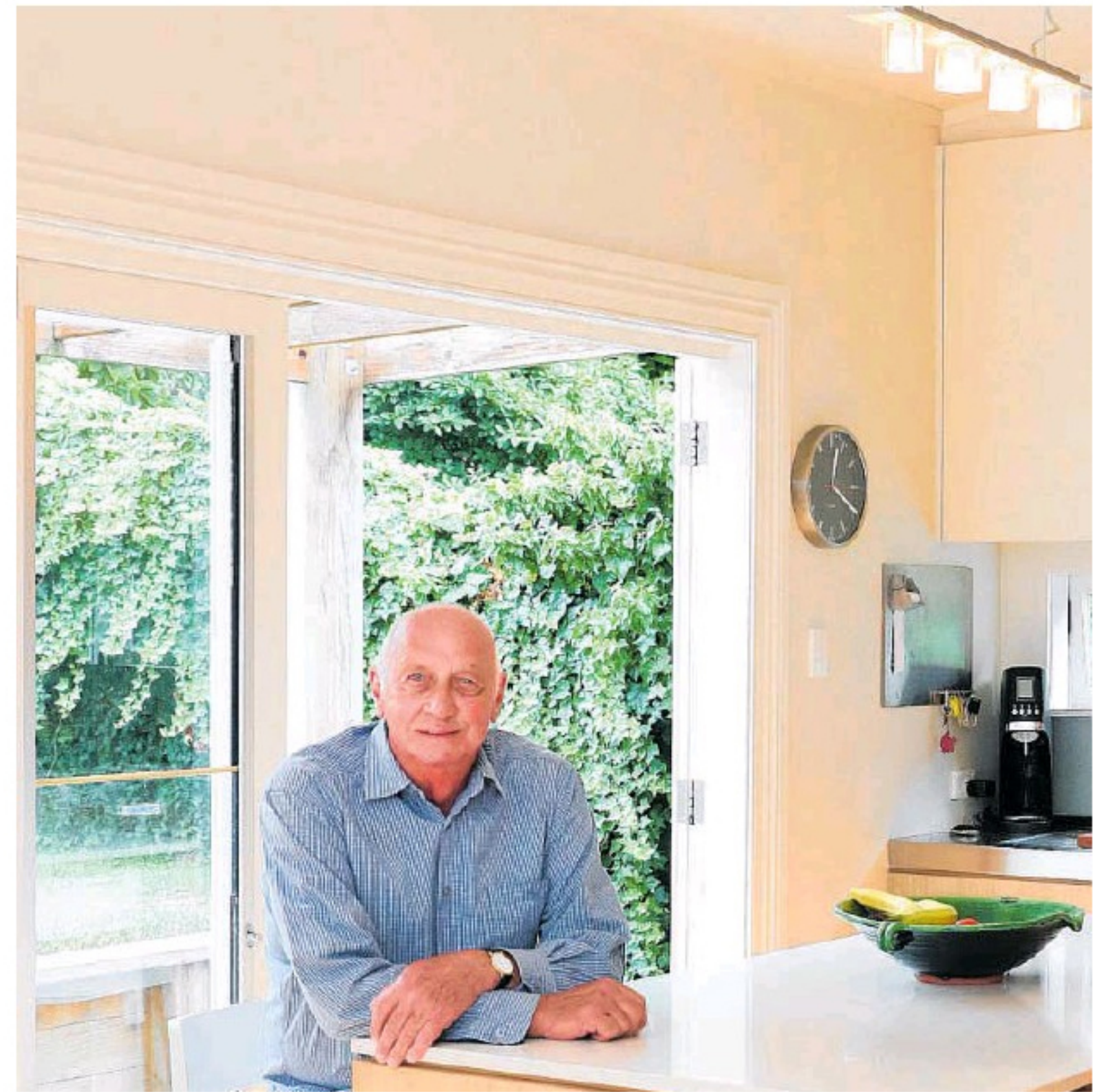
\$100,000, he jumped at the chance.

The three-bedroom home was a great place to raise his sons Greigh and Ryan and when the boys were teenagers, it became known as Club Maurice, because it was a safe place where all their mates could hang out.

By the time Maurice's partner Clare O'Higgins moved in in 1995, the urban regeneration in the area was well under way. The couple, who have a son, Flynn, decided it was time their home had a makeover and started in 2000 by digging out underneath it.

This created a large tandem garage with a laundry and workshop area, along with a room that is currently used as an office but has also been a playroom, and would make a good media room.

The renovation also allowed them to turn the narrow porch at the front of the house into a large deck that enjoys great



PHOTOS / GETTY

views of the city and Sky Tower.

"It's the perfect place to watch the fireworks on New Year's Eve," says Clare.

In 2007 she and Maurice enlisted ar-

chitects Smith + Scully to further transform the house. The master bedroom was reconfigured, adding a walkin wardrobe with clever storage solutions such as pull-down double-height clothes

both bathrooms. A laundry chute installed in the family bathroom means dirty washing doesn't have to be carted downstairs.

A lean-to kitchen was replaced with a generous designer kitchen and dining area that extends the width of the house. The kitchen also has plenty of storage and a central island with a stone benchtop around which people tend to congregate.

A glass ceiling above the dining space floods the area with light, as do folding glass doors along the back wall.

"You can open up just about the whole back of the house to the garden, which is lovely in summer," says Clare.

The back deck is covered, so can be used in all weathers.

"It's like another room — we spent a lot of time out here," says Clare.

The northwest-facing garden is private and get lots of sun. A built-in brick fireplace has proved popular over the years with teens who like to pull up beanbags and gather around it.

Many years ago the original wash house was converted into a spa pool room. The spa no longer works but there are plenty of options for transforming the space.

While the renovations carried out to the house brought it up to date, Maurice and Clare were careful to make sure



their home didn't lose any of its period features. It still has high board and batten ceilings, sash windows, original fireplaces and kauri floors that give it so much character. They had been planning on extending upwards, but feel it is time for a change.

"We will miss Ponsonby Rd being a

minute away," says Clare, listing Prego and Ponsonby Central as two of their favourite local haunts.

Maurice says: "We've definitely been spoiled, living here. It was a good move."

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4 COLLINGWOOD ST, FREEMANS BAY Size (more or less): Land 328sq m, house

177sq m.

PRICE GUIDE: RV \$1.49 million. Sale by negotiation.

INSPECT: Sat/Sun, noon to 12.30pm.