

NZ HOUSE & GARDEN

MARCH
2004

Screen Star



\$8.95
NCL GST



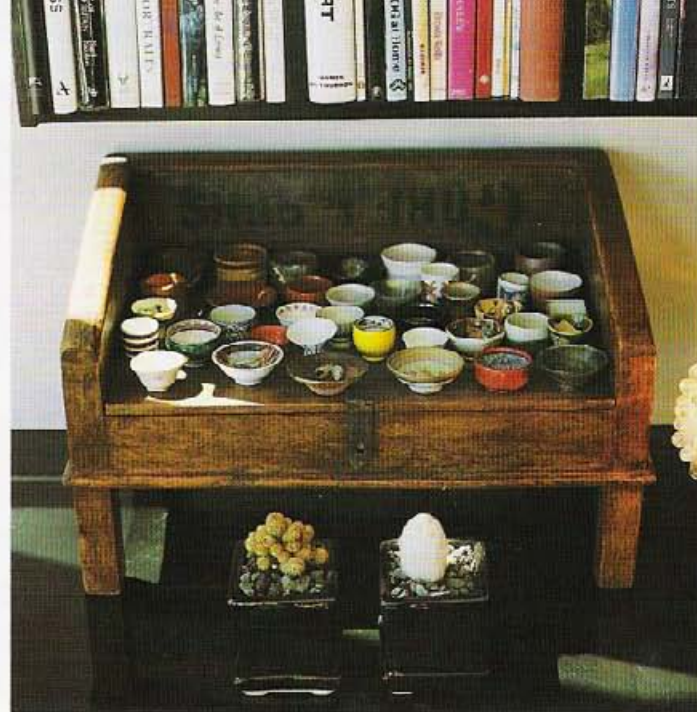
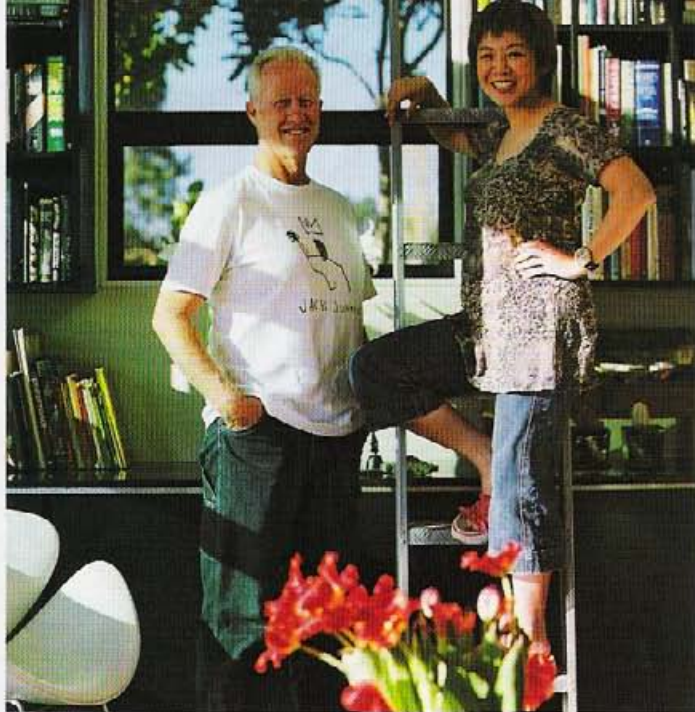
Stellar Marlborough garden • Miranda Harcourt's family home
Ode on a Masterton urn • Fashionable furniture • Easter feast



A photograph of a modern interior space. On the left, there is a dark wooden bar area with a small illuminated display. In the center, a dining table with a light-colored top and dark legs is surrounded by dark chairs. Behind the table is a large white cabinet with multiple doors. To the right, a vertical scroll with Japanese calligraphy hangs on the wall. The floor is made of dark wood, and a large window in the background lets in natural light, creating a bright area on the floor. A dark sofa is partially visible in the foreground.

East weds West

Owen Hughes and Yuri Kinugawa have married two cultures in their home on Auckland's inner harbour. Prue Dashfield visits
PHOTOGRAPHS: PATRICK REYNOLDS



In 1996 film producer Owen Hughes made a movie called *Memory and Desire*. Filmed partly in Tokyo, it was directed by Niki Caro – who later rode to greater fame on the back of a whale – and starred young Japanese actress Yuri Kinugawa.

But memory and desire did not end with the movie. For the next four years Yuri and Owen visited each other four or five times a year for several weeks at a stretch. Two years ago in Tokyo they tied the knot in a thoroughly traditional Japanese service. Yuri still returns to

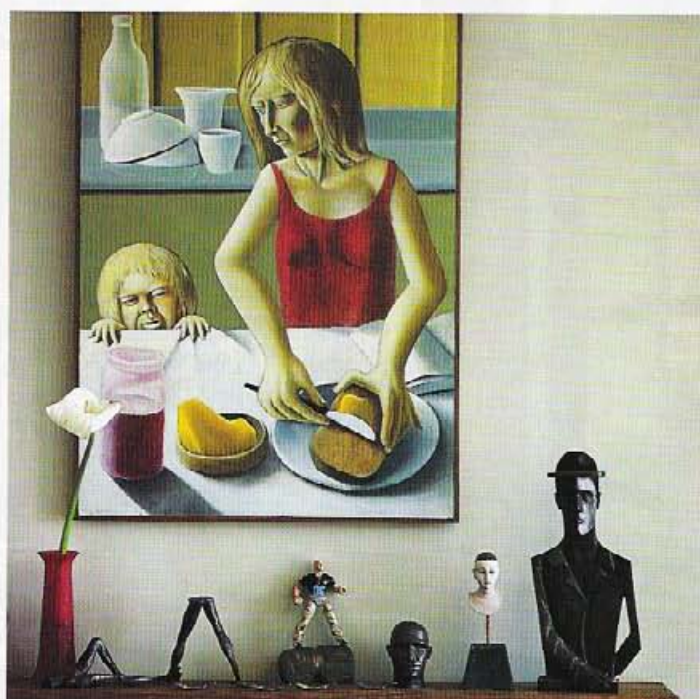
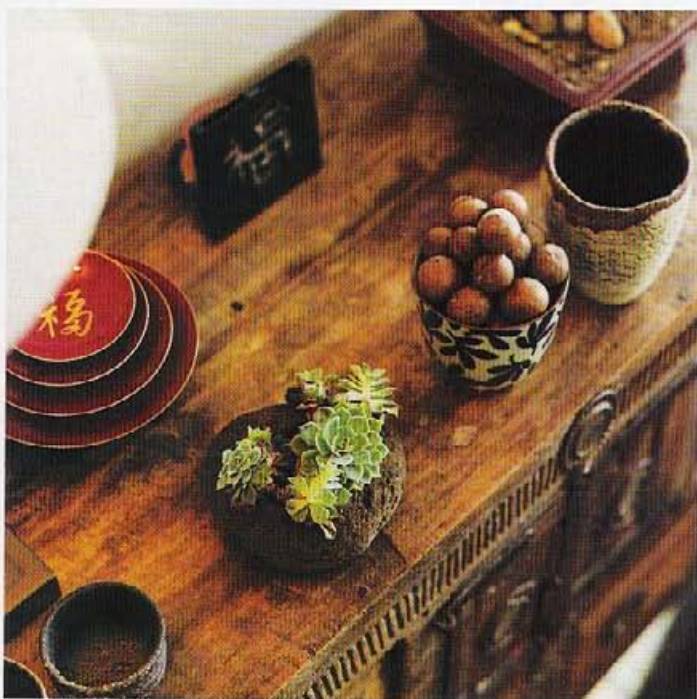
Japan every few months to teach and perform improvisation. The container of personal effects she brought to New Zealand – obi (kimono sashes), her grandfather's calligraphy, filmy silk-screened noren (curtains), cherry wood tea canisters, her grandparents' teapots – cohabit happily with the couple's simple, contemporary furniture. The harmonious fusion of oriental and occidental is much more than just a decorating style. East hasn't just met West – it's married it.

Owen had always wanted to build a house – "I have no idea why". ➤

PREVIOUS PAGES: Steel ladder designed by Andrew Lister; floors white pine stained dark walnut; kitchen cabinetry Tasmanian ash veneer stained dark walnut; dining table from Bo Concept Design; dining chairs from Corniche Interiors; sofa from Bromhead Design's 'Loft' series. **THESE PAGES:** Sake cups on an old Indian desk; kitchen calligraphy by Yuri's grandfather; lights above the table and sitting area from Real Time; white chairs from Off Beat Design; cowskin rug from Astley Leathers.







It took him two years to discover the steep Waterview section that overlooks mangrove swamps and the North Western Motorway bridge across the Waitemata Harbour. But the architect to furnish it with a house was obvious.

Andrew Lister had visited his wife Niki Caro in Tokyo, spending his days looking at buildings and his evenings describing his impressions to Owen and Yuri, who shared his likes and dislikes.

Four years later he started work on their small, symmetrical, timeless house. Yuri was still based in Tokyo where she

followed a particular exponent of the direct compass – the most complex, mathematical branch of feng shui – and an enigma to Owen and Andrew. Her teacher, a gracious woman invariably dressed in full kimono, had exacting requirements for the placement and proportions of the house, arrangement of rooms, flow of water. With their imperfect grasp of the principles, Owen and Andrew did their best to satisfy them. Andrew built detailed models which went to Yuri in her tiny Tokyo apartment and thence to her teacher. ▷

Books and toys in Yuri's office. One of Ian Scott's *Lattice Series* above the spare room bed. The tuvaevae (quilt) is from Rarotonga, the appliquéd pillowcases from K Rd. The red wedding sake set belonged to Uri's grandfather; a Michael Smithers painting is above objets that include a sculpture of legs by Greer Twiss, a bronze head by Richard McWhannell and Terry Stringer's *Rita Angus Man*. The timber used for bath and floorboards is known as hinoki in Japan and lawson's pine here.







Washi (Japanese paper) covers the walls in the master bedroom. The tatami (mat) for the bed platform was imported from Australia. The bedding is from Country Road. An Allen Maddox painting is above the bedroom bookshelf. Dick Frizzell's self portrait, below. Yuri at work in her office.

The first – a wedge-shaped house – was the victim of a height-to-boundary issue. The second, two boxes joined at an angle, was rejected by the teacher.

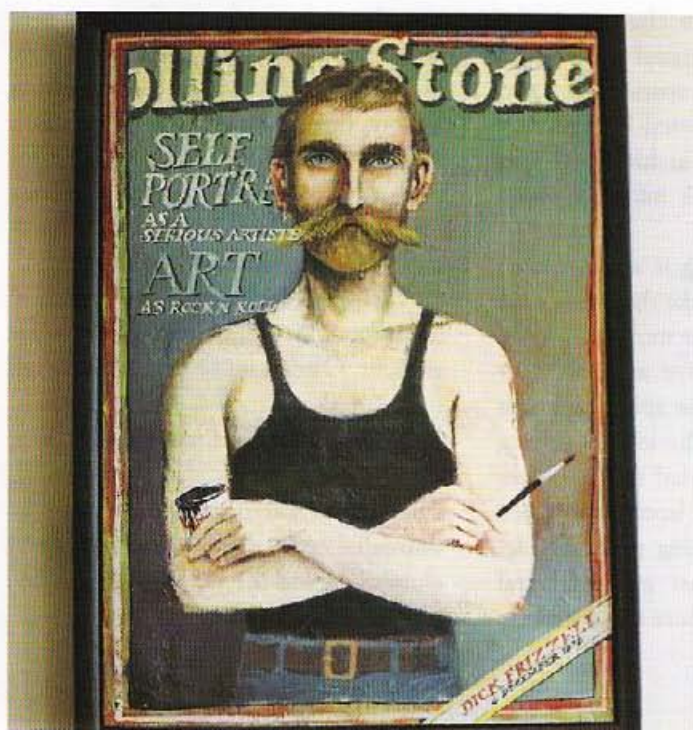
"It completely buggered up the direct compass," says Owen. "It got dumped on by the teacher and from those comments Andrew and I, who were tearing our hair out at one stage, made some adjustments."

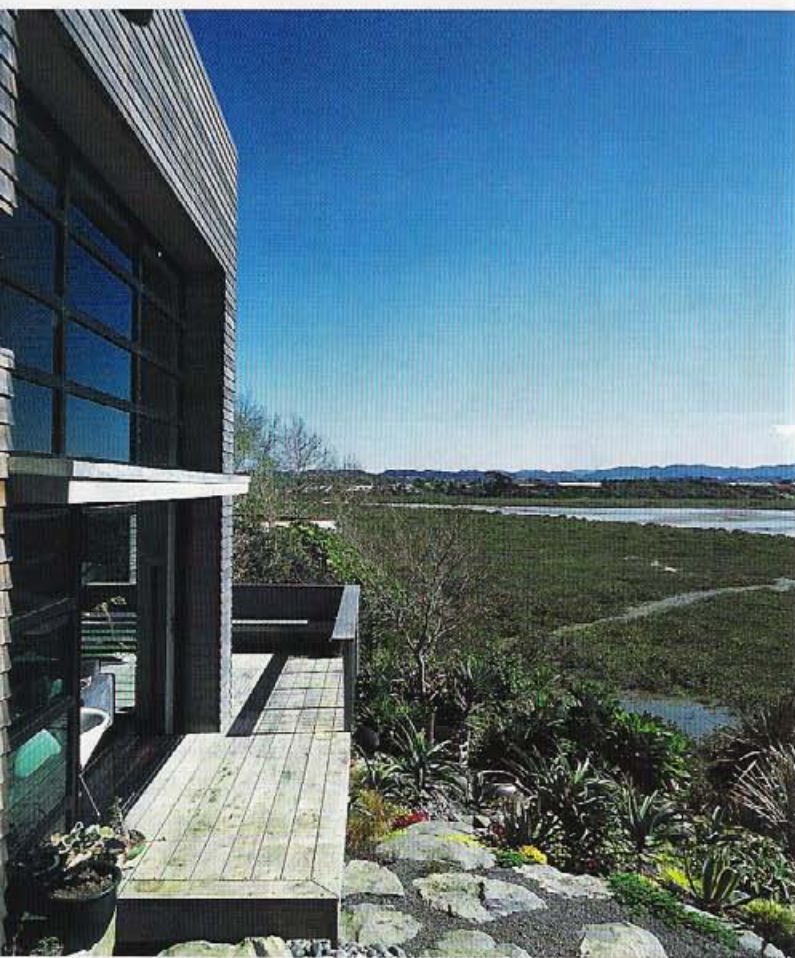
But the direct compass remained disgruntled and in desperation Owen took himself off to Auckland's biggest bookshop in search of enlightenment.

He found a helpful book, bought it and made extensive notes for Andrew. Next time the teacher gave the architect a pass. Now Owen says that feng shui in general is simply common sense.

For instance, the direct compass identifies the bedroom as the centre of personal life so a passage built to the teacher's specifications separates that from the social nexus of kitchen/sitting room.

Although her teacher was happy Yuri had grave concerns about the site's steepness and its proximity to water. ▷





"I have no experience of building a house and I couldn't believe it wouldn't fall down the hill. I was also very worried about living so close to the sea. I have no experience of that either."

But the couple rented the house next door, cleared their land of tangled bushes and fruit trees and terraced it with sixty tonnes of the choicest boulders. Observing that the land was not collapsing into the mangroves, that the huge house piles were firmly anchored to the bedrock and that no tsunami had as yet charged across the harbour, Yuri relaxed.

As the topsoil here is scanty and the south-westerlies aggressive their garden plants are wind resistant with shallow roots and structural form – yuccas, succulents ... And although the garden doesn't need watering, it does need work. It contains, says Owen, "an amazing number of weeds and quite a lot of snails". Those he can deal with.

But as a former owner of a Ponsonby cottage, then a country villa, he became a poorer, tired, wiser man and he wanted his new house to take care of itself.

Its untreated cedar cladding cost more than weatherboards but as it needs no painting it's cheaper in the long run. Budget dictated the house's size but the front of it soars the full two storeys, an idea suggested by a picture in a book on Japanese architecture. This makes the house look and feel much larger than it is.

If they were doing it again, Owen says he'd probably make the house a bit bigger. Yuri would like more wall space for paintings, room for a piano. Her upstairs office, like the spare bedroom beside it, sits above the kitchen/sitting room and is open-ended to the higher altitudes of the glassy, book-lined space and the view. Projecting platforms act as balustrades against an accidental plunge to the floor. Here she translates

and writes practical guide books about theatre and improvisation. In Japan she practises what she preaches.

"My career there is growing but I live in New Zealand so I have a unique point of view – I can tell Japanese people something about New Zealand that is of interest to them. New Zealanders love life and enjoy food, nature and creating art but Japanese people have to work hard to keep up. My life here is better than my life in Japan because there my life is busy and here I rediscover what is important and what is beautiful."

Yuri likes to watch the lights of the motorway traffic crossing the water at night. Owen says he's more attracted to the mud.

"I never thought I would be." □

The deck is macrocarpa, the walls untreated cedar, the window joinery aluminium and the railings powder-coated galvanised steel.

