

THESE PAGES Damien Hiquet and Claire Zhou wanted the kitchen in their Auckland apartment to blend in: "It almost looks like a piece of furniture," says Claire; the couple do most of their living in this area, so didn't want it to feel like they're always in a kitchen; the cabinetry was made by Jordan & Brooks in Onehunga; the blue booth seat was designer Susan Lands' idea and quickly became the couple's favourite spot; a Venetian glass chandelier hangs above it.

Two into one

A couple with apartments in the same building move in together and a glam renovation makes it just right for two

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THIS PAGE (from top) Claire, a financial adviser, loves the apartment's central location and having excellent restaurants nearby: "Everything is within walking distance." Damien, who works for Air New Zealand, sits at the kauri table made by Karin Venator from Kauri Vault.

RIGHT The kitchen splashback is antique-look mirrored glass from Image Glass and the marble surround for the kitchen is washed by small LED lights from the floor; *The Vision of the Levitating Lamb (With Tether)* is a triptych by Alan Ibell.



Damien Hiquet and Claire Zhou could think of nothing worse than spending a weekend weeding a garden. Owning the classic Kiwi dream – a quarter-acre section with a picket fence and a car parked in the garage – has no appeal for these apartment dwellers.

The Metropolis building in Auckland's CBD has been Claire's home for 17 years, Damien's for 10. "I like that we don't have to mow the lawns or put out the rubbish," says Belgium-born Damien. Claire, who grew up in apartments in Shanghai, did once spend four years in a house in the suburbs. "I found it so depressing," she says. "If we weren't living here, there'd be a much greater housework load and we would hardly see anyone."

Apartment life makes socialising easy for the pair, who regularly pop over to friends' apartments for a drink or meet up with them at the spa pool in the health and fitness centre. In fact, it was because of the apartment complex that Claire and Damien first met – at a body corporate meeting.

When they decided to move in together, they chose Damien's 52sqm apartment as their home. Although Claire was living in a bigger apartment, Damien convinced her they didn't need that much space. Besides, they wanted to renovate and that would be cheaper in a smaller apartment.

"We didn't like the standard layout and thought we could do better," says Claire. "We wanted the spirit of the architecture to

be maintained in the design. It's a good-looking building from the outside, so we didn't want people to be disappointed about how it looks from the inside."

Interior designer Susan Lands of Stratford Interior Design recommended they redesign the entire floor plan, so they ripped everything out and started from scratch. Originally two bedrooms, one bathroom and a study had been squeezed into the compact footprint but the new layout created a far more gracious one-bedroom apartment. The couple realised they didn't need a big bathroom, thanks to the building's spa facilities. Downsizing the bathroom meant gaining a window in the kitchen area and the extra light has made a huge difference. >



THIS PAGE By removing the bath, the couple were able to create a luxurious bathroom, with an Italian gold-leaf basin and a vanity with smoked glass doors; the extra large marble-look tiles came from SCE Stone & Design.
OPPOSITE The couple wanted a peaceful, relaxed bedroom: "We don't really hear the street noise," says Damien; sliding shutters create a lighter look, but still offer plenty of privacy; the wallpaper is by Nina Campbell.

A closer look

Compact living calls for creative storage solutions and thoughtful ways to add personality in a small space.



Storage on show Claire didn't want to compromise on storage for her handbags and shoes. They got rid of the second bedroom to make room for a larger wardrobe and en suite.



Glimpse of greenery Claire wanted a low maintenance garden so she bought the vintage birdcage from Le Monde in Parnell and took it to a florist to fill with easy-care herbs and plants.



Scale and substance Damien always wanted a sailing boat, says Claire. She found this one at an antiques dealer. It's now used as a screen to separate the entrance from the living room.



On the wing Claire loves the taxidermy parrots from World, which bring colour to the living area. If she had her way, they'd have more birds, but Damien thought two were plenty.

Q&A

Tips for small apartment design: A high ceiling and good lighting really make a difference. Also stick with one type of flooring throughout; it keeps it simple. *(Claire)*

Bravest thing we did: Start the reno! If we knew the cost and trouble we would go through, maybe we wouldn't have done it. But we have no regrets now. *(Damien)*

The best money we spent: The bespoke kauri table always gets comments. To bring a designer table from Italy would have cost more and isn't as original. This was made by a New Zealand artist. *(Damien)*

Best renovation advice: We would have saved money if we had contracted a building company who was accustomed to working in apartments. *(Damien)*

Best seat in the apartment: Right in the booth at 2.30pm the sun is perfect. *(Damien)*

Favourite activity around here: I have a bicycle that I take around Mission Bay, the waterfront or Westhaven. *(Damien)*

Damien Hiquet and Claire Zhou

To add to the spacious feel, they raised the ceiling height by a metre. The cavity between each floor that holds pipes and air-conditioning made this a challenge, but the result was a game-changer. "It's amazing how much bigger the place feels with just an extra bit of ceiling height," says Damien.

If ideas were flowing fast, the renovation certainly wasn't. Progress on the building work was hindered by the difficulties of working in a multi-storey block. "In a standard house, the builders could keep all their equipment right outside. Here, they had to store it in the basement," says Damien.

With only one busy service lift up to their floor, the tradesmen would sometimes have to wait up to 25 minutes to use it. The builders later calculated that moving equipment and materials took up a third of their time. Cramped spaces and the need to be considerate towards neighbours also slowed things down.