



Made by hand

A textile artist's New Zealand cottage is filled with handcrafted pieces and precious mementos displayed in beautiful vignettes

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STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF NARRATIVES, ARTWORKS (OPPOSITE) PHOTOGRAPHS BY ABBY WASHBOURN



EXTERIOR {opposite} A quiet country road in the Wairarapa, New Zealand, is the picturesque setting for the little 1910 villa of Alison, a textile artist, and her husband Gregor. LIVING AREA {this page} Alison's artful eye reveals itself in considered vignettes, which include the teal vase on the mantelpiece – it cost just \$2 from a local charity shop. Alison loves to display found objects, like stones and shells picked up on walks with her husband, on the lower shelf. "I look at them and I feel what I felt then, I see what I saw," she says. >



Open up a battered pine cupboard in textile artist Alison's home and what's likely to come tumbling out are memories – snippets of the past waiting to be turned into something simple, fresh and new by her dexterous hands. That's what her design label, Agnes Coy: Made by Hand, is all about and it shines from every corner of the pale blue-and-white painted villa she shares with her husband Gregor in a small country town in the Wairarapa, New Zealand. Glass-fronted cabinets in Alison's studio hold prim stacks of antique fabric waiting to become cushions or flounced corsages. Adorning the guest bedroom like a piece of art is the 1920s blush-pink silk negligee that Alison wore on her wedding night. "I am all about the memories," says Alison. "I love anything that has a story, anything that holds some sort of social history."

English lass Alison first met Kiwi lad Gregor in Brighton 14 years ago, when she was singing in a punk rock band and treading the boards as an actress and he was a young builder, just arrived in the UK. Seven years later, "to the hour," Alison says, they got married, and moved back to New Zealand. Life in the bustling UK city had become a rat-race, explains Alison. "We wanted to get to the stage where we were totally content to just curl up together on the settee with a good book."

So here they are in what Alison describes to her friends and family back home as "our little wooden cottage". The 1910 villa had already been modernised when they bought it; one of Alison's biggest challenges when decorating was learning how to work with an open-plan living space. "We thought the best thing to do was to keep it really simple and work with just two or three colours," she explains. With Alison's love of Scandinavian interiors, it was perhaps natural that those colours would be blue and white. But there was another influence at work. "Since I was 10, I've always lived by the sea. I wanted to create an airy space with good flow, but also, being here, I really miss the seaside," Alison muses. "So I wanted something that had a beachy feel to it. I love that battered, driftwoody, beachy style."



DINING AREA (top left) Alison and Gregor brought their dining table over from England. "We couldn't bear to part with it," says Alison. "It holds a lot of memories – all those fabulous dinner parties that we used to have with friends and Sunday lunches with my parents." It was made by Gregor out of old scaffolding boards that "we sanded and sanded and sanded," and a salvaged set of Victorian table legs. The chairs are modern but Alison painted them white. The little old bathroom cupboard on the wall was found in a local second-hand shop and painted in Resene Paints Sorrento. "It houses my great grandmother's handpainted tea service that she got for her wedding," says Alison.

KITCHEN (top right) Alison's pegboard is an ideal spot to pin up inspiring postcards, while the 1930s Smith clock above it was purchased from a friend's antique shop in England. "It loses time, it gains time, it stops when it wants to but I love it," says Alison. "I love its age."

LIVING AREA Seeking airy simplicity for their living and dining area, Alison and Gregor chose British Paints Stowe White for the walls. Gregor made the coffee table out of scaffolding planks and a set of old legs that were given to him by a friend. "The top's got a bit of a wave in it, which I really like," says Alison. "We balance glasses of wine there quite precariously." The 'Portland' 2-seater sofas from Freedom – "we really like them because they're neutral" – form an inviting zone. Teal accents are found in cushions made by Alison out of vintage blankets, adding lively colour. >



ARTWORKS (OPPOSITE, LEFT & RIGHT) BY ASHLEY G AT WWW.ETSY.COM/SHOP/ASHLEYG

"I can think OF NOTHING WORSE THAN GOING INTO A FURNITURE STORE AND JUST BUYING EVERYTHING FOR MY HOUSE FROM THERE. IT WOULD BE MEANINGLESS – IT WOULDN'T HAVE A SOUL, REALLY"



STUDIO Alison's passion for antique fabrics comes to the fore in the work and display space that Gregor converted out of their garage and carport. "People always want to see where I work and what I work with," Alison explains, "so we wanted this to be open-plan. You can walk around my studio and look in all the boxes. I don't mind – in fact, I encourage it." Her work bench – an old pine kitchen table – came with her from the UK. The weatherbeaten display cases are old nail boxes that Alison painted in Resene Paints Friar Grey; the insides are covered with pages from an old copy of *Jane Eyre* that was that was "falling to bits" – it's her favourite novel.



SITTING ROOM (top left) Until Gregor can build the shelves for the couple's dream library, this is a second sitting room. Alison has covered an oak daybed, picked up for a song on Trade Me (the Kiwi equivalent to eBay), in an old woollen blanket and added vintage embroidered cushions for that extra touch of comfort. The butler's tray was found in France; try Whiteport for a similar tray. The French toile curtains were made by Alison, with fabric sourced from eBay.

we love...
the little details

Shaker-style simplicity and a neutral colour palette create warmth thanks to pegboards displaying favourite postcards and Alison's handmade accessories, such as these soft sculpture trees (right) and a nest she fashioned out of raffia, fleece and antique lace. Alison's studio showcases her colourful tools, including fabrics and mini reams of embroidery thread (top right). Scour charity shops, garage sales and family attics for materials with which to make your own accessories or, if you're not handy with a needle, turn to Alison's label, Agnes Coy: Made by Hand, at agnescoy.co.nz. >





GUEST BEDROOM The faded beauty of old eiderdown enhances the soft, romantic appeal of the guest bedroom. Alison found these eiderdowns in antique shops and car boot sales in England. The bed is "just a regular high street bed" from the UK, which Alison loves to dress with vintage linens edged with lace. "It's completely different, sleeping in vintage sheets; it feels special – they feel cool," she says. Both the vintage French print and blanket box were car boot finds; Alison painted the blanket box in Resene Paints Sorrento and upholstered the top in a natural beige linen. >



COSY CORNER {top left} The bedside table was found at a car boot sale and painted in Resene Paints Sorrento. Sitting upon it is an artwork by Alison, a watercolour painted on a vintage book page.

BATHROOM {top right} All Alison and Gregor did to the bathroom when they moved in was paint it using white and a darker shade of Resene Paints Sorrento. Alison made the blind out of an antique monogrammed sheet. The guest towel is vintage linen and the stool was given to them as a "throwaway".

MEMORY NECKLACES {left} Alison handcrafts these long pendant 'Memory' necklaces, available at her website or in the shop attached to her studio. "They're made using fabric and ephemer, and fused between glass then soldered," she says.

Inside story

Who lives here? Alison (pictured right), a textile artist, her husband Gregor, a builder, and Trumpet the cat.

What was the first thing you did when you came into the house?

Alison: "Whacked some cream paint on the walls. The master bedroom was blood red; we found it really disturbing."

What are you most proud of? "All the work that my husband's put into the house. We work really well together, because I have the design ideas and he has the ability. Your home is like a backdrop to your life – this house really reflects us."

Any decorating tips? "I think anything can look decorative. An old piece of wood can look decorative if it's displayed properly. You can make a feature of anything."

What would you save in a fire?

"I'd definitely grab my laptop, because that's how I keep in touch with family and friends in the UK. The other thing that I'd save is my grandma's life story. She typed it out on this old typewriter – it took weeks. She filled it with old photographs, her old school badge, the receipts from the engagement rings that she and her husband had... It's a really beautiful piece of work."

How do you entertain? "We have family and friends who come on weekends to get a bit of country air. We really enjoy cooking so the evening will be spent sitting around the dining table, eating, drinking good New Zealand wine and just laughing. There's nothing better than being with people that we love."



CUSHION DETAIL
{below left} Alison's cushions evoke nostalgia; this one is crafted from a vintage blanket, with a hand-printed image and hand-stitched message providing final touches. Felt flower brooches complete the display.

fave find
Alison's handcrafted vintage cushions are joys to behold.
'Bird' cushion.
Price: from \$34.
Find it: Agnes Coy.
Made by Hand,
agnescoy.co.nz.

EXTERIOR {right} Alison and Gregor chose a white hue, Resene Paints Bianca, and Periglacial Blue, also from Resene Paints, for the exterior of their cottage, mirroring the colour scheme within.

STUDIO {below} Alison's pegboards are adorned with patterns and photographs of her past work, as well as scraps of embroidery and images that inspire her. "They tend to get overloaded," says Alison, "so every few weeks I'll sift through them, ready for more inspiration."



Your home is LIKE A BACKDROP TO YOUR LIFE
– THIS HOUSE REALLY REFLECTS US"

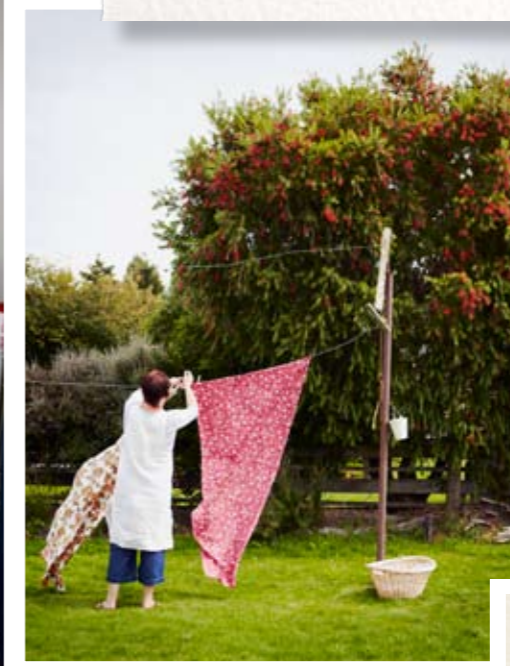
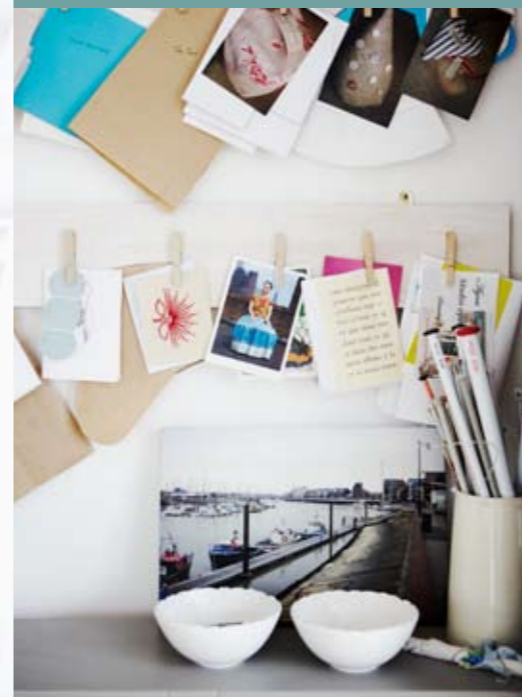


ILLUSTRATION WWW.KENZIEDSIGN.COM

KITCHEN {left} When Alison and Gregor moved in, the kitchen was painted orange and green with vivid blue cabinets, and there was no room for a fridge. Time for a makeover! They re-used the original cabinetry carcass and put in a butler's sink. Gregor made the worktop from salvaged pine which, says Alison, "only gets better with age". The colour on the walls is Resene Paints Half Pearl Lusta.



colour & materials

1 Paint InColour Low Sheen acrylic paint in 'Stowe White', from \$54.60/4 litres, British Paints.

2 Paint Zylone Sheen Low Sheen acrylic in Sorrento, \$85.40/4 litres, Resene Paints.

3 Flooring Try 'Tundra' click-lock function floor, \$18.99/sqm, Ikea.

Stockists, page 221

Due to the printing process, actual colours may vary.

CONTACT: Agnes Coy: Made by Hand, visit agnescoy.co.nz.

