

A touch of Tuscany



MICHELLE HYSLOP

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* Off-street parking for two cars

Size: 2/5share 974sq m, Floor area: 424sq m.**Price indication:** Offers over \$2 million. Sale by negotiation.**Inspect:** Phone to view.**On the web:** www.harcourts.co.nz/RM141002**Schools:** Grey Lynn School, Kowhai Intermediate, Western Springs College, Auckland Girls Grammar.**Contact:** Linda Galbraith, Harcourts, 021 966 028 or (09) 520 6114.

By **Donna Fleming**
FEATURE HOME

497 GREAT NORTH RD, GREY LYNN

When you sit on the back deck of Annette and Rufus Carey's home on a sunny day, and look around at the cypress and olive tree in the garden and the plaster walls of the house — that are painted a soft yellow — it's hard to believe you're in Auckland and not Tuscany.

Their home started life nearly 100 years ago as two working men's cottages on the fringe of the city but today it has a distinctly European feel. The garden and rear facade are Italianate and numerous sets of doors on Juliet balconies with wrought-iron balustrades feel typically French. Inside, the conservatory, fireplaces and sash

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windows are reminiscent of an English home.

"We like the fact that this house is very different from most other places," says Annette.

It is thanks to Annette's creative eye, and their desire for one large family home, that they have ended up with such an unusual property.

The couple bought one of the cottages in 1990. They loved its handy location just steps from the Grey Lynn shops and a short drive into town but, within three years, and with their family expanding, they decided it wasn't big enough. They considered moving, and also thought about building another bedroom in the attic.

And then they had a brainwave. If the neighbours were prepared to sell their property, which was tenanted, they could knock the two into one large home.

"The day I rang to ask the neighbours if they were interested in selling was the same day they had just decided to put the house on the market," recalls Annette.

"That really was serendipity."

The pair imagined joining the two houses together would just be a simple matter of knocking down a few walls. "We got that wrong," says Rufus. "It was a huge job."

As well as rewiring and replumbing, they also had huge steel beams installed to provide structural support for the upper level after pulling down several load-bearing walls on the lower floor.

The builders worked on the house fulltime from January to December, 1996, and the Careys spent a whopping \$425,000 on the work needed to transform the two cottages into one large home and modernise it.

"It was worth it, though," says Annette. "It was a house that deserved some TLC and we have been able to live here knowing it is structurally sound and the wiring and plumbing are up to date. We also put on a new roof."

Combining the two houses gave them a dwelling with five bedrooms, four bathrooms, a study, two spacious

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living areas and a conservatory created by installing a glazed roof over a courtyard. There's also a wine cellar and a huge walk-in dressing room next to the master bedroom, which was doubled in size by knocking down a wall.

Most of the bedrooms are on street level, which is the upper floor of the house. Two have beautiful old fireplaces and three have en suite bathrooms.

Another bedroom is on the lower level, which made great accommodation for the nannies Rufus and Annette employed for their children. The study next to this could be used as another bedroom if necessary.

The two living rooms have provided plenty of space for the four Carey children, who are now grown up. Annette has been particularly fond of the conservatory. "It is a lovely place to sit and read a book," she says.

The couple's builder put in 11 sets of French doors, including one set that opens directly from the galley-style

kitchen to the back deck, making outdoor entertaining easy.

They made sure to keep the character features when they renovated and added a few of their own, like the bar made by a boat builder that was slotted in under one of the staircases.

Rufus and Annette moved to a lifestyle block in Hawke's Bay a few years ago and are now selling because they no longer need an Auckland base.

They have had tenants in the house — including their daughter — who have taken good care of the property, although the Careys realise new owners may update bathrooms, replace carpet or repaint. They may also want to develop the attic, which is currently used for storage but could be another bedroom or office.

"The good news is the major jobs have been done, so you can just enjoy living in such a unique house," says Rufus.



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