

AT HOME WITH...

PIP RICE

When her life changed unexpectedly, Pip Rice found comfort in moving to an apartment with the city on her doorstep

Text by **Claire McCall.**
Photography by **Melanie Jenkins.**



There are many reasons why people move from a freestanding house to an apartment. They may be downsizing to a place that's more manageable; they may be busy corporate types who like the lock-up-and-leave aspect; or they may be first-time buyers on a limited budget. Pip Rice's reason is tinged with sadness. When her partner Sid passed away unexpectedly, she found her renovated state house in Mt Albert, Auckland too isolated, and felt she was rattling around in it. "I was keen to get amongst it in the inner city," she says.

Although the Star Block apartments in Freemans Bay are highly sought after and a proven good investment, Pip had her doubts. "My brother and sister-in-law encouraged me to look at them, but I wasn't sure that this ex-council development was where I wanted to be."

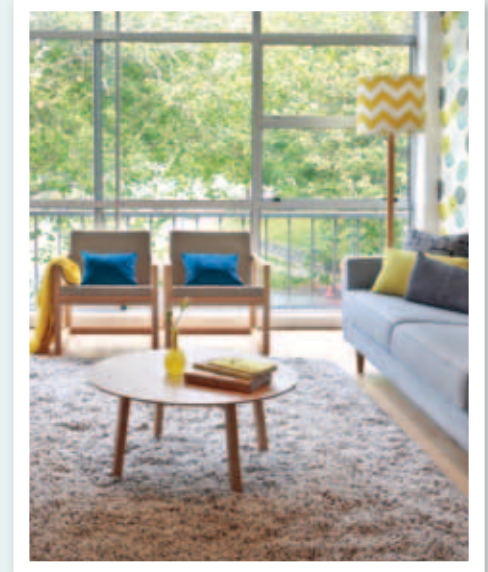
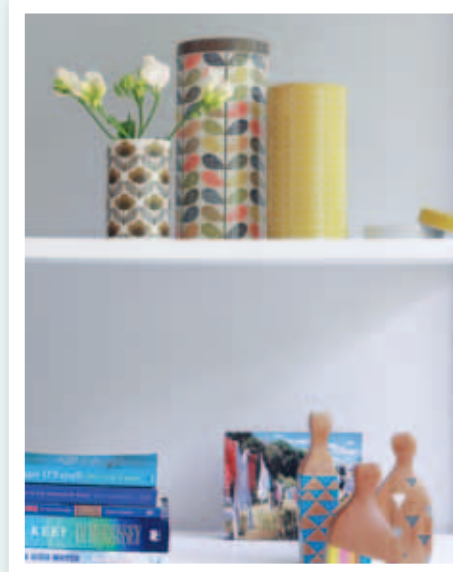
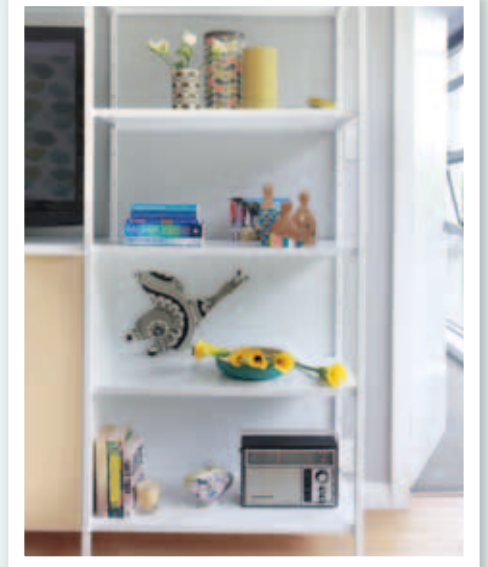
She was also concerned about the potential noise factor of living with another apartment above, but she loved the idea that, due to the central location, she could walk everywhere, even to her job as receptionist at a legal firm.

The stars aligned to present Pip with an opportunity not to be missed. Through a friend of her sister's she heard about a top-floor apartment that was due to come on the market. She rang the owner, enlisted the help of interior designer Tomi Williams from Indigo Design, and went to view it.

"It was just brilliant timing," says Pip. "And Tomi pointed out that in this apartment you don't look out to the rest of the complex because it's a corner unit."

On seeing the apartment's magnificent oak trees that provide a leafy view in the living room, the peek of the Harbour Bridge from the kitchen window, the oodles of morning sun and the second bedroom her son Dylan could occupy, Pip was convinced. But while the financial deal proved easy, the hard part was leaving the home she'd shared with Sid.

Clockwise from top left Sanderson 'Dandelion Clocks' wallpaper forms a funky, Scandinavian-style backdrop in the open-plan living, dining and kitchen area; shelves create display space and provide extra storage; a pair of David Moreland chairs, teamed with the 'Mabel' coffee table by Simon James Design, are softened by a wonderful white tufted rug; a 'Rope Light' pendant from Forma hangs above the dining table; the grass mat's shape and texture provides a counterpoint to the simplicity of the dining table and chairs; jars by Orla Kiely double as vases for sweet-smelling freesias.





“A ‘SCANDINAVIAN RETRO’ STYLE SEEMED TO SUIT THE APARTMENT’S 1960S ERA AND ITS COMPACT PROPORTIONS”

Pip, how did you deal with the emotional and physical stress of moving? “It was really difficult at the time because I had to get rid of a lot of stuff as storage in the apartment is minimal. But I took a positive approach, seeing the move as a chance to reinvent myself. I asked Tomi to help me create the kind of space I wanted to live in.”

How would you describe the apartment when you moved in? “It had a somewhat masculine feel. While there were fabulous wardrobes in the bedrooms and an impressive dark-timber kitchen, the finer details had been overlooked.”

Were there any eyesores that simply had to go? “Yes! An ugly old fuse box was plonked in the middle of one wall, and layers of wallpaper and paint gave the vertical surfaces distinct lumps and bumps. The wooden floors had gained a yellow tinge with age, and the white, utilitarian bathroom was in dire need of an injection of personality.”

Did the furniture from your previous house work in your new home? “Apart from the beds and a few collectibles, I didn’t bring anything with me, so Tomi virtually had a blank canvas to work with.”

Left Floor-to-ceiling windows maximise the natural light in Dylan’s bedroom. A significant portion of the budget was spent on rewiring, and the skirtings throughout the apartment were replaced. The walls were smoothed then painted Resene ‘Double Flotsam’, a soft grey.



What was Tomi’s vision? “She had some exciting ideas about how to update the space, coaxing me along. I liked what she’d done at my sister Nikki’s house. ‘Scandinavian retro’ was the style we agreed on, which seemed to suit the apartment’s 1960s era and its compact proportions.”

Did you and Tomi disagree on anything? “She was great, giving me a moodboard of suggested fabrics, furniture and colours. The only thing I changed was the wallpaper she suggested for the living room and bedroom – I swapped them around.”

What’s been the best thing about moving? “The location – I love how central everything is. For one thing, it’s close to the best supermarket in Auckland: Victoria Park New World. Previously I’d drive there if I couldn’t find an ingredient I needed. Now it’s my local, I can walk. I can also walk to work and the gym.”

How does it compare to living in the suburbs? “I’m still getting used to the road noise and my new community, but this place feels right for now. I can look out the windows and watch the world go by, and I don’t feel on my own.” ●

Clockwise from top Fresh flowers add vibrant colour; geometric Graham & Brown ‘Soprano’ wallpaper from Paper Room makes an impact in the main bedroom; the bathroom was updated with tiles and a spacious shower; the kitchen didn’t need updating and is styled simply.

