

RENOVATION



LEFT The Waipahihi three-bedroom 95m² home had a full renovation from top to bottom at a cost of \$30,000. THIS PAGE An ex display kitchen was bought at a garage sale for just \$500 and the couple installed it themselves.

DOUBLE DOWN

Two renovations, two great results: we meet a couple who have been bitten by the reno bug. By **Joanna Mathers**.

Two's a charm for Tracey Griffin and her partner Duncan McCartney. The couple from Gisborne (now living in Taupo) have two renovations under their belt, and both of them have been roaring successes.

The most recent renovation in Taupo came off the back of an earlier one in their home town. At age 22, the couple had used their KiwiSaver nest egg to purchase a small house for the grand sum of \$185,000 in Gisborne. It seemed a lot at the time.

"This was in 2011, so the market wasn't the same as today," says Griffin. "We did a bit with it, but we weren't really that motivated because we were so young and had no big goals or dreams at that stage."

They lived happily in their first home

for a while, but eventually decided that they needed a change. Duncan wanted to join the army, so he and Tracey headed to Taupo, where she set up a beauty therapy business.

Unfortunately, the relatively high Taupo rents, coupled with the costs of setting up a new business and trying to manage a rental property in Gisborne, took their toll.

"We actually ended up about \$50,000 in a hole," says Griffin. "And it was a real struggle to find good tenants, so we decided to clear our debts and sell the property in Gisborne."

Initial valuations put the place at \$225,000; a figure that wouldn't give the pair any headway. So, they made a decision to renovate and add value.

"We cobbled together \$15,000 from three banks and spent three weeks over the Christmas holiday period renovating. It was a full renovation - the real estate agent thought we had no chance of succeeding."

Working 16-18 hour days, seven days a week, they managed to complete the renovation. And the place sold for \$285,000. "We made \$60,000 in three weeks, essentially," says Griffin.

The success of this renovation gave the pair the impetus to try again, but in Taupo. They spotted a house in Waipahihi that had great potential, but the owner (a property investor himself) drove a hard bargain.

"We actually made ten different offers. At the end, we offered to rent the place off him for six months before we bought

it, so he could get more money for it. We really had to think outside the square," Griffin explains.

They secured the house for \$325,600 in April 2017, but took ownership in November (after the six months renting period had finished). The 95m² three-bedroom home was built in the 1960s and had loads of potential.

But it was a dive. The kitchen was tiny, with nearly zero storage; the bathroom had a rotten vanity, and a punch hole in the shower wall, and fetching pink panels that ran half way up the walls.

This room was the first to go. McCartney is a qualified builder, and he did the building work. A "Jack of all trades", he even did the tiling.

"It was just as good as a professional would do," says Griffin. "He was so pedantic, and he did a great job."

The shower, bath, toilet and vanity all came from Mitre 10.

With both Griffin and McCartney working full-time, the renovation was done incrementally. The aim was to have it ready to sell for spring in 2018, and tradespeople



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They replaced this with high-quality underlay and a light grey carpet from Harrisons.

"We wanted to use light colours, because the house is small, and it makes it look bigger," says Griffin.

The walls throughout had been desperately in need of an upgrade. Griffin repainted them a pale cream, except in the kitchen and lounge, where they are a warm grey tone. This was a slightly controversial choice.

"I painted the lounge in this colour and when my partner came home from work he said: 'What is this colour? I absolutely hate it'. I answered: 'Well I absolutely love it, and it's staying,'" says Griffin.

The kitchen was another problem area in the house, and featured a leaky tap and bench that was installed on an angle, so that water poured onto the floor when turned on.

But luck was on the couple's side when it came to this room. They happened upon an ex display kitchen at a garage sale and purchased it for just \$500. A matching cabinet was bought

were booked at set times throughout the year in order to keep the impetus going.

Carpet and walls are often problematic in older homes with little upkeep, and this was no exception.

The carpet was blue and old ("I think they had actually replaced it before they sold the property, but it didn't improve the place") and in some places many layers thick.

"We removed three layers in one part of the house, and then found there was a fourth layer glued to the floor. We spent hours with a heat gun and scraper trying to get it all off."





to finish the kitchen, with a second-hand dishwasher purchase from Trade Me, and an oven from Smiths City.

"We were lucky because the kitchen from the garage sale even included a sink," says Griffin.

Finishing touches for the house included removing a fireplace that wasn't working and creating a recessed space with cabinetry and hidden power points that allowed for cords to be discreetly hidden away. Attractive black shelving was also installed, which provides a striking counterbalance for the pale walls.

A large reclaimed barn door has also been utilised in the lounge space. This acts as a sliding wall, allowing the space to be closed off from the rest of the house, and is a particularly striking feature of the home.

The outside area was also tidied up. It originally featured an unusual "random garden in the middle of the lawn, that was full of flax," says Griffin. McCartney brought in a digger and levelled the lawn (random garden included). The couple then re-sowed the lawn and created a new patio area in the space that formerly held a rusty old clothesline.

Ten months after the renovations began, the couple were ready to get valuations done. They came in at between \$430,000-\$475,000 - they were looking to sell at the higher end of this bracket.

The "unusual" garden in the middle of the lawn was removed and the lawn was levelled. TOP The exterior was given a good tidy up before being put on the market.

They sold privately through Trade Me, and on the second day of viewings someone made an offer. After a bit of to-ing and fro-ing, they sold for \$468,000 in October last year.

"We were thrilled," says Griffin. "We spent \$30,000 on the renovation, so we did really well."

They've now caught the reno bug. Their current plan is to build on a property they have just purchased and buy a do up on the side.

"We hope to be mortgage free by 35," says Griffin. "And hopefully we can make this [renovating and selling] our full-time job." ■

THE NUMBERS

Purchase price: \$325,600

Sale price: \$468,000

Renovation costs: \$30,000