



Diary of a renovation

The fifth instalment in the ongoing renovation of Dunedin style meister **TAMSIN COOPER's** family home, Fern Cottage

Isn't spring so very wonderful? Our southern winter garden has suddenly leapt to life. I particularly enjoy the magnolia now that it is blooming and can be viewed through a large window as you descend the staircase. It really is quite magnificent.

The first ruby red rhododendrons have also just come out, the chooks are happily laying again and I even managed to assemble a spring bouquet (of sorts) from the garden for my ten-year-old Hugo to take to his school spring service last week - within the 15 minutes' notice he gave me. I must say I was slightly dismayed by the composition (not my greatest floral work) when I viewed it later leaving the church - and was glad it didn't have my label attached!

The climbing Etoile de Hollande rose I planted (and mentioned in my second column) has finally produced its first stunning velvety blood-red blossom. It now needs some help to secure its trailing branches and to encourage it to climb.

I have to say I've only painted half the picture of spring here at Fern Cottage. To be honest I am suffering a little from the abundant chaos in the garden and an overwhelming sense of a spring takeover! There was certain kind of subdued order in our winter garden and no pressure to attend to the garden in its hibernating state - though I did somehow manage to grow a flourishing crop of kale that survived the depths of winter.

Now there just seems so much to do, and I'm in the throes of flitting around the country selling my new collection so I haven't had time to give the garden, let alone the house, any real attention



Tiny tables are ideal for artful arrangements of treasures

of late. Consequently this latest installment of our renovation diary is of the smallest and most achievable kind.

Have you had the satisfaction of finding and renovating a small, yet perfectly formed, piece of furniture? My sister Emily admits to having a quiet obsession and keen eye for finding the best tiny tables on which she creates stylish and ever-changing displays of her treasures. I have learned from Emily to adore little tables and now have a growing collection dotted around the house. The table of this small renovation belonged to my late nana and was until last week a dark, varnished mahogany - the finish of all the tables in her house. I inherited it and a set of nesting tables, which are now in my boutique and were given a new lease of life with a powder coating in gloss white. Their job is to show off small purses and other accessories in-store.

The darling wee circular table we sanded down and painted in Resene Pohutukawa. I adore this deep shade of red and it brings out the colour of our hearth rug, and matches the red of my velvet cushion.


The round table now sits in front of a larger table that once belonged to my wonderful grandmother, now 91 years old. This was originally made by my great-grandfather to sit a tin bath on, in which my grandmother was bathed as a baby. I love to have pieces in our home that come with a bit of history and some stories attached, as it gives any interior setting so much more soul.





We love old maps, but vintage botanical prints are just as good for adding an air of learned elegance to your decor

The photo on top of the table (see previous spread) is of my late nana. The antique sewing box was a wedding gift and is filled with the most wonderful collection of old bits of lace and buttons and trims. In arranging the tabletop I wanted to add a touch of the current season, so I added these yellow flowers on their long green stems. They have appeared in our garden every spring and no one seems to be able to identify them. The pictures pinned on the wall are pages from a book of old botanical drawings, and the glass dome is filled with amazing spring flowers that have somehow been preserved. Meanwhile, the green velvet couch (surely my best online find ever) was originally from an exclusive lodge and has apparently sat many prime ministers as well as Sally Jessy Raphael and Bill Cosby!

Sometimes I wonder why anyone wants to buy new furniture when there are so many beautiful pieces out there with great stories attached to them. There's also so much joy to be found in bringing life to a tired piece of furniture with just a lick of glorious paint - and in freshening up a room with a pleasingly arranged tabletop and a few seasonal touches. 

Next issue ...
Summer's around the corner and we're heading outside for some fabulous alfresco dining - with a glamorous twist!



TONY BROWN JOHN CLOTH FROM WALLACE COTTON