



CHRISTINA SYMONS

WHILE WORLDS AWAY on the Sunshine Coast in Australia, Keith and Jean Muir bought an older home in Madeira Park, launching an extensive online renovation with local designer Dara Wyton. That long-distance leap of faith paid off strikingly, with a dream home today.

INGEBORG SUZANNE, COURTESY DARA WYTON DESIGNS

STORY BY **CHRISTINA SYMONS**

PHOTOS BY **INGEBORG SUZANNE** AND **CHRISTINA SYMONS**

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Upon entering the Muir's Madeira Park home, the first thing you notice is the amazing flow, sweeping your eyes and attention from the entranceway, past the open-plan living room, sleek kitchen and dining area, right out the retractable glass doors, across the deck and into the harbour.

But wait a minute. Back right up. Let's rewind this scene. Because there's something remarkable going on between the door and the patio, against the grain of standard Sunshine Coast décor, to brilliant effect.

The light appears to dance inside off the water, literally bouncing across the walls. But it's the colour palette that is singing, looking elegant and understated, ultra glossy and unapologetic. From floor to ceiling, kitchen cupboard to picture frames, the

place is seriously tonal and almost totally white-on-white. Aside from the bamboo floors and Australian cutting board, there's not a sliver of wood in sight.

Could we actually be entering the territory of West Coast modern, right here in the heart of laid-back cottage country, Madeira Park?

"Yes!" says designer Dara Wyton. "That's exactly what we were going for."

Reflecting back on the overall success of the renovation, from the sunny vantage on their expansive deck, Keith and Jean Muir clearly adore their designer, almost as much as they love their new home. And they couldn't agree more on the success of her vision and her palette.

"Dara provided exactly what we wanted and more," says Jean. "The colours are fantastic, but the main

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thing is how much we love our new home and its transformation."

It's the perfect backdrop for the lively, light-hearted vibe that emanates from the couple, who may have switched hemispheres when they packed up and moved to our Sunshine Coast, but didn't skip a beat or lose an ounce of their style, along the way.

Communicating in different time zones while the Muirs were living in Australia meant that much of the work between designer and client, over the six-month reno, was completed via email. Without having met, the beginning was something akin to online dating, says Jean, with each person trying to interpret the true meaning behind what the other intended.

"Dara totally understood what we wanted from the first contact through to the end," says Jean, who sent Dara oodles of designer magazine clippings reflecting her style from her home country.

Originally from Alberta, Dara is also a relatively recent import, having lived on the Coast for just two years. With professional training and striking personal style, she's familiar with all aspects of design, including renovations, space planning, colour consultations, home staging and custom window treatments. Her design repertoire is broad and includes classic, modern, West Coast, rustic, contemporary and country.

"Instead of forcing my own style preferences on people," Dara explains, "I prefer to confer with my clients and get a sense of their own vision of how they want their space to feel."



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Dara is best known for her bold, yet subtle residential design projects and this commission will clearly add to her reputation not just locally, but internationally. The project is being featured in an upscale Australian décor magazine, called Queensland Homes, over the next few months.

The original interiors of the 1,300-square-foot, 35-year old home, the former dining/office complex of a hunting lodge, was as Jean describes it, "gross, dark and kind of creepy".



CHRISTINA SYMONS

Dara Wyton and Jean Muir on the deck of the renovated home.

Today the interiors are anything but dank, with lots of built-in storage, and abundant light-filled living spaces. Given the former identity and tone of the space, the lighter palette was an unexpected yet natural choice.

"So many people seem to go for dark colours and woods, but we wanted to keep it really light, especially for winter," says Jean. The bonus of this blank canvas is the opportunity for the Muirs to punctuate the space with hot-coloured accents, bold photography and rustic accessories from Down Under.

To temper a space that risked seeming too pristine, Dara layered lush fabrics, thick area rugs and custom draperies in soft dreamy neutrals and watercolours.

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with large smooth stone accents surrounded by modern leather club chairs. Moving down the expansive hallway to the master bedroom, beach-inspired fabrics offer a serene mood while an oversized mirror extends the space.

Lavish finishes such as radiant-heated marble flooring in the bath add yet another soft touch to the suite. The overall ambiance is of a playful, sophisticated retreat, ideal for relaxed living and perfectly suited to the Muirs.

While the Muirs insist that their Australian lifestyle was quite similar to here, the Sunshine Coast in Queensland is much bigger and hotter, while Madeira Park is more laid back and friendlier, they note. Despite leaving a warmer climate, where 27degrees Celsius is normal during winter, they enjoy the change of seasons on the Coast and the ample opportunity for indoor-outdoor living that their new marina home provides.

Keith, who likes nothing more



PHOTOS BY INGEBORG SUZANNE, COURTESY DARA WYTON DESIGNS

than "messaging around with his boat" loves the long twilight of summer and is even partial to the cooler weather on the Coast.

"Actually, winter is not bad at all," he says, sweeping his arms off the edge of the deck. "I find it quite magical around here, especially when the views are this gobsmacking!"

Translation — that's "astonishing!" by Australian standards. **CL**

The kitchen features an aqua glass-tiled backsplash, glossy white lacquered cabinetry and sturdy composite quartz counters called Silestone.

The Muirs also specified some unique features from home, including an ultra-compact Australian drawer dishwasher by Fisher & Paykel.

In the living room, a key focal feature is the stunning electric fireplace

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