



Consistency

The juxtaposition of opposites, a kind of duality or putting things together with potential double meaning seems quite consistent. For instance, the furniture in our living room is mostly simple and modern but the cream chaise with its curvy legs and ornate carving creates a playful contrast. That corner is a great foil to the more sober pieces and areas in the living space – a serious tone with a bit of folly thrown in. I like the idea of being informed about design – which comes from being trained in design history years ago – but also not taking myself too seriously. In fact, maybe the one consistent theme throughout our apartment is its inconsistency: a kind of eclecticism.



HOME DÉCOR

Artistic sensibilities

Visual artist and fashion label co-owner Deborah Crowe takes us through the creative processes and design elements of her stunning Auckland apartment.

Words Leanne Moore. Photography Helen Bankers



Collectables I'm drawn to collectables that pique my interest and make me think. These pieces may contain some kind of contradiction or pose a question about relationships of material, ideas, colour, form or texture. I value the intention of the maker in the things I collect and am interested in the concept and history that influence an object's creation.

Aesthetically, I have a diverse range of collectables. In some pieces high-technical finishing is of utmost importance, whereas in others the aesthetic is the exact opposite – a kind of deliberate shonkiness. There are also things that hold meaning because of family connections, the place they originated or have special ties because they were gifted. Of course, because our living environment is a space influenced by the tastes and style of two people, my husband's and mine, the range of things we collect and their composition evolves as we do.



Deborah Crowe's home is a high-rise Auckland apartment that she has transformed into a platform for artistic expression and exploration. For Crowe, creating a home is a journey that lasts a lifetime. In the decade since she moved into the apartment with her husband Gary, she has transformed it into a unique space where staying power wins over passing fads. The secret to turning the apartment's blank canvas into a harmonious whole is building layers of character over time, she says. Her expert eye as a visual artist is evident in the mixed-up décor that successfully combines colours, art, family memories and repurposed objects. Her colour confidence is perhaps most evident in the energising jolt of bold yellow on a wall of the apartment's open-plan kitchen, dining and living space.

Crowe and her business partner, Kim Fraser, have just relaunched their clothing label, Fraser Crowe. The Fraser Crowe fashion label was exhibited internationally and won a number of New Zealand Fashion awards in the late 1990s in high-end womenswear. This time around, the label maintains its distinctive architectural references but it has a new emphasis on the environment and ethical issues in the clothing industry. "Fraser Crowe pushes against trend-focused fashion, thinks about the future of the planet, and designs clothing that feels gorgeous to wear," says Crowe.

A former senior lecturer in art and design, Crowe has worked from her studio in an historic building on Ponsonby Rd, five minutes walk from the apartment, for about nine years. "I love living just off K Rd. There's a great buzz of creative activity, Western Park is close and there's always something going on. The community has an open-mindedness and when I'm walking or cycling around our neighbourhood I always find something that makes me smile."

Creativity *I could list many artists, architects, designers, musicians and creative practitioners, but really who and what inspires me are people who speak their minds to uphold truth. People who are brave, not fearful of being criticised by the masses, or by the dominant group or culture, and who are focused on achieving a long-term balance for humankind. The "what" that inspires me is making and taking actions – small or large – that make a difference to our environment and/or political structures. From a slightly less abstract perspective, I get inspired when I encounter uncensored happiness and contentment, for example my exhausted English bull terrier proudly hanging her ball on her lower canine tooth on the walk back from the park. Related to my creative work, I get ideas when I walk around cities, taking in the structures, sounds, smells and sights, or when I breathe in the air high up in Tongariro National Park.*

Colour *Rather than a current colour crush, I tend to have single colours or colour combinations I just love forever. For example, the combination of bright yellow and light salmon pink; together they jar a little, but just enough to create a bit of tension and soft uneasiness (if that's not an oxymoron). I also love the colour we painted one of our living room walls "Lady Lime" (PPG Paints). Apart from the brilliant name (which helped close the deal in the paint shop) the slight tinge of green makes this colour change in different light throughout the day. I like how certain colours do that – have a life of their own and appear quite fluid and are responsive to what's around them. In terms of colours related to my current art practice, some jarring, slightly uneasy colour combinations provide my colour language. Alongside flecks of intensely saturated colours, I love to utilise a full tonal range of greys – from dirty green grey to the amazing Payne's Grey. Probably if I had to pick my all-time favourite colour, it could be Payne's Grey – a dark blueish grey that in itself contains almost a contradiction of being a hue without chroma (colour) but actually has so much chroma in it too.*



Character *At home I like to feel comfortable, to observe changes of light and sound throughout the day, and to have long sight lines. I love that from my bed I can see shoes in my plywood tower built by my husband; a jewellery collection; Maungawhau (Mt Eden); the rooftops of the CBD; the bridges of spaghetti junction; and the local sex shop and gallery. For me to feel fulfilled I like to be surrounded by things that stimulate, but also to have breathing spaces for contemplation.*



Composition *For me it's about arranging things that have potential to strike up a conversation with each other, and whomever engages with them. That conversation might be a humorous one, or one about colour, function, materiality, politics, gender issues, environmental considerations. From a practical perspective, I love to take time positioning objects in relation to each other. It's almost meditative for me, and feels a bit like the objects are dancing, with space as their partner. The object, the space and I respond to little actions from each other, working out a nuanced partnership that feels complete. Slight movements a few centimetres or so create the tension or flow of the conversation to just what works in relation to the intention. In general, when I think about establishing composition and character I would summarise it like this: I like pushing against and disrupting the system in some instances, but have areas where respect of craft, or design history, or other associations kick in and I flip back to being a little more rigid. It's all about creating balance. g*

