

the family HQ



“We want our home to be somewhere the kids can think back on fondly. Somewhere that’s full of good memories of swimming and playing in the trees, and in years to come I hope they can think of it as their headquarters – somewhere they can always return to.”

Television producer Mark Leishman and his wife Jo Raymond both grew up in Timaru and have their own fond memories of their childhood and the family home. Now, Mark says they're trying to create the same sense of fun and security for their children – Paddy (12), Molly (7) and Rosie (2).

Designed by respected architect Horace Massey in the depression era, their three-storey house is perched on a hill in Auckland's Mission Bay. And, over the last 12 years since they bought it, the Leishmans have made a significant investment in landscaping the property to make it child-friendly.

"We've been doing it all in stages, because the funds tend to dry up when you do too much at once. After we put in the pool base, it sat there for four years," says Mark. "We're at the stage now, though, where the kids and all their friends can really enjoy it."

As well as the pool, the section offers a treehouse nestled in the middle of a pohutukawa, a stretch of astroturf with golf holes, a volley court for tennis, and a net area for cricket practice.

"Paddy's not a PlayStation boy, so he's always out in the section, kicking and hitting balls."

Located at the end of a cul de sac, the Leishman section is also a popular venue with the neighbouring children.

"Living in a cul de sac is wonderful. It's more like it used to be, with the doors open and children coming and going. In our street, there are three or four other seven-year-old girls for Molly to play with."

Inside the house, the Leishmans have developed what used to be an unused basement area into a music room, complete with a drum kit, piano and guitars.

"We have all the makings of the Partridge Family," jokes Mark. "The kids love the room and it's an infinitely better use of the space."

Not all the progress has been met with eagerly by every Leishman child.

"Molly's not one for change. She objects vociferously to even the smallest alteration, so there was a major commotion when she came home to find we'd changed



the colour of the lobby without her permission. The dark green had to go, though. It was a bit depressing, really, so we've replaced it with a much nicer, less oppressive colour – Resene Half Spanish White – a kind of light grey-brown."

Next in line is the outside of the house.

"Frankly, it needs painting and if I was more of a handy person I might get out there, but it's a big house and I would need a whole lot of scaffolding."

A long-time presenter and now producer of the television programme *Wonder Dogs*, Mark has also created a special space for his own dog DJ in the Leishman household.

"DJ has a kennel on our deck that leads out from what is essentially the heart of our house, our open-plan kitchen. It's really important for dogs to have their own space, where they can relax and where they know they'll be left alone. I think it's particularly important with an eager little two-year-old in the house."

Rosie's presence is also one of the drivers behind Mark and Jo running their production company from home. Dexterity Productions, named after their much-loved dog Dexter, takes care of the editing for *Wonder Dogs* and for the annual Young Farmers contest. A newly built editing suite has helped to cut back on the distractions that come with working from home, and Mark welcomes the chance to be on hand for his children.

"Working from home has its challenges, but it's a real privilege to be around to watch Rosie growing up. It also means Jo and I can be there to pick up Molly and Paddy from school and to hear about their day." **H**

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