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TAKE IT AS RED

There was never any question about rebuilding when a treasured lakeside home burnt down, and its replacement pays joyful tribute.

THE PROJECT

Artist Janet Muir and her husband Richard Brown, a builder, worked with architect Lisa Webb of Studio LWA to rebuild the home they lost in the Lake Ōhau fires — a place where they can holiday with their sons, Harvey (18) and William (17).

LEFT Bold in form and tone, the home's Scoria Colorsteel cladding punches into its surroundings, in a similar way to the farm buildings in the area. **BELOW** A recessed entry forms a sheltered threshold, offering protection from the elements before you step directly into the home's main circulation space. A separate door to the right leads to a compact mudroom, keeping the main arrival experience calm and considered.





LEFT Anchored by a concrete slab and surrounded by shingle for fire resilience, this modest deck extends the living space — a sheltered, sun-catching spot where morning coffee is often enjoyed. Inside, a leather sofa bought from Katalog many years ago is dressed with cushions and a throw from Città, and teams with a vintage chair around a Contour Ovoid coffee table by Woodwrights. The circular piece on the wall behind is *Silent Spring* by homeowner Janet Muir. **RIGHT** Warm materials such as the Feltex Heathland wool carpet in heathered tones and built-in elements shape this spot to gather around a freestanding Woodsman fire. A window seat upholstered in James Dunlop Vienna velvet in Vine with a Wilson & Dorset sheepskin rug makes a cosy perch, and the walls are tiled in Pasture Brick mosaics that originate from Japan.



Lake Ōhau doesn't invite you to slow down — it makes you. Framed by mountains and sky, it's a place where time stretches out and life settles into a slower rhythm. That's what drew Janet Muir and Richard Brown here, and what made them stay.

When fire tore through the valley in 2020, reducing their home to ash, the decision to rebuild was almost instant. This place had shaped their life. Leaving wasn't an option. "The light, the space, the sense of solitude," says Janet. "It all felt right."

Their first home was a creative, considered space by architect Lisa Webb of Studio LWA, a long-time friend who understood both the site and the spirit behind it. She returned to design its successor, not as a replacement but as a continuation. "There were a lot of decisions that didn't need to be spoken

about," says Lisa. "It was just understood."

What followed was a collaborative process guided by trust and clarity. The new house follows the footprint of the first, with one key evolution: the addition of a mezzanine, which introduces a second living area, Janet's office and a sleeping nook — creating breakout zones for when the house is full of people. In the first iteration, a garage had doubled as a gamesroom for their children, but this time the layout offered greater flexibility, without increasing the home's overall size.

For Brown House 2.0, the couple navigated constraints of time, money and the rising cost of building. Re-creating the original in full wasn't possible, nor was it the goal. Instead, they turned to what mattered, stripping back what didn't and letting that guide the design.

The revised structure alters the shape of the home significantly. "The first house had that >



RIGHT The picture window is set in the same position as in the original house, framing a view to the mountains. “It was one of those things we didn’t even need to talk about,” says Lisa. “Of course it would stay.” A window seat now spans the width of the room, with cushions from Città and a set-down nook for books and games tucked beneath a Marz Designs Bright Beads Alise pendant light from Inlite. To its left is *South Pacific Wonderland* by Janet, and in the centre of the room a paper lantern bought at Bunnings lends a soft glow to the space.

OPPOSITE Viewed from above, the kitchen, bought from Ikea in Brisbane, is tucked into the main volume with clarity and calm. Pride Mahogany benchtops tie in with the mahogany floors while the vintage bar stools, found in a secondhand shop, were restored by Janet. Another of her works, *Blue Willow*, hangs on the oriented strand board walls, above the stainless benches on the back wall.



acute gable that lifted at one end — expressive, but not essential,” says Lisa. “This time we unified the massing. It’s one solid form that’s more grounded. Less a statement, more a shelter.” Its solid form and red-scoria finish give it an unmistakable presence in the landscape. Rather than replicate what was lost, the layout was simplified to reflect what they knew they needed: nothing more, nothing less. “There’s a confidence that comes from living with a design and knowing what works,” says Lisa.

That understanding also informed the way space was allocated. They skipped an ensuite, reducing repetition and prioritising shared space. Bathrooms are compact and communal, allowing room elsewhere for circulation to feel generous where it counts. “There’s something about not overdoing it that helps a house

perform better,” says Lisa. The plan supports both solitude and sociability. It works just as well for two as it does for a house full of friends — or guests, when it’s listed for stays.

Richard (known to most as Brownie) took on much of the building work himself through his business, Henry Brown & Company, just as he had the first time. His passion for the project and hands-on approach shaped the home in a way that feels both personal and grounded.

Their approach to materials reflects the same thoughtfulness. Where the first house was about craft, this second build is about economising. Structural insulated panels (SIPs) provide thermal performance and construction efficiency. In turn there’s a certain honesty to the interior. Fire-resistant elements, such as steel cladding, >



LEFT At the centre of the plan, the circulation space connects the living area to the mezzanine stair and the corridor to the bedrooms. It's also where the volume shifts — from the double-height openness of the main space to the more intimate scale of the private zones above and below. "It works harder than you realise," says Lisa. A circular print — also by Janet — entitled *A Room in Meng's House*, decorates this zone. **OPPOSITE** Designed with durability and flexibility in mind, the built-in bunks offer a practical sleeping space for family and guests. "It was about fitting a lot into a small footprint, without it feeling cramped," says Lisa. Simple and solid, the joinery keeps things unfussy while making smart use of every inch.

were introduced as a practical response. "There's beauty in building with materials that don't pretend to be something else," says Lisa. "And a comfort in letting the structure show."

Views are carefully framed to draw in the alpine surroundings. Sliding doors can be left open to enhance connection or closed to offer retreat. It doesn't try too hard. It simply makes space to settle in. "We reused things we loved and found a few new ones along the way," says Janet. Among them was a series of artworks painted by Janet after finding her groove as a painter again. "It's not a story about the fire," she says. "It's about life going on."

Lisa approached the project with the sensitivity of someone who knows her clients deeply. "It didn't need to be a reinvention,"

she says. "It needed to feel like it had always been there." And while the house could be described in architectural terms as modest, pragmatic or even minimalist, its strongest quality is the connection to Ōhau for the couple and their two boys — Harvey (18) and William (17).

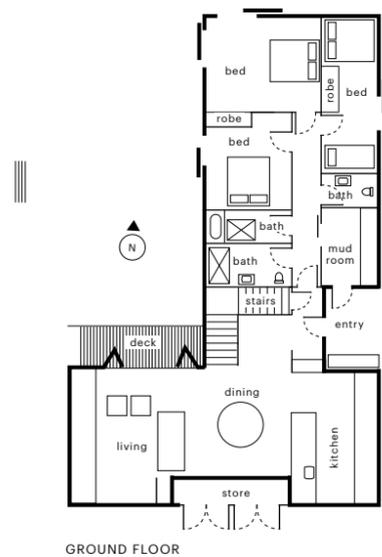
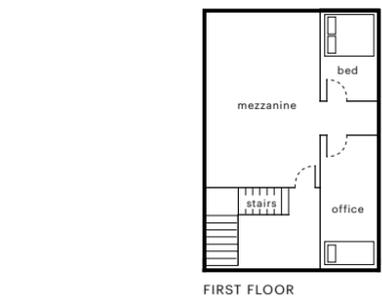
The process wasn't about overcoming adversity so much as honouring a relationship to place. The land still held meaning. The routines of life — coffee in the morning sun, afternoons spent out and about around the lake or up on the ski slope, evenings back at the house filled with friends — still mattered.

What Janet and Lisa have created together, and what Richard's hands have brought to built reality, is a home that reflects those values — and one that welcomes others to experience them, too. ■





THESE PAGES Compact and communal by design, the bathroom prioritises simplicity and shared use. “I’ve always loved the idea of a Japanese ofuro — something quiet and restorative,” says Janet. The bath was built out of Wedi building panels, with tiles applied directly to the surface, since no weatherproofing is necessary with this substrate. The space is thoughtful in its restraint. Pasture Brick mosaics behind the shower are paired with Classic Veincut Ivory travertine tiles surrounding the rest of the room, and a vintage ceramic vase is quiet decoration. A mirror from Ikea, a LeVivi Piazza basin and clean-lined Felton Linea chrome tapware add amenity in a suitably low-key manner.



ABOVE A Morandi bedspread from Città keeps the mood simple in the upstairs bedroom nook. **RIGHT** Skylights in the mezzanine bring light into the space, which is deliberately kept spare so it can double as a movie room and sleeping quarters for extra guests. A Wilson & Dorset stone set adds comfort and can be tossed about for lounging. **OPPOSITE** A mix of design buys and DIY is evident in the main bedroom where Westberg w201 extra small pendants from Inlite hang alongside another piece by Janet, entitled *Remnants*. The bedspread was made with linen bought from Lovrich Design.