



Flight of fancy

Tui inspired the form and colour of a house hovering on a hill in Wellington, writes **Diana Dekker**.

The day architect John Mills visited a section with a had-it house and a great view, he encountered two apprehensive prospective clients and a bunch of excited tui.

The clients, Stella Ramage and Chris Thorn, had picked Mills after trawling the internet for an architect whose ideas and manner they hoped might click with them. They did.

And Mills, watching a dozen tui darting around the Melrose property, immediately decided on the birds as the inspiration for the new house to replace a small 1950s box of a building.

The new house appears to hover over the site and, inside, its swooping ceiling has panels hand-finished with iridescent tui colours.

"I've been living in the house for 18 months and it still gives me a buzz to walk in," says Ramage. "It's lovely, comfortable, warm and welcoming. It's energising in a way. The ceiling in particular gives it that kind of energy. Some people say having

nice surroundings shouldn't make that much difference. It has."

The house was a recipient last year of the New Zealand Institute of Architects' colour and local architecture awards, and a gold medal in the Registered Master Builders House of the Year awards. But its main triumph has been the happiness of client and architect.

Ramage says the original house was bought for its sun and views and they tried, over 12 years, to alter it to make it dry and liveable, including making it as open-plan as possible.

The idea of a new house gradually crystallised as they realised how much money they were spending on a place "that would never be quite right".

"At the end of the day we liked the position, thought about refurbishment and decided to knock it down."

The section is verdant with mature trees and lies across the valley from Zealandia. Kakariki and tui make it their playground.