THE DAILY NEWS

Tome



Alison Rumball's home has history and a very big heart. Writer DENISE TUTAKI and photographer PIP GUTHRIE visited her special place

NE of the traditional aspects of churches from time immemorial has been to provide a refuge for the soul. But a former church that has been turned into a rural home has become a link with another place of refuge in New Plymouth.

New Plymouth Dispirct councillor Alison Rumball would be the first to say her home is her another place of refuge in the standard of the second of the

private person where her reside



concerped, it was a challenge for Alison to open her inher sanctum to the crowds that deluged her home-fover one weekend recently. But it was all in aid of a good cause. Alison's home was one of nine that were trans-formed via the spirit of Christmas to benefit the Taranaki Women's Refuge.

formed via the spirit of Christmas to benefit the Taranaki Women's Refuge.

The elegant home is found at the end of a tree-lined, one-land country road, and it is not hard to forget that this was once the domain of hymnesermons and prayer. This may be a family home but a peaceful energy is permanently eithed in the country of the coun



"The house called for a certain style and decoration, and once I got here and observed the ambience and saw how the house flowed through, I saw it was more than just about doing up one room," Diane recalls.

BHE set about capturing the essence of the building and its serene ambience, sourcing Christmas decorations that would reflect the personality of the home. The transformation was stunning and moved visitors into an awe-stop of the set of the

The building has a great mellowness and the olde worlde ambience of the decorations has An old Bible rests on a piane stool, small dainty crosses adorn chains and a small prayer table in the entranceway give subtle Christian overtones. Christmas trees are a ubiquitous feature throughout, right from the front doorn the control of the control of the control with a volin perched on a chair, its case overflowing with a floral arrangement. Stairs are carefully discovered with the control with the control with a consess and lights.

The detail is precise, right down to the white chiffon tied into bows on the backs of chairs in a crosses nestle. Another bowl is filled with pear local beat of the control of a log fire. An elegant nativity scene graces one table and an old hunting horn



on a wall inspired Diane to place a jaunty little fox alongside.

"Although I had a design idea in place, there were a few little things that evolved, like the have the place of the place

simplicity and understated elegance to the setting.

"It really called for sensithing tall and fegant," says Diane, "but it needed to be strong for the setting that the setting tall and alison admit. Nine hundred people visited the home over two days and were captivated by the ecclesisatical theme adopted for the Christmas fundraiser.

The setting that the sett

RVEN without the extensive decorations, Alison believes the former church is "just a integrity of her home has been maintained with the decorations and feels they tone in with the decorations and feels they tone in with the decorations."

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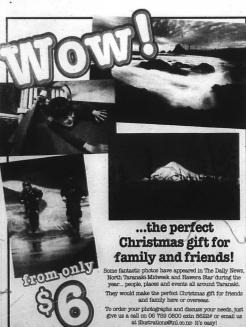
"But it's just a lovely environment in which the five," she says. "It has an ambience of peace, I like to think of it as my sanctuary."

To get the former Bell Block church from scratch to the home it is today has been a labour of love, and intervenew with the toil and sweat is a superstry of the church for \$250." Alison for \$250." Alison for calls. We moved it on to the site on February 29 — Leap Year Day — 1976 and finally moved in Christmas Eve, 1984."

The original foundation stone has found its way into the home, resting at the foot of the piano. It was laid by Archdeacon Govett on September 26, 1901, and if you couldn't feel the history already, this is solid proof of the homes.

nistory areasy, tins is some proor or the nomes public on and husband Barry independently sourced all the materials for their new home, becoming regulars on demolition sites.

"We physically picked these pieces up and brought them here on our trailers. We put up the big beams with block and tackle. It took a long, long time," she remembers.



THE DAILY NEWS Midweek STAR





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PERFECT SETTING: The Rumball dining table, set magnificently for a Christmas feast.

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A house built with love

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"We had three daughters, I was teaching and we had a town milk supply. We lived in an old house, which we eventually sold, and it stood where the garages are now. It was hard at the time but the end result has surpassed our expectations and there are so many wonderful stories. I love this house with a passion."

But some this

But some things were still not right. Shortly before the family moved into the home, Alison had doubts about whether she could live in such a dark house.

live in such a dark house.

"I came home from work and, where the altar had been, Barry had chainsawed a huge hole in the

Problem solved? "Well, then we had to design a window that would complement the house and make a statement. We certainly achieved that."

History seeps from the arteries of the house and every door can claim a stake in a colonial past. Solid church, prison and convent doors have their past intertwined with the Rumballs' own family history and future; old beams have come from demolished cool stores and hardwoods from the old Borthwicks freezing works at Waitara. The huge stone fireplace has been built with locally-sourced andesite stone, reinforced with steel from the interior of power poles from the city's electrical department.

Barry had hauled the power

Barry had hauled the power poles home on a four-foot trailer, Alison recalls. The poles were laid over timber and broken apart until the thick, tortured steel was

exposed.
"Our friend Jim Boon said you could have an earthquake with a

richter scale of 10 and the fireplace still wouldn't fall down. This house is really a Taranaki demolition site — in a funny way," she laughs. But laughter occasionally gives

But laughter occasionally gives way to quiet reflection as those aforementioned wonderful stories are recollected.

"One year, before my birthday, Barry said I would be impressed by his git. It would be like the pyramids of Egypt. And then a fortnight before, he told me it compared more to the Great Wall of China. The big day arrived and he put a blindfold on me and took me up to a track and told me to walk where my eyes took me. He had made a 300-metre walk into the native bush while I was out each day teaching. I thought it was the most, the most. ..." and words fail her.

Barry died two years ago but his energy still pervades the home. His slippers are out by the old fireplace, as if any moment he will stroll in through the door with another demolition find.

"Barry always said our house had an element of public ownership because it used to be an old church. I often think about that comment he made. I didn't really agree and to hold this event in my home left me feel considerably out of my comfort zone," Alison reveals. "But a friend reminded me that we learn from every experience — it's all a part of the tapestry of life."

Barry would have considered the experience character-building, and in some reflective moments after the hectic weekend, she has wondered how he would have felt about it-all.

it all.

"I'd like to think that he would be saying with a gentle smile . . . well done Alison." □