

rare for a criminal to return to his house after it's been seized by the courts. Plus, the contract for the property came with a nice letter from the vendor promising that he wouldn't come back and telling us that none of the internal walls were load bearing.

Anyway, he's in jail for at least another couple of decades. So, because the price was good, and despite the need for renovation, we signed on the dotted line and began the long wait, first to find out if the courts would accept our offer and then for settlement.

I paid the deposit with unmarked, non-sequential \$20 notes from a duffel bag. It seemed to suit the house.

Recently, there has been a lot in the news about the crackdown on bikie fortresses. As I now own one, I have some insight into what they involve. The place has a fancy alarm system and a few high-tech security cameras, but it's the less-expected features that I most enjoy.

That the front door is a big, remote-controlled roller door (so we can park our motorbikes in the living room) is interesting and somewhat inconvenient. Having only tiny, high windows that, like all the other external doors, are covered with metal roller shutters is frustrating. But I do enjoy that the bottom of the stairs, kitchen and laundry nook all have bullet-resistant roller doors. I always wanted a kitchen that doubled as a panic room.

The outside of the house is designed to prevent the police from blasting their way in with a small charge and there is a pool-style fence at the top of the stairs and several deadlocks on the bedroom door so the police couldn't surprise the occupants during the night.

Of course, we're keeping most of those features because they're fantastic. I'm a little disappointed that we'll have to remove some of the security cameras because they're shading our new solar panels and we're going to build a front wall with an actual door — and the pool fence thing is a bit weird. But everything else is just cool.

We were supposed to settle on the house last Monday but because none of this process has gone smoothly, the owner's conveyancer lost the title certificate, so we had to get a licence to occupy while waiting for a new one.

The bright side is that we're now able to start our renovations and rent the place for \$1 a month. The downside is that last week we discovered that part of the roof fell off between our last inspection and us taking up residence, and it looks like we have to replace the balcony doors and the kitchen.

But who wants smooth sailing when you can have an exciting adventure, spiralling into poverty and insanity? Apart from everyone, I mean.

Alice Clarke is a Melbourne writer. Twitter @Alicedkc

How a house led me to the underworld

THERE comes a time that all good escapades must end and it looks like the first part of my adventure in real estate might soon come to a close. But, of course, the road to buying one's first property isn't easy for those who aren't super rich and mine was no exception.

Once my partner and I had saved a small deposit, the hunt began. Sadly, in the areas we wanted, most of the apartments we could afford lacked structural integrity and space. After several near misses, we were about to give up hope and resign ourselves to living with my parents, when we found a four-bedroom house, within our budget, slightly beyond where we were looking.

Of course, a house that's almost \$50,000 cheaper than a Footscray apartment doesn't come without baggage and quirks, but I decided that it was worth checking out.

On first inspection, the house was a little unusual, to say the least. It seemed very secure. I grew up in a house that my father designed to withstand a bushfire, zombie attack and World War III. It had battlements, a bunker and escape tunnels, so I was relaxed about this house having a few quirky features. But the sheer amount of security implied that this place wasn't owned by your

average family. That's when the real estate agent happened to mention that it was being sold by the courts as proceeds of crime. She assured me that, while she didn't know what the former owner had done, she didn't think it was violent.

After Googling the man's name, I found out he was a former bikie with a penchant for arson, assault, blackmail, drug manufacturing, supplying drugs and murder. Allegedly.

I assume he also wasn't very good with his taxes.

However, when your budget is tight, it's hard to be choosy about where you live, and we did seek advice from a criminal defence lawyer who assured us it was

**Alice
Clarke**



**HOME IS A
FORTRESS**