




Silver LINING

Sympathetic to its environment, a hillside perch over Sydney's northern beaches, this house bares its soul to the bushland surrounds and brings the outside in

WORDS & STYLING HELEN ADAMS PHOTOGRAPHY CATH MUSCAT



OPEN-PLAN LIVING Splashes of radiant red, in the form of native blooms in a Bison vase (opposite), Cloth cushions and even bold high-gloss storage units (this page), punctuate the largely neutral palette of Howard and Katie's family home. Tallowood floorboards from Sydney Flooring seamlessly connect the kitchen and living areas, creating one continuous space, with cosy oases formed by white leather sofas from Domayne, which give a glamorous look while being easy to wipe clean, making them a practical choice for the couple and their young family. >



KITCHEN The pale mauve-tinged grey units, painted in Dulux Eggshell Pink, were chosen with the help of Utz-Sanby Architects as a delicate counterpoint to the rich red glass splashback. "We wanted a striking colour to contrast with the greenery outdoors," says Howard. While the island bench is topped by practical stainless steel, CaesarStone quartz composite in Osprey was chosen for the rear benchtop to prevent the kitchen looking too industrial. The home includes such clever features as high louvred windows, which allow hot air to escape and encourage cross-ventilation. "We put in ceiling fans but we rarely use them," says Howard.



The best homes make a lasting first impression on their owners, but it was a bare pocket of bushland on Sydney's northern beaches that made a dramatic impact on homeowner Howard. "It resembled a tropical amphitheatre," he recalls. The three-bedroom family home he and his wife Katie built on the site maintains this feel, a testament to the thought the couple put into creating what they call "an everyday retreat with minimal impact on the bush setting".

Howard fell in love with the area several years prior when it was a regular sailing haunt, which prompted him to look for land to buy. "I always saw it as a longer-term proposition, but I was keen to put our stamp on it and create a dream home," he explains. The sloping plot had already been subdivided, with the building location originally envisaged at the bottom of the hill. While this may have been the easier option, the couple thought it would have defeated the point of building on the beautiful site. "We were really taken by the Sydney blue gums and native foliage, so we wanted a house perched high on the hill, with a treehouse feel." After sending a brief to three architects, Howard and Katie opted for Utz-Sanby, favouring the company's consultative style.

Three years of problem-solving followed, with complex council requirements and structural engineers part of the convoluted mix. But with enthusiasm, passion and sheer commitment, the couple's dream home – which they now share with their young children, Ellie, Sam and Jasper – eventually became a reality.

"We wanted a one-storey home that opened to the outdoors and capitalised on the river views," Howard says. "From day one, we were focused on having as many windows as possible." At just over 150 square metres, the house was kept a modest size to reduce its impact on the land. The floor plan is divided into two zones, with the living areas in one wide-open space to take advantage of the light and river views, while the bedrooms are nestled into the bush at the other end of the home. "The layout makes the space feel very open, so you feel like you're sitting outside," explains Howard. The living room opens out onto an outdoor area, complete with retractable flyscreens, while the adjacent kitchen includes a bench that extends outdoors to an alfresco kitchen with integrated barbecue. As the living areas face north into the prevailing wind, breezes are drawn into the house, with the angled roof and high louvres enhancing cross-ventilation and eliminating the need for airconditioning. Heating is covered by a gas fire in the living room, with a fan to disperse the warmth.

With all the hard work behind them, the alarm clock is long gone, replaced by a dawn chorus of birdsong. A variety of animals, from bandicoots to wallabies, are regular visitors and a constant reminder of the natural setting. Although the couple didn't have children when the house was first designed, the home has seen them through the vicissitudes of new family life. All that's changed is Howard's sailing; "When the kids arrived, I sold the boat and bought a kayak," he laughs.

LIVING ROOM {top left} The custom-made storage unit, spraypainted in bold red, houses a Jetmaster gas fire and a plasma TV that rises from the benchtop on a hydraulic lift when needed. "Deciding where to put the TV was a major decision. I wanted it high, but we didn't want it to obscure the windows as it would interrupt the view from the barbecue area," explains Howard.
KITCHEN {top right} The brushed stainless-steel benchtop on the island bench extends beyond the kitchen to the outdoor barbecue area, with bi-fold glass doors blurring the lines between outside and in. >



We wanted AN EVERYDAY RETREAT
WITH MINIMAL IMPACT ON THE BUSH SETTING”

we love. . .
the outdoor room

The beauty of this family home is its clever construction, with every space used to the full. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the outdoor room with its angled roof, which excludes the summer sun yet allows winter rays to stream into the home. “This design suits the climate really well as you can’t sit outdoors for a long time without being under cover,” explains architect Duncan Sanby of Utz-Sanby. A screen of fixed timber battens provides shelter and privacy without obstructing the view.



BARBECUE AREA The outdoor barbecue area makes the most of the home's open environs; lit by dappled sunlight, it has all the benchspace needed for cooking up a storm, with easy access to the indoor kitchen. The deck, which wraps around to the outdoor room, is a favourite place for Howard and Katie's son Sam to play. >

*"I love waking
UP TO UNINTERRUPTED GREENERY
AND THE SOUNDS OF WALLABIES"*





MASTER BEDROOM {opposite} The master bedroom is Howard's favourite room. "I love waking up to uninterrupted greenery and the sounds of wallabies. It feels as if we're camping out." The low wall separating the bedroom from the walk-in wardrobe doubles as a bedhead and also incorporates recessed bedside cabinets. In soft green Wilsonart laminate, the pale wall reflects the foliage outdoors, an impression further enhanced by the leafy Bed Bath N' Table quilt and green Adairs sheets. This connection to the outdoors is a strong theme in the peaceful parents' retreat, with both the ensuite and the master bedroom opening onto a small deck area {top right} enshrouded in lush flora.

BATHROOM {top left} Bisazza mosaic tiles covering the wide bath surround introduce a vibrant hit of emerald to the otherwise neutral room, which is mainly used by the couple's oldest children, Ellie and Sam. The same tiles are used in the ensuite {right} as a striking feature wall, echoing the verdant bushland outside and giving the home a cohesive and unfussy feel. >



Inside story

Who lives here? Howard, 44; Katie, 37; and their children, Ellie, five, Sam, three, and Jasper, one.
Describe the house in three words: Howard: "Energetic, creative and reflective."

Were there any dramas in the construction? "Not during the build, but the council introduced new requirements for the geotech [geological engineering report for the site] which proved to be a nightmare. They asked for more and more rigorous engineering and this was definitely the lowest point. Our architect came up with alternatives, so we got there in the end."

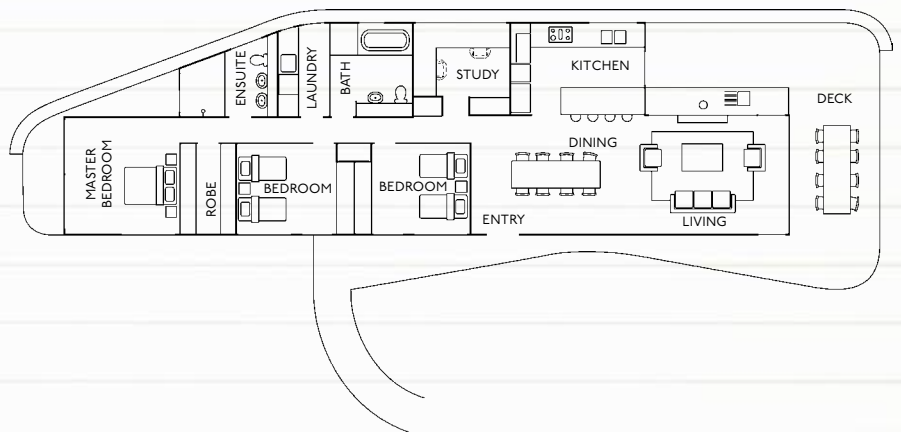
Biggest lesson learnt? "Patience, especially before the build; there would be a few weeks of excitement, then nothing for months."

Most extravagant buy? "The hydraulic lift for the television [below] that raises the TV out of the cabinet."

Is there anything you would have done differently? "Strangely enough, we didn't consider our cat, Stanley. Stanley joined the family after we bought the land but he's an indoor cat. This didn't matter in the city, but here he's escaped a few times and come back covered in ticks or injured fighting, which has led to big vet bills. It also stops us opening up the house as much as we thought we would."



Simple bar stools from Freedom tuck neatly underneath the breakfast bar and tie in with the stainless-steel benchtop.



STREAMLINED DESIGN {right}

The linear design of the house helps the space to flow smoothly from the outdoor room at one end through to the bedrooms. Walls are kept to a minimum and the living spaces and master bedroom all open up to the outdoors.

KITCHEN {below} A wall of built-in storage and integrated appliances, including a TV, keep the design sleek.



"The layout MAKES THE SPACE FEEL VERY OPEN SO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE SITTING OUTSIDE"



fave find
Leafy patterns and natural hues bring the outdoors in. 'Olive Branch' table runner in Pistachio. Price: \$29.95. Find it: Dandi, (02) 8815 5928. dandi.com.au.



DECK {left}

Despite being designed before Katie and Howard had children, the single-level layout is incredibly child-friendly. It was while visiting a play centre that the couple discovered the mesh for the exterior balustrades, which they sourced from Nationwide Netmakers. "The original mesh we chose wasn't the right specification, whereas this is the ideal size for small children," says Howard.

colour & materials

1 Benchtop Quartz composite in Osprey, from \$500/lineal metre, including installation, CaesarStone.

2 Bathroom tiles 'Shading Blends' mosaic tiles in Begonia, \$318/20mm x 20mm, Bisazza.

3 Floorboards Tallowwood timber floorboards, from \$150/sqm, Sydney Flooring. [Stockists, page 221](#)

Due to the printing process, actual colours may vary.

CONTACT: Duncan Sanby of Utz-Sanby Architects, call (02) 9904 2515 or visit utzsanby.com.