

A thick mass of dense bush was all Michelle MacLennan could see when she went to visit a section her husband, Rob Finlayson, was keen to buy. There was no natural clearing on the 0.8ha section, so it was a case of climbing through the undergrowth to explore the site's full potential.

Rob, a keen bush walker, was excited about the find, but Michelle needed a bit of convincing. For her, building a house on such a section seemed like a huge job and she couldn't really visualise how it might look.

"I really wasn't that attracted to the

site, but it was perfect for Rob," says Michelle. "Now we joke that Rob got the site he wanted and I got the house I wanted!" she says, laughing.

Access to Michelle and Rob's newly-built house is down a quiet, winding road with the advantage of being just a few hundred metres from the motorway – without the traffic noise. The house is buried in the bush and has literally been built "around" the trees; a requirement of the local council's resource consent.

"It was a case of having the trees surveyed, plotting where they were located, and planning the house around them,"

"ROB GOT THE SITE HE WANTED AND I GOT THE HOUSE I WANTED!"

THIS PHOTO: The shiny silver of the Zincalume is offset by drama of red-stained plywood cladding in this Auckland home. RIGHT: Talia (six, left) and Chelsea (nine) make the most of the bush near their house.

bushbaby

This Auckland home nestles within a mantle of green trees, with splashes of scarlet to give it a warm heart

TEXT BY JANE CRITTENDEN PHOTOGRAPHY BY STU & KELLAR BASSET





THIS PHOTO: The cherry red of the exterior cladding was colour-matched to the kitchen wall colour and is picked up in the kwila flooring.

says architect Carolyn Smith, director of Architecture Smith + Scully in Auckland, when she talks about designing the house.

The idea of bringing in an architect seemed like a luxury to the couple and, at first, they had plans to hire a design-and-build firm to do the work as a package. Then Michelle spotted a magazine feature about the house designed by Carolyn's business partner, Hilary Scully. Michelle was taken with the practice's philosophy, "Architecture is available to everyone", and shortly afterwards the couple asked Carolyn to help with the project.

Michelle says it was nice to find a female architect, because construction can be a male-dominated environment.

"Carolyn was very approachable," she says. "She had amazing vision, which was great because we didn't really have any ideas about the style of the house we wanted. We were happy to put our trust in her."

That said, Michelle did give Carolyn a brief of the practical requirements of the house. This included a list of "must-haves", such as a "Department of Conservation hut-style study" (at Rob's request) and

Buildingbiz

- Draw up a list of "must-haves", "would likes" and "would loves"; this will help you prioritise when decisions have to be made.
- Give the architect a realistic budget as early as possible, so they can work out if the brief is achievable.
- Your architect also needs visual clues to help them understand where you want to head (or don't want to go) and the styles and colours you like. Make a file of cuttings from magazines and scribble down the details you find appealing.
- Give your architect as much information as you can about the existing site (or house), such as the certificate of title and LIM report, and check with the relevant council to see if any other existing information is available. You may be surprised at what is on file for your property.
- Write down how you want to use the spaces in the house. Think about how you prefer to entertain. How important is privacy? Are you messy in the kitchen? The answers will help determine the design.



THIS PHOTO: The living area bi-fold doors can be opened wide to bush and sunshine.



THIS PHOTO: The dining room feels as though it is practically outdoors.

THE SENSITIVITY SURROUNDING THE BUSH MEANT RESTRICTIONS ON HOW THE HOUSE COULD BE BUILT

another list of "would loves" (depending on budget), such as a split-level design.

The sensitivity surrounding the bush meant restrictions on how the house could be built. The trees that were allowed to be removed were put through a shredder and the mulch was laid over the site to allow the nutrients to be absorbed back into the soil.

The ground could not be altered in case tree roots were damaged during construction and this prevented the workers carrying out any excavation work. Instead, pile foundations were bored

carefully into the ground, with the proviso that if roots were accidentally damaged, they had to be immediately checked and repaired by an arborist. In turn, lightweight Zinalume and plywood claddings were used to reduce the load on the foundations and the ground.

Building had to be slow and steady, partly because resource consent approval took time, preventing the site from being touched until it had been formalised. It also took four months to clear the footprint and construct the driveway. Michelle says this took them completely by surprise.



THIS PHOTO: The couple's en suite has shower encased in glass that almost dangles in the trees.
BELOW: Michelle's mother's collection of tiny Thai pots adds a touch of the exotic.



"WHEN WE BOUGHT THIS SECTION, I ASKED MY MOTHER IF WE COULD MOVE IN FOR SIX MONTHS. TWO YEARS LATER, WE FINALLY LEFT!"

"When we sold our house and bought this section, I asked my mother if we could move in for six months. Two years later, we finally left!" she says with a smile.

Bush houses are often dogged by lack of light and dampness, but Carolyn kept the plan relatively narrow to maximise natural light across the spaces. The roof was also tilted to the north to make the most of the sunlight.

The shiny silver of the Zinalume exterior is warmed up by red-stained plywood cladding and contrasts with the natural green backdrop. "We chose a red stain to balance the effect. It was like adding a warm 'heart' to the house," says Carolyn.

Inside, the same cherry red has been colour matched and applied to the kitchen wall. Again, this glow adds to the perception that the kitchen is the "heart" of the house. The colour picks up hints of red in the kwila floors, while the charcoal grey cabinetry and benchtop reflect the cool silver of the Zinalume and aluminium joinery.

The walls are painted in a creamy white throughout the house and lighten up the rooms. They also offer a calm surface that doesn't compete with the furnishings, nor the trees outside.

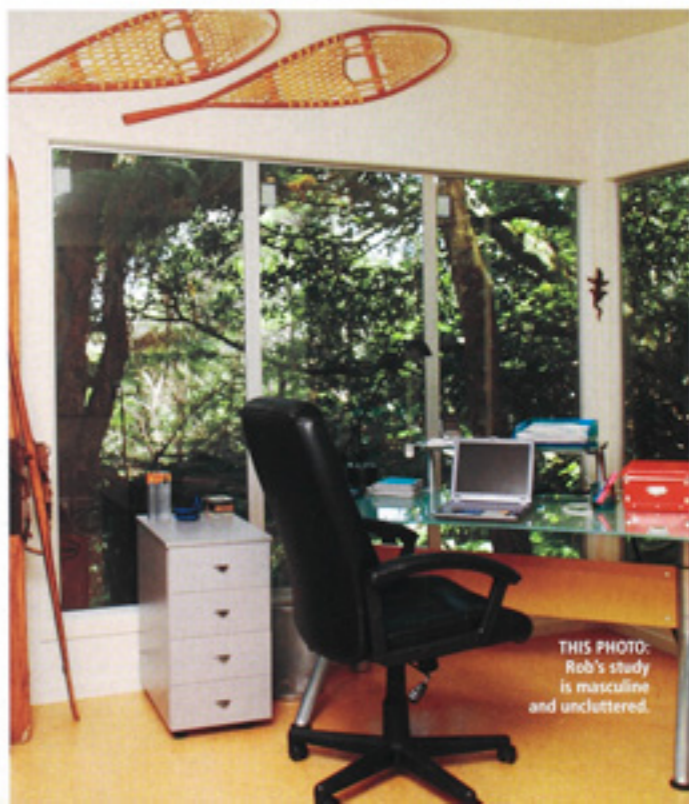
Manageright

- 1 If you are building a house on a flat section, you should consider hiring a building contractor to build the house and project-manage for you.
- 2 Hire a quantity surveyor to cost out the project in its entirety.
- 3 Be very organised with paperwork. There's nothing worse than not being able to lay your hand on an important document immediately.
- 4 Keep a close watch on costs and be prepared to make changes as you go. Decide which features you can do without and be prepared to make compromises.
- 5 Don't rush bathrooms and kitchens, as they are expensive and not easy to change.



THIS PHOTO: Neutral colours and golden timber are restful in the main bedroom.
LEFT, FROM TOP: The stairs have become a family wedding gallery; high ceilings and broad hallways add to the sense of space; decks create a private sanctuary.

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THIS PHOTO: Rob's study is masculine and uncluttered.



Q&A

Michelle MacLennan and Rob Finlayson live with: Chelsea (nine), Talia (six), cats Benson, Hedges, Shadow and Buttercup, and Kura the dog.

Love: Taking Kura for family walks along the beach at weekends.

Q: Did you have to make any compromises in the design?

A: We were going to have an outdoor burner on the deck, but we decided it was going to be too expensive. In hindsight, we might have struggled to get permission, because we are so near the trees.

Q: What part of the house do you love the most?

A: Our shower, because it feels as if we're showering outside. It took some getting used to at first! But it is very private and the windows let in lots of light, which is important, because the bathroom faces south.

Q: Did you change anything along the way?

A: We mainly stuck to the plans, but we did change the pantry in the kitchen to a little study area for the kids, so Michelle can keep an eye on them when working in the kitchen and they're doing homework. Our builder offered suggestions all the way through that up enhanced the design.

"I WENT HUGELY OVER BUDGET, SO ROB SAYS I'M FIRED IF WE DO THIS AGAIN!"



THIS PHOTO: Lilac creates a soothing haven in the main bathroom, with accents of blue. LEFT: The family enjoys breaks on the deck in summer.

The house steps down the natural contours of the land, allowing the kitchen/dining area to be perched on a raised platform. Stepping down into the living area gives the illusion of descending into the undergrowth – in part a reality. The children's bush playground, complete with a rope swing, hideaways and climbing ropes drops down below the deck, but is still within view of their parents' watchful eye.

The split-level second floor faces north and reaches up towards the treetops to meet the sun. The dawn light pours into the couple's bedroom and the ensuite has a shower encased in glass that feels as though it almost dangles in the trees.

The sound of moreporks, tui and kereru rings around the house and Michelle says

it's easy to forget the stresses of project managing such a complicated building project. "I went hugely over budget," she says laughing. "so Rob says I'm fired if we do this again!"

But would they want to build a house again? Michelle and Rob are thrilled with the haven they live in and say they're lucky to have their dream home so quickly.

"We went from our first home to our dream home without moving in between," says Michelle. "We love folding back the doors and sitting out on the deck and breathing that earthy bush smell. We can watch the kids playing and there isn't a day that goes by when we don't think 'Wow, this is a lovely place to live'."

Turn the page to recreate the look ▶



THIS PAGE: The storage chest in Talia's bedroom was painted, then covered in Wallies stickers (available at Spotlight) and polyurethaned, while her desk should take care of all her future study needs.



factfile

■ exterior

Plywood cladding in Resene 'Totem Pole'; deck furniture from Harvey Norman, Auckland; balustrades by Greg Gunderson Builders, Auckland; lighting throughout from Light Industry New Zealand, Auckland.

■ living area

Walls throughout in Resene 'Acropolis'; ceilings half-strength Resene 'Acropolis'; Alpine 'Colorado' carpet from Carpet One, Auckland; leather sofas and chair from Gascoigne Furniture, Auckland; coffee table from Marton Lee Furniture By Design, Auckland; cushions and artwork from Freedom Furniture.

■ dining area

Metals table from Country Living, Auckland; red chairs from Freedom Furniture; metal hatch dresser from Country Living; black sofa from Target Furniture Hypermarket, Auckland.

■ kitchen

Wall in Resene 'Lusty'; splashback matched to Resene 'Lusty' by Graphic Glass Auckland; Silestone benchtop in 'Gris Expo' and two-pot lacquer cabinetry in custom-mixed 'Fossil', both from Kitchens By Pat Gavin, Auckland.

■ main bathroom

Walls in Resene 'Amethyst Smoke'; paia tiles from the Tile Warehouse, Auckland; vanity by Kitchens By Pat Gavin.

■ main bedroom

Duvet cover set and cushions from Household Liners, Auckland; art from Freedom Furniture.

■ en suite

Vanity by Kitchens By Pat Gavin; Linea 'Mocca' and Linea 'Blanco' matt tiles from the Tile Warehouse; fittings from L. G. Carter, Auckland.

■ Talia's bedroom

Walls in a custom-mixed pink by Resene; duvet cover set from Pumpkin Patch, Auckland; curtains in Mory 'Pastel' from Creative Curtains; furniture from Target Furniture Hypermarket; artwork from Freedom Furniture.

■ Rob's study

All office furniture from Direct Office Furniture, Auckland.

Contact details, page 142.