

THIS PHOTO:

A cladding of ply not only fitted Susan and Derek's budget, but ensures the home blends smoothly with the surrounding landscape.

FACING PAGE: Luca Heard, Derek Heard and Susan Ross-Heard find their home is their family haven.



Thanks to creative design and clever planning, this challenging Auckland site has become host to a home that is at one with its environment

At tight budget and a tight squeeze between protected native trees might seem like a challenging design brief to most. But Susan Ross-Heard and husband Derek Heard, with the help of architect Carolyn Smith, managed to turn adversity to advantage when building their West Auckland home.

The result is a spacious two-bedroom dwelling that nestles so comfortably within the surrounding foliage that the couple have dubbed it their "tree house".

Susan, who works for Air New Zealand, bought the Wood Bay, Titirangi, property 11 years ago in her single days and lived in the original one-bedroom weatherboard cottage, believed to be one of the first baches in the area. But, with outside

Conservation clues

1 Meet with the appropriate authorities on site before designing begins. That way, the constraints are clear to both parties. Consulting with councils from the outset will reassure them you are genuine in your concerns and allow them to be more flexible.

2 If you intend to cut back a tree, make sure you are clear on how much you are permitted to prune and consult with your local council.

3 Make a feature of any tree that cannot be removed. Certain trees are protected because of their scarcity and their beauty – working within this constraint will ensure your home is surrounded by mature trees, always a bonus.

greenrevolution

STORY BY NICOLE PARISH PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN PERRY

homeofthemoth

THIS PHOTO: The warm Aalto 'Heartfelt' on the living area's feature wall gives an air of comfort.

BELOW RIGHT: The dining table and coffee table were made to Susan and Derek's design in European oak.



THIS PHOTO: This view from the kitchen shows the effortless flow that Carolyn Smith's design injected into the house.



THIS PHOTO: Derek and Luca share a secret in the kitchen, cleverly downlit to provide task lighting.

factfile

■ exterior

Exterior in CD LOSPH3-treated radiata ply, from Scott, Auckland; shade sail from Kmart, Auckland.

■ living area

Walls and ceilings throughout in Aalto 'Apartment', feature wall in Aalto 'Heartfelt', architraves in Aalto 'Minimalist'; aluminium joinery by Summit Aluminium, Auckland; flooring in Strandboard from Carters, Auckland; Erzo sofas and cushions from Freedom Furniture; coffee table by Essex Cabinetmakers, Auckland; red vase from Country Road Homewear; rug from Artisan Floorwear, Auckland; artwork above sofa is 'Je t'aime' by Robert Motherwell.

■ dining area

Dining table by Essex Cabinetmakers, legs are Scilm from Scott; chairs from Camira Furniture, Auckland; louvre windows throughout by Breezeway from Summit Aluminium; Warrington Studio woodburner from Fires By Design, Auckland.

■ kitchen

Feature wall in Aalto 'Purple Rain'; ceiling in radiata pine ply from Scott; cabinetry in Bestwood 'Maple' veneer on ply; benchtops and sink in stainless steel from Mercer Stainless; Furnipart handles from Scott; blinds from Pacific Blinds, Auckland; bar top in Corian 'Macadam' by Prefinished Surfaces, a division of Prefinished Products, Auckland.

■ bathroom

Vanity unit and shelving by Concept Interiors, Auckland; vanity doors by Luminaire from Scott; basin in Corian 'Glacier White' from Muzzarolo, New Plymouth; green Bisazza glass mosaic tiles from Jacobsen Creative Surfaces, Auckland.

■ main bedroom

Walls in Aalto 'Zero', feature wall in ply from Scott; bed by East West Designs, Auckland; bedlinen from Laura Ashley, Auckland; Electra lighting from Scott.

■ Luca's bedroom

Venetian blinds from Pacific Blinds, Auckland; bedlinen from Pumpkin Patch, Auckland, table and chairs from Distinction, Auckland.

Contact details, page 126.

Susan was as keen as any conservationist to protect the site's trees and was inspired by Australian bush homes

ablation facilities, her intention was always to build something more comfortable.

At 860 sqm, the property was a full site, with views down to Wood Bay, but usable area was limited. The section sloped steeply towards the beach and the house had to be wedged between a large puriri halfway down the slope and a nikau palm nearer the road.

Far from being daunted, Susan saw the restrictions as an opportunity to build something a bit different, and engaged life-long friend and architect Carolyn Smith of Collective Architecture. Susan was as keen as any conservationist to protect the site's trees and, inspired by bush houses she had seen in Australia, her brief to Carolyn was to design

a contemporary home that let as much of the outside in as possible, but which wasn't too expensive on a single income.

Around the time the cottage was demolished, Susan met Derek and, being a bit of an expert on timber and building materials with employer Scott (formerly Scott Panel & Hardware), he has had significant input into the finished product. The house became a couple's haven and with the arrival of son Luca three years ago, has withstood the challenge of becoming a family home.

"The whole project was conceived with just me in mind, but it turned out to be a great place for a couple and for a family as well," says Susan. When admiring the view from the upstairs main bedroom with branches of the puriri tree



LEFT and BELOW: The bathroom's vanity unit and tall shelving unit are in American white oak with a dark chocolate stain, sourced by Derek. **BOTTOM:** A ply feature wall gives the main bedroom a minimal touch and complements the bed, which is in American white ash.



The choice of materials was an important factor in keeping to the budget, so cheaper products were employed, but good design ensured a stunning visual effect

In the raw

- To achieve the natural style of Susan and Derek's home, don't be afraid to make a feature of building materials, even if they are chosen with a lower budget in mind.
- Consult designers, builders and timber experts for ideas on what works and what doesn't.
- Enhance, rather than cover up, low-cost building materials. Staining ply, rather than painting it, gives the material its own life.
- Leave the layered edges of ply and metal attachments showing. This carries through the natural look, rather than appearing unfinished.
- Thoroughly research the market for products and materials that are within budget and complement your style.



THIS PAGE: Luca's spacious bedroom gives the three-year-old plenty of room to spread out with his toys – or to indulge in a little artwork at his table.

just centimetres away, it's not hard to see why. In the end, the majestic puriri lost just a single limb to make way for the house. Carolyn Smith says she and Susan met with the council arborist prior to planning. "Right from the beginning we knew what the parameters were and the council was prepared to be flexible."

From there, the plan was kept as simple and compact as possible with the open, spacious feel gained by thoughtful design. Says Carolyn: "We effectively borrowed space from another area to make each larger than it appears – the kitchen is open to the dining area, which is open to the living space, which is open to the stairs." Varied ceiling heights and plenty of full-length glazing also add to the feeling of openness and light in the home.

The slope of the property and the fact

that it is in a "shifting ridge" zone means a lot of money has been invested in its foundations – some poles went in eight metres deep. To minimise costs, Carolyn's design followed the contours of the land, which meant some poles were shorter than they might otherwise have been.

The choice of materials was the next most important factor in keeping to the budget, so cheaper products were employed, but good design ensured a stunning visual effect. The cladding is in ply with a stain finish. Zinalume, which doesn't require painting or powdercoating, was used for flashings, the roof and the Juliet balcony, providing a stylish contrast to the ply.

Inside, the metal-on-timber theme is continued throughout the living areas. The kitchen, only recently finished, is an area in which both partners enjoy spending





THIS PHOTO: The living area's water hyacinth floor cushion, found in the US, adds texture to the smooth polyurethaned Strandboard flooring.

BELOW: Susan and Derek love the sweeping views from the home's upper storey.



THIS PHOTO: The site's magnificent trees were a deciding factor in the final position of the house.

The floors are in polyurethaned Strandboard while the pine ply ceiling panels have a "negative" effect, with panels placed slightly apart and the building paper just visible

Design advice

- Keep the plan simple and compact but maximise space by keeping the interiors as open as possible so each "room" or area borrows space from the one next to it.
- Using ceiling-height dowel, instead of a balustrade, on a stairwell ensures safety while still allowing energy to flow from one area to another.
- Vary ceiling heights, where possible, to add a sense of volume and spaciousness.
- Include plenty of full-height windows, opening to attractive views, to create a feeling of expansiveness.
- Polyurethaned Strandboard is a cost-effective flooring solution that copes well with the wear and tear of family life.

time. The cabinetry is a maple veneer on ply. "We liked the layered look on the edges of the cupboards and chose stainless-steel benchtops for durability," says Derek.

The floors are in polyurethaned Strandboard while the ceiling panels, matched as closely as possible, are radiata pine ply. Susan and Derek wanted the ceiling to have a "negative" effect, with panels placed slightly apart, and the black building paper behind just visible. The couple also insisted on making a feature of the steel screws in the panels.

"Keeping costs down on the main building materials meant we could spend a bit more on some of the fittings and make features of them," says Derek.

An acrylic product called Corian was used for both the bartop in the kitchen and the hand basin in the bathroom.

Derek also sourced American white oak for the bathroom cabinet and shelving.

Susan and Derek have just finished the last job on their list – landscaping their front yard to create an outdoor entertaining area and playing space for Luca. The nikau palm and a cabbage tree are the focal points, and are surrounded by a fence made of 177 ponga trunks, handwired by Derek.

Now the house is finished, Susan and Derek, who relished the experience, are keen for a new project. "I loved researching and sourcing the products," says Susan. "We were very fortunate to have Carolyn's friendship and ability to interpret our dream into a home that functions so well for us and is a joy to live in. You live and learn and it would be great to do something where we could try what we couldn't here." □