

Dream Home

Durable design for a laid-back lifestyle

Quirky details prevail in this family-friendly house, writes **Judy Barouch**.



Pet projects ... the kitchen's super-sized bench and robust design suit keen cook Kristen Marsh and family (left); an unexpected "pod" houses a guest powder room. Photos: Marco Del Grande



Tree change?... Country escape?... B & B?....

On Oberon golf course, 50 paces to tee off!

- Natural gas heated indoor pool and spa
- Huge living dining area with wood fire and golf course views
- Spacious kitchen with adjoining family and dining area opening to alfresco areas front and back
- His and her studies. 4 double bedrooms. 2 Bathrooms. Double garage
- Central and underfloor heating, double glazing, high ceilings
- Private with established low maintenance surrounds
- 10 minute stroll to shops, bushland walking and cycling, Lake Oberon

Oberon, a friendly small country town, enjoys a high altitude climate with mild summers & occasional winter snowfalls. Only 20 minutes from Jenolan Caves, 21/2 hours from Sydney with very good shopping, recreational & community facilities, this home is well worth your inspection!

View By appointment

Price \$890,000

Contact 0418 245 161

R&W Blackheath
4787 8372

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The commanding view from Kristen and John Marsh's Dover Heights property across four headlands—Bondi, Tamarama, Bronte and Clovelly—inspired the concept for a four-level home.

"John is a keen surfer. He loves that every morning he can look across from the front balcony and check out the surfing conditions," Kristen says.

The new abode was the result of a happy collaboration of friends, all University of Sydney architecture alumni: owner John with Heidi Pronk and Neil Mackenzie of Mackenzie Pronk Architects and architect/interior designer Antonia Pesenti of Make.

The house's facade hints at mid-century modern style with its over-scaled three-storey-high sandstone chimney.

"In a metaphorical sense, the chimney secures the house to the sandstone bedrock," Mackenzie says.

The Marshes have three children—Billy, 6, Nicco, 4, and Milana, 2, plus Vegas, a Rhodesian ridgeback, and Sammy, an exuberant snoodle, so the choice of materials was dictated by their "indestructibility".

"We used Boral's Designer range of polished concrete blocks for both external and internal walls," Kristen says.

"The kids can tear up and down and the

COSTS

- ▶ Excavation \$100,000
- ▶ Structure \$140,000
- ▶ Concrete \$130,000
- ▶ Boral blocks \$200,000
- ▶ Plasterboard \$110,000
- ▶ Glazing \$100,000
- ▶ Timber doors \$110,000
- ▶ Timber soffits, staircase, handrail, etc. \$110,000
- ▶ Pool \$60,000
- ▶ Joinery \$130,000
- ▶ Electrical and plumbing \$150,000
- ▶ Landscaping \$30,000
- ▶ Tiling \$70,000
- ▶ Kitchen \$60,000

TOTAL: \$1.5 million

walls don't get chipped or marked like they would with paint."

Other chosen materials are similarly robust, such as travertine flooring in the formal lounge, bathrooms, terraces and back paving.

"As the blocks and travertine require little or no maintenance, several finishing trades with their associated costs were saved."

THE AIM

A family house that's not precious. During building, the three children were under five years old.

HOW LONG?

One year.

INSIDER TIP

Get three quotes for everything.

FAVOURITE FEATURES

Kristen: The tall, sliding lounge and family room doors—made by a master builder using thickened glass for insulation and noise control. Also, the indoor-outdoor living. John: All of it, especially the quality of light.

GREEN POINTS

▶ Passive solar design brings winter sun into the main living areas with balcony overhangs and operable sunshade blades

(about to be installed) shading the glazing in summer.

▶ Insulated stone and concrete floors provide huge thermal mass.

▶ Building's orientation and oversized sliding doors at either end harness any available breezes.

▶ Two large rainwater tanks harvest water for toilets, laundry, garden and pool top-ups.

▶ East and west glazing eliminates the need for any artificial lighting during the day.

ARCHITECTS

Neil Mackenzie and Heidi Pronk, Mackenzie Pronk Architects, 9559 4595.

INTERIOR DESIGNER

Antonia Pesenti, 0410 575 020.

BUILDER

Wilson Constructions, 0410 515 648, and Sydland Construction, 0418 382 002.



In the zone ... outdoor spaces are well defined and cater for all family members. Photos: Nick Bowers



Mackenzie says. Cedar for door frames and soffits, and Victorian ash for flooring in the family rooms, joinery, staircase treads, handrails and balustrades, were used to impart a feeling of natural warmth.

A PARTY HOME

An important part of the brief was that it be designed as a family home that feels intimate for five yet not seem overcrowded when filled with 50 friends and extended family. The ground floor is functional, containing garaging, a theatre room, guest suite and cellar. The main entrance is on the first floor, where a glossy, pearly-white, freestanding pod defines the entry, separating it from the living areas.

"We didn't want a cold, modern house ... instead, something a bit quirky," Kristen says as she opens the elliptical pod's door to reveal a guest powder room lined with Catherine Martin wallpaper.

"The quote to have the pod made up was very expensive so we had a carpenter construct it on site. Then we got a car spray-painter to form a spray booth around it. He polished each section to a gleaming car duco finish."

To the front of the pod there's a sunken lounge room; behind it is a dining area that flows into the kitchen, after which is the family living room.

An impressive feature of the kitchen is a six-metre-long island bench with sinks at both ends, each with its own cooking station behind. "Both John and I love to cook so we have a pair of ovens, dishwashers and even fridges," Kristen laughs.

CONNECTIONS

The staircase that connects all four levels is at the centre of the house, on the northern side. "It doubles as a light well and is a key element in the home's natural ventilation," Mackenzie says.

A series of timber screens forms its balustrades. "They provide a foil to the glare of the strong northern light and create a playful element at the home's core."

The private realm is contained on the third level with the parents' suite connected to the children's zone and a home office by a timber bridge. The top level consists of a rooftop entertainment area.

Distinct rectangular recreation spaces divide the back garden. There's a paved courtyard with long steps where, Kristen points out, "the kids can sit dribbling iceblocks while watching the TV in the family room". There's also a grassed play area and a covered dining section with a staircase that leads up to a sparkling pool—the perfect spot for a dip when the waves aren't pumping.



Tools to use if the hammer fails

Apparently there are worse things than a failed auction: thieves and noisy airconditioning units.

Our house was passed in at auction. Now we're stuck on the market for another two months with the agent who promised he'd sell it under the hammer in the first place. What do we do?

Alex, Bronte

Many houses sell for thousands more than the passed-in price in the weeks after the auction, so don't lose hope. If that seems unlikely, however, you have three choices: ask the agent from Promises Promises to terminate the agreement; take your property off the market for the next two months and relist it later with a new agent and campaign strategy; or stick with this agent in case he can hunt down any mildly interested buyers. Be warned, though: the pressure will be on you to drop the price, thereby ensuring the agent gets his fee. For the rest of us, buyer's agent Deborah West recommends only signing an agency agreement for the campaign period up to the auction date and for two weeks after that time.

I'm worried our expensive artworks might be stolen during open inspections. Are they insured during an open house?

Paulo, Surry Hills

No. Most mainstream policies do not insure items stolen by people who are in your house with your permission, such as an open inspection. That is in large part why there is often more than one agent at each open house

and why everyone has to give a name and contact number. It is also why agents usually recommend you put away more than just your toothbrush: anything of value, particularly anything portable, should be removed. After all, "open inspection" translates as "case the joint" in underworld speak. Alternatively, take your cue from the high-end property market and have inspections by appointment only.

Our neighbour's airconditioner is directly outside our living room window and it makes so much noise. Do we have any rights to get it moved?

Amanda, Randwick

Your best bet is to ask your neighbour nicely, using your best conflict-resolution skills (remember to start each sentence with "When I hear your airconditioner, I feel..."). When that fails, there is free mediation through your local Community Justice Centre. Given the nature of compromise, though, it might be more about turning off the airconditioner at certain times than removing it entirely. Local councils are also able to enforce noise limits but that is usually only between 10pm and 7am. Of course, if it is that close to your window it might not have DA approval, in which case simply apply to the council to have it removed. If it does have approval, perhaps it's time to move your window.

Send your questions to macken.lucy@gmail.com



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