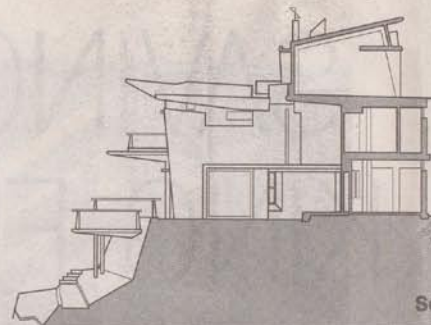


home | Jane Burton Taylor

Cliffhanger finish

How architects conquered a tricky site to create a retreat for all ages.



It's a beautiful location but the site from hell. To reinvent this family weekend home to house three generations, architects John Hooghuis and Luke Playoust had to stabilise a cliff, reroute a neighbour's sewer, construct a suspended road and negotiate two years of building on a 45-degree slope with no on-site storage.

"We had a very big crane," Hooghuis recalls. The rigours of construction are forgotten – or at least put into perspective – when he turns towards the view. Where once there was a rundown fibro cottage, a tower house fits snugly

stabilise it – the process that required the architects to reroute the upper neighbour's sewer – and the driveway is supported on steel-reinforced concrete columns.

Hence, the rear wall of the house serves not as a retaining wall but a privacy screen to the road. It is one of two hefty parallel L-shaped masonry walls open to the north-east, which support a cantilevered lightweight structure of steel and glass.

The walls create a complex collection of spaces and break the children's and adults' rooms into two sections.

The rear and western side wall form the first L-shape. There are games and television rooms on the ground level and the children's bedrooms on the first floor. Then there are the stairwell, void and central courtyard. The second L-shaped wall defines the kitchen and adults' living space on the ground floor and the main bedroom on the first. This latter room is really "the grandparent's retreat," Hooghuis says, and has its own sitting room, deck and beach views.

"The house is designed to have a range of spaces that can be used by the various family members," Playoust says.

From an outsider's perspective, each of the spaces has an individual, even adventurous feel. The dining room recalls the cavernous dimensions of a castle and has duly been dubbed "the dining hall" by the family.

"They have a large family. They need a large area to seat more than 20 people,"

Playoust says. "Here they can feel intimate with two or 200."

The living areas are divided, too. The children have their own games room and adjoining living room with television. The parents have theirs (without TV) on the other side of the courtyard.

"They wanted to separate out the TV and living rooms," Hooghuis says. "With family and friends around, there can be up to six to eight kids, so it is an understandable request."

The adults' living room has a double-sided fireplace onto "the dining hall" and, on the beach side, a split high and low deck. "You can have people sitting down there dining," Playoust says, gesturing to the lower deck, "and they don't block the view from up here."

The kitchen, which is next to the main living space, is in a discreet position. It is an old-style kitchen, Hooghuis says. A room separated from, rather than part of, the living area.

Despite the size of the new house, no significant trees were knocked down to build it, an achievement of which both architects are proud. Trees were plotted and surveyed and the house, including the roof, was designed around them. One deck even has a gum growing through it. "The new house is pretty much on the same site as the original weatherboard cottage, it just reaches a lot higher," Hooghuis says.

It is a big change, but the magical locale of bush and sea is the constant. Now the owners have a glamorous home from which to enjoy it.

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into the cliff, opening to a panorama over the languid curve of Palm Beach to Barrenjoey.

The main entrance to the house is via a little-used public access road at the top of the site. The owners drive into a three-car garage that is the top floor of their house. From here, there is a lift and a staircase down to the house.

Though the staircase requires more energy than the lift, it rewards with a sense of drama. It has a three-storey glass wall on its eastern side and a void on the other.

The house has been built independently of the cliff and suspended driveway behind it, Hooghuis says. The cliff was "rock bolted" to





Section



THE AIM

To create intimate private spaces with views to suit a range of ages, from one year to 70.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE?

Six years: three to design and draw up detailed plans, one in council and two to build.

OWNERS' FAVOURITE FEATURES

The way the house circles the courtyard and opens to split decks.

INSIDERS' TIPS

Make sure your materials and design are sorted at an early stage.

GREEN POINTS

The house is built on the footprint of the original weekend. Overhangs keep sun off the house and there is cross ventilation. Decks are all timber, so breezes can come up through them. There is a rainwater tank.

ARCHITECTS

John Hooghuis and Luke Playoust of Playoust Churcher Architects, 9498 8811

BUILDERS

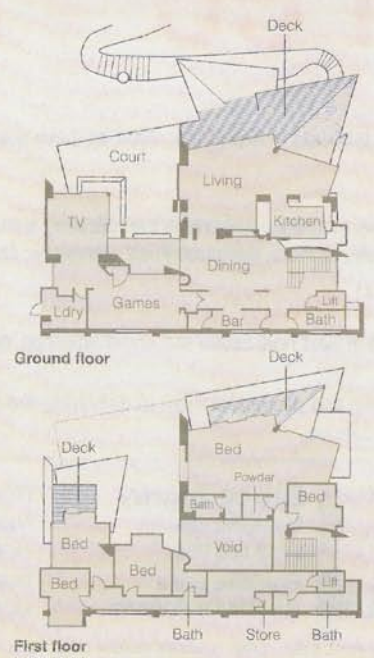
Infinity Constructions, 9332 4722

ENGINEERS

DW Knox & Partners, 9066 1170

FURNITURE

Anibou, 9319 0655



- 1 Two masonry walls support a lightweight structure of steel and glass that opens to beach views.
- 2 Adults' and children's living rooms are separated by a central courtyard.
- 3 The double-height dining room.
- 4 The staircase adjoins a wall of glass that doubles as a lightwell.
- 5 The front deck is stepped down, so the view from the main living space isn't obscured.
- 6 Owners drive into a garage at the top of the site and walk down into the house.

Photos: Brett Boardman
Plans adapted by Robert Parkinson