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NOVEMBER 10, 2002

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Jane Stevenson
gets the dirt on
all your home's design
and structure needs

Timber usage has rocketed in the past decade or so, partly as a result of the renovating boom that has swept Sydney. This boom has seen many houses in some of the older suburbs being stripped of old carpets to reveal original timber floorboards underneath (often edged in Black Japan finish and covered with lino pieces to imitate carpets).

Polished timber floors are viewed as a selling point because they give warmth to a room. What's more, they are also cheaper than recarpeting.

Timber usage does not need to be rustic, country or some retro nightmare of diagonally installed pine walling. Most housing or design magazines feature contemporary colour schemes, panelling systems or slick joinery units to emphasise this reworking of an old theme.

New timber floors can be plain boards, plywood flooring panels, parquetry or floating floors.

Walls and ceilings can be lined with veneered plywood panels. Grain markings can be mirrored from panel to panel to create patterns, or laid randomly to achieve a less-contrived look.

A growing environmental awareness and a greater appreciation of timber as a

tailor made



It took almost a year and cost a lot of imagination, sweat and money. But Tom and Michelle were determined to build their home on just the right spot of cliff overlooking the Pacific, as **Jeremy Bass** reports.



resource has led to an increased usage of recycled timber.

Recycled timber has a character that can only result through ageing. Recycled floorboards are wider than planks used today, and using recycled may be your only chance of getting large quantities of rare and valuable timbers.

But don't assume that because the wood is recycled, it will be cheaper. You will actually pay a premium for recycled timber because it is a rare commodity desired by many home renovators to match existing timbers in older houses, or to contrast with newer finishes in modern houses. Also expect to pay more for recycled boards to be laid because it is harder work.

Timbers can range in colour from blond through to yellows and pinks to reddish browns and blacks. Additionally, the type of finish (wax, oil, varnish, polyurethane) used on the timber will affect the tones achieved.

For timber advice call the Timber Development Association of NSW on (02) 9360 3088 or email www.timber.net.au

If you have any architecture questions for Jane, send them to architect@sundaytelegraph.com.au

Had they been more interested in ease of building, Tom Bishop and his partner Michelle Coleman would not have taken on this awkwardly shaped block when they set about designing and building their own house.

But then they wouldn't have ended up with a home high on the slopes where Beacon Hill tumbles into Dee Why, offering the same commanding perspective of the Dee Why to Long Reef stretch that Dover Heights gives over the city.

Tom and Michelle wanted a place that they could build themselves as much as possible. Which is a fair bit, as it happens. Tom, 27, is a builder while Michelle, 21, is an interior designer.

The house arose from Tom's relationship with Killara-based Playoust Churcher architect John Hooghuis. "I do a lot of work with them, and I like John's work a lot," he says. "Michelle and I really like the idea of pushing the experimental envelope, and it gave John a chance to let a few of his ideas off the leash."

The result, discreetly tucked away down a battleaxe driveway, is a study in ultra-modern angularity. Natural rock features and timber finishes offset louvred glass, aluminium and exposed steel.

Bridging the gap is the timber Shadowclad weatherboard paying visual homage to concrete.

The house took 10 months to build – two months of preparations and eight months building. "But part of the reason we went with the design we did was so we could do it in phases," Tom says.

First up came the northernmost pavilion, a self-contained, one-bedroom studio in which they lived while they finished the rest.

A major part of Hooghuis' brief was to extract maximum advantage from the block's north-east aspect to make the most of natural heating in winter and cooling in summer.

The stepped design absorbs winter sunlight through its floor-to-ceiling glass from dawn until dusk, radiating it back out through floor and wall surfaces throughout the

possible. "Michelle wanted to keep things like architraves and skirting boards to a minimum," Tom says.

Southward views are through rimless panoramic picture windows. The north-facing glasswork is framed by aluminium. One way in which Tom and Michelle kept their building costs down was by ordering windows they could construct themselves. "It still wasn't cheap," Tom says.

Internal stairs are suspended from a steel frame on one side.

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night. It needs virtually no additional heating, Tom says.

In summer, with the sun tracing a much higher trajectory directly overhead, the three-pavilion design optimises shadowing in the middle of the day to protect the main living areas from direct sunlight. It's also designed to collect the north-easterly summer breezes.

Louvres make for a good deal of precision in the management of cross-ventilation. "To install air-conditioning would defeat the purpose of the place," Tom says.

Judiciously placed timber batons act as awnings and protect the occupants' eyes from the irritations of direct sun early in the day. Tom has elevated the vertical ones fronting the northernmost pavilion a couple of centimetres off the wall surface, giving a floating effect.

Inside, they've worked to keep lines as clean and minimal as

Their steel core is veneered to match the blond timber floor.

The living spaces are kept open by the use of a portal frame, evident in narrow steel pillars and hefty horizontal girders. Joinery is all high-quality MDF, finished in satin polyurethane.

As for the building costs, Tom says it's hard to be precise because their relationship with the architect was informal and they did so much of the work themselves. "But I think if I was doing it for someone else it'd be in the vicinity of \$900,000 to a million, not counting landscaping and architect's fees."

The couple have recently sold up to start work on another project in Curl Curl. "We have at least enough time to finish another project before we have kids, so there doesn't seem much point in supporting a big mortgage to rattle round in here," Tom says.



The aim

To build an environmentally temperature-controlled home they designed themselves

Time frame

10 months

Setbacks

Took three months to get it through council

Return on investment

Land and and house cost \$1.28 million; recently sold for \$1.367 million

Renovations

Cost \$900,000 to build

Surprise costs

It all went about \$150,000 over budget



Clockwise from top left: Big windows warm the house in winter; louvres allow for cross-ventilation; living areas are open-plan; the steel staircase is veneered to match blond timber floors; simplicity rules in the bathroom too; timber batons keep out harsh early morning light; the sun-drenched and simplistic bedroom

Pictures: Valerie Martin



DEE WHY SNAPSHOT

Average house price	\$598,000
Av. apartment price	\$352,000
House: unit ratio	25:75
Av. weekly rent (houses)	\$400
Av. weekly rent (unit)	\$270
Owner: renter ratio	59:41
Av. rental yield last year	4.4%
Av. house price last year	\$539,000
Capital growth last year	11%
Expected growth this year	9%
Av. online hits last week**	5330 (up 2.1%)
Homes now listed online	481
Distance to city	15.3 km

* Figures supplied by www.propertyvalue.com.au
** Searches on www.realestate.com.au compared to last week