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Dream Home

Group effort pays off

This beach shack reflects the warmth of its owners, writes **Jane Burton Taylor**.



Modern family ... John and Helen Dransfield with their children, Jesse, 10, Zoe, 8, Tyler, 6, and Beau, 4 months; the staircase John built; (below) the rooftop. Photos: Tamara Dean

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When Helen and John Dransfield started renovating their house they did not realise it would take years. But the slow pace was a choice. Near the end of the project, they had a chance for a sabbatical and went sailing with their three children, Jessie, Zoe and Tyler, finishing the house when they returned.

Helen says they knew when they bought the 1960s beach shack in Curl Curl that they would renovate it. They looked at magazines and cut out ideas and eventually settled on their architect, Su Keong Cheah, who was then based in nearby Narrabeen.

"We always wanted to use a local architect and a local builder," Helen says.

The original north-facing house was on a sloping site and had sandstone foundations. The ground level was essentially an undercover car space and an adjoining storage alcove. Upstairs living spaces were tight and dated. There was a long corridor leading to bedrooms and no real connection to the back garden.

Su Keong came up with a design that retained the existing house's footprint, keeping its solid foundations and side walls, but reinvented all the internal spaces and added a new upper floor at the back.

On the ground level he closed in the alcove and converted it into guest accommodation.



He introduced a void to bring in light and a generous stairway up to the main level. He kept the existing balcony but made it more private and linked this main living floor through to the backyard.

They also excavated the block to add space and make the backyard more user-friendly. By excavating downstairs, they increased storage and made room for a guest bathroom and a rainwater tank. On the first floor, where the back of the house meets the slope, it was a little more involved. John says the previous owner had worked for Boral, so had used concrete rather generously. "He had poured concrete around sandstone floaters but the rocks were sticking out," John says. "So we had to chip right into it and undo that work."

The result is a large, grassy backyard they can use. There are now bi-fold doors connecting the internal living space to a covered timber

AIM

To create a casual, family-friendly beach house for a young family, using sandstone, glass and steel.

TIME FRAME

Ten months to build and several years to finesse.

FAVOURITE FEATURES

He: I love the void and the curved stairs, the way you enter the house and come up the stairs.

She: Having a north-facing balcony and a deck at the back, and the connection from the kitchen to the backyard so I can see the kids.

GREEN POINTS

▶ A rainwater tank, with water used in laundry, toilets, dishwasher and garden.
▶ Reuse of foundations and side walls.

- ▶ Extensive insulation in roof and walls.
- ▶ Taking advantage of ideal orientation.
- ▶ Cross-ventilation.
- ▶ Ceiling fans and louvred windows instead of airconditioning.

INSIDER'S TIPS

Consult a designer – they bring the house to life. For a relatively small cost, you are capitalising on the money spent on the renovation.

ARCHITECT

Su Keong Cheah, sukeongdesign.com.

INTERIOR DESIGNER

Rikki Stubbs of PureColour, (02) 9716 4382; 0414 569 115.

BUILDER

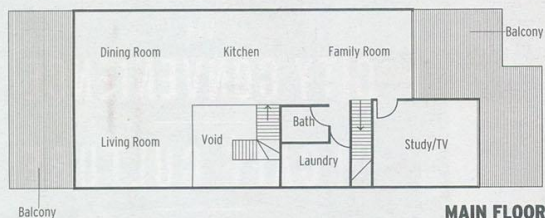
Steve Brajkovich of Brak Built, 0416 222 255.



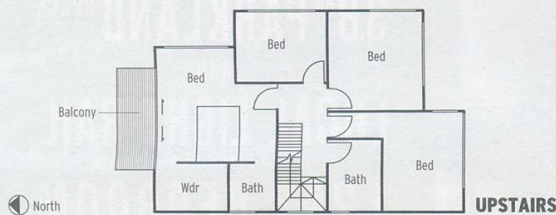
Domain TV
See more of this beachside family home in Pat Stevens's video.
See domain.com.au



Change for the better ... the house retains its sandstone foundations.



MAIN FLOOR



UPSTAIRS

deck overlooking the garden. As it faces south, Helen and John say it is the perfect spot for sitting on hot summer days.

GOING SOLO

Unusually, the couple opted to use their architect only for the initial design. Helen emphasises how much they loved his design but, given their strong relationship with the builder and John's expertise as an engineer, they chose to go solo for the rest of the project. "The advantage was we were able to tweak things and the builder was good about it," Helen says.

One of the changes was to convert a proposed upper-floor study into a bedroom (just as well, as they have since had another baby) and do the reverse on the main living level. The architect had proposed a bedroom at the back but the couple made it a study and television room.

A DESIGNER'S HELP

A challenging aspect of not having an architect was making all the decisions involved in the renovation on their own. Helen recalls the day when it was one decision too many.

"The builder asked me, 'What tiles do you want?', she says. 'I said, 'I've got no idea. It was then that we called in Rikki (Stubbs) to bring it all together.

"She looks at the whole house, the layering, the organic overall picture."

Stubbs, an interior designer who has her own company, called PureColour, worked with the family from midway through the renovation, then again when they returned from sailing.

"We got Rikki back to do the kids room, to finish it all off," John says. "She did the colour schemes, the flooring, all the tiles and the finishes for all the joinery. She even helped choose the aggregate for the concrete kitchen bench and the colour for the exposed structural beams."

Stubbs says: "I wanted the house to feel like this family. I wanted it to feel friendly, warm, relaxed and colourful."

COSTS

\$

▶ Architect plans	\$8800
▶ Council DA fees	\$4200
▶ Demolition, excavation, including rubbish removal	\$35,000
▶ Concrete bottom floor and driveway and paths	\$19,300
▶ Sandstone feature walls	\$18,000
▶ Steel beams	\$78,000
▶ Aluminium doors and windows	\$69,000
▶ Concrete island bench, including polishing	\$3500
▶ Electrical	\$23,200
▶ Plumbing	\$24,500
▶ Roof and guttering	\$29,000
▶ Painting – internal and external	\$19,500
▶ Gyprocking	\$34,500
▶ Tiling	\$9800
▶ PureColour – interior design advice on colour and finishes	\$6000
▶ Steel curved stairs	\$9800
▶ Bedroom and living room cabinets	\$23,400
▶ Kitchen cabinets	\$15,000
▶ Carpet upstairs	\$6000
▶ Timber floors and decking	\$22,000
▶ General builder's costs	\$189,000
TOTAL (includes GST)	\$647,500

From the owners' point of view, Stubbs, Su Keong, the builder and themselves – particularly John, who built the stairway and the island bench – succeeded.

On Domain's visit, it seems like it, too. The sun is pouring in the north-facing glass doors onto the front balcony. Beau, the latest addition, is relaxing in his bouncy chair and the other three children are playing out the back. It is a house tailor-made for the young family and it is indeed, like them, friendly, warm and relaxed.