



A step up

A self-sufficient weekender
in the New South Wales bush

The large single-pitched roof slopes downward on the southern side to protect the house from the summer sun.



The clients who commissioned this weekend in the Kangaroo Valley, two hours south-west of Sydney, wanted their retreat from the city to be “one step up from camping” in terms of its impact on the surrounding landscape. Their holiday home is environmentally sensitive but doesn’t sacrifice comfort.

The family (a married couple with three young boys) spent time camping on the 66-hectare block while considering possible sites for the house. “The location we eventually chose was the first one we arrived at,” says the owner. “It’s an elevated site but not too high. We were fortunate to find a site that has waterways either side of

the house and trees that provide a windbreak and great shade. We wanted a building that was going to be sensitive to the microclimate there.”

The couple then called on Utz Sanby Architects, the firm that oversaw the renovation of their Sydney home. “Duncan (Sanby) made a couple of visits with them to help decide on the site,” architect Kristin Utz explains.

“The location they came up with was chosen to maximise the northern aspect to ensure adequate solar access, as this was always going to be a fully self-sufficient house.

“The house is several steps up from camping, but it’s still very low impact,” Kristin adds. “It’s



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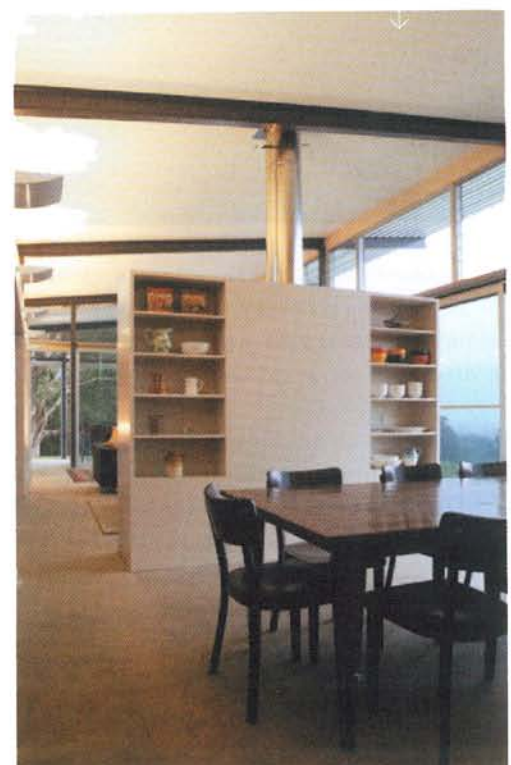
all about the view and the greater landscape, it's not about the house, which is almost incidental. It provides shelter but you are so much more aware of and connected to the view, the escarpment, the mist and the sunsets in this house. When you wake up in the morning and pull the blinds up, it feels like the bed is out in the field and the house practically disappears.”

That's exactly how the owners like it. “We told the architects **we wanted a house that would accommodate up to three families at a time, and that would capture the views,**” the owner says. “It also had to be low maintenance so that we could close the door and forget about it when we

went back to real life in Sydney. And it was always going to be an energy and water efficient house because it was built in a cow paddock, admittedly only a couple of kilometres from town, but there was no infrastructure there.”

While this is the first self-sustaining house designed by Uitz Sarby, Kristin says she and Duncan have long been interested in environmental design. “We have always been concerned with natural ventilation and lighting, and aspect and passive environmental controls,” she explains.

“We go out of our way to try to avoid air conditioning in all of the houses we design, so we were terribly excited about working on this job.”



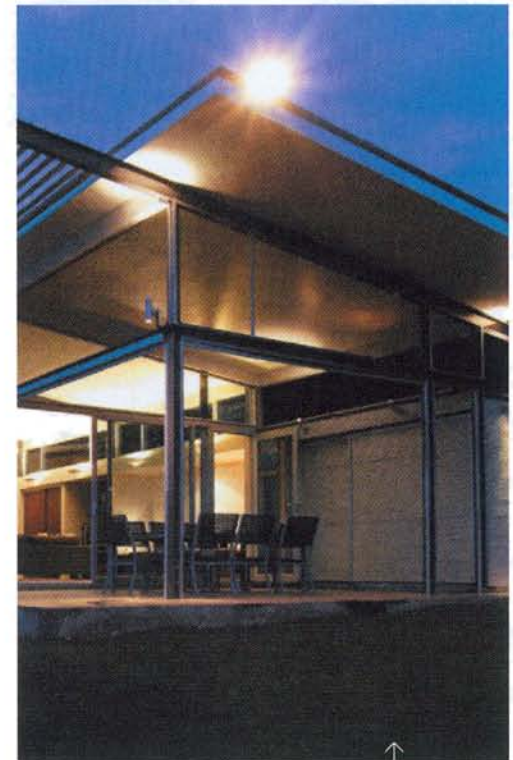


The clever use of space such as built-in daybeds, means a smaller size house and smaller environmental footprint.



The building itself is a simple rectangular form that was positioned to enable every room to enjoy northern light and panoramic vistas. The solid southern wall anchors the home to the slope, while the fully glazed northern wall opens up to stunning views. **A large concrete slab provides thermal mass, keeping the house cool in summer and warm in winter**, and it extends beyond the external walls, acting as a stage from which to view the surrounding landscape.

The structure is sheltered by a large single-pitched roof that slopes downwards on the southern side. This means winter sun can penetrate the glass to warm the concrete floors, but the summer



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sun is excluded. Additional sun control is provided by a fixed aluminium sunshade welded to the steel roof beams. Internally, all of the rooms are fitted with motorised blinds to control heat loss during winter nights and early morning light in summer. The roof also enables the collection of rainwater, which is diverted into four storage tanks that line the southern side.

Inside, the house is of modest proportions yet it manages to accommodate several families at once. "When we have lots of friends down it works brilliantly," the owner says. "We can accommodate parents in rooms with doors, and kids on the daybeds in the corridor. Our children actually prefer

to sleep in the daybeds rather than the bedrooms. They are screened off from the living area with sliding doors, and there is further accommodation in the banquette in the living room."

As well as being compact, the house was economical to build, because the architects devised a modular plan using a structural grid of eight 3.6 metre wide bays to define each room. That regularity ensured that standardised windows, louvres and doors could be used throughout the house.

The four bays at the western end incorporate a covered outdoor dining room that extends from the open-plan living area. It is separated from the

kitchen by a joinery wall that accommodates a fireplace on one side and shelving on the other. At the eastern end, the four bays comprise a family bathroom and three bedrooms, the main with a narrow ensuite.

All of the rooms are accessed via a corridor on the southern side. This backbone incorporates the ensuite, kitchen cabinetry and entry porch as well as a series of 90cm deep alcoves that house built-in day beds and storage.

"The great relationship we had with the client meant that we were able to help them dismantle some of their preconceptions about the size of the house they wanted, by introducing innovative



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ways of doubling up on space, such as the built-in daybeds,” Kristin says. “The house is a bit like a ship in the way it uses space, and that enabled us to eliminate some of the floor space that many people seem to demand these days.

“Having clients who are prepared to experiment in that way, and not just push for a bigger and bigger house, is one way of becoming more sustainable,” she adds. “There is a lot of talk about environmental design on one hand, but on the other hand, houses are getting bigger all the time. Some people are prepared to go the full way, and this is a great example of that.”

The Kangaroo Valley House has led to more work

of a similar nature for the firm, a direction that Kristin and Duncan are keen to pursue. “It’s been a great project for us,” Kristin says, “particularly because we’ve been able to direct potential clients to Kangaroo Valley so they can experience our work before they commission us.”

The client couldn’t be happier either. “We’ve just planted a garden and it’s a fantastic feeling to finish a day’s work there, go inside, lift the bathroom wall up, hop into the tub with a beer and the paper, and watch the dusk in the valley: it’s beautiful.”

“There is a tremendous feeling of achievement in building a house like that, which is so sympathetic to its environment,” he adds. “It looks



Water is captured from the roof to fill the four rainwater tanks on the southern side of the house.



like a shearing shed from behind, and it's wonderful to see that in a cow paddock and see kids playing around it. One of the reasons it works so well is that you spend as much time outside as you do inside, which is a good sign of the house working as we envisaged it would." ←

Bundaleer is available for holiday rentals and bookings can be made at www.kvre.com.au

Designer: Duncan Sanby (director), David Hart, Kristin Utz of Utz Sanby. www.utzsanby.com

Builder: Steele Associates Pty Ltd. www.steeleassociates.com.au

Location: Kangaroo Valley, NSW

Photography: Ben Wrigley

- Features:**
- 315 litre Endless Solar hot water system
 - Gas-booster hydronic heating
 - 1.44kW BP stand alone solar power system
 - 33,000 litres of Bluescope rainwater tank storage
 - Ecomax Septic System
 - Astro-Foil, Autex and Solartex roof and wall insulation
 - Taubmans low toxicity paints
 - Silent Gliss motorised window blinds
 - High level louvres for cross-ventilation
 - Caroma water-efficient tapware and toilets