

hot house



cool view



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LEFT: THE ENTRANCE TO THE HOME IS FROM THE SOUTHERN SIDE. ON THE LEFT ARE WATER AND STORAGE TANKS; ON THE RIGHT, THE SOLAR PANELS THAT PROVIDE POWER TO THE HOME.

OPPOSITE PAGE: AS THE SUN SETS THE COUPLE'S THREE SONS ENJOY THE OPEN-FIRE PIT ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE HOME WHICH IS LINKED TO THE INDOOR/OUTDOOR ENTERTAINING AREA BY SIMPLE STAIRS.

DRIVING INTO KANGAROO VALLEY, 20 minutes south of Bowral, coming through the steep and winding Barrengarry Mountain pass is a challenging drive even in good conditions. The sweeping valley is quite suddenly revealed, and despite the recent drought, is lush and green. This is prime dairy farming country. Large herds of Friesian cattle graze in the picturesque paddocks, their black and white markings a graphic contrast to the verdant pastures and vaulted blue sky. Character farmhouse

cottages are dotted along the country road that leads to the small town centre, the historic general store and post office which, according to the sign outside, makes the "best pies in the world". Getting into town requires negotiating the single lane sandstone Hampden Bridge, the oldest suspension bridge in Australia, built in the 1890s.

This is undeniably one of the prettiest places in Australia. It's why a couple from Sydney, in search of a rural retreat from the "big smoke" – but still with good proximity to it – came here. Their search ended happily in 2001 when 160 acres, just a short drive from town, was found. With no house on the property, the couple and their three young boys came down to camp whenever possible. "We were in no





hurry to build – we really wanted to get a feel for the land. We used to camp in a different location each time we came so we could work out the best place to put the house,” says the owner.

The couple eventually decided on a section of high, level ground at the top of a gently sloping, heart-shaped valley. The site afforded spectacular views, being sheltered on the southern side by an escarpment of Cambewarra Mountain

and on the eastern and western sides by dense virgin bush. There was one hitch – the proposed site had no road access. “The original driveway went straight through the valley – right through the centre of the property. The home site would have looked over it which we didn’t want, so a decision was made to build a new access road that would come in from behind the house when it was built.” It was a good decision, albeit an expensive one, with the new



Above: With so much beauty outside, interiors have been kept simple. Every room of the home enjoys sweeping northerly views over Kangaroo Valley, made possible by floor-to-ceiling glass walls and sliding doors.

Right: Activities in the kitchen centre around a generous farmhouse table. Cupboards are built in marine ply and veneered in turpentine. The appliances, including the refrigerator, run on gas. Highlight windows and louvres have been included on the southern side to increase light and cross ventilation.



THE MAIN BATHROOM FEATURES AN EXPANSIVE TILTING SECTION OF WALL THAT WHEN OPENED, ALLOWS THE BATHER TO EXPERIENCE THE JOYS OF THE GREAT OUTDOORS.





THE ROOF IS PITCHED AT SEVEN DEGREES, ALLOWING MAXIMUM LIGHT AND SUN IN DURING THE WINTER MONTHS, YET AFFORDING SHADE IN SUMMER. THE SOUTHERN SIDE OF THE HOME HOUSES ALL UTILITIES AND STORAGE. THE HOME IS HEATED BY THE CONCRETE SLAB AND JETMASTER FIRE.

driveway providing a scenic trip to the site, meandering through paddocks, native bush and criss-crossing the creek that runs through the property.

Architect Duncan Sanby of *Utz-Sanby Architects* in Sydney was retained to design the home. The owner says: "We discussed several designs, from traditional to contemporary but we didn't want to imitate something old. We wanted it to be authentic – a more modern interpretation of a house in the country. Also our decision to use solar power to run the home dictated some of the design options available to us". Included in the brief was the requirement to keep the house "pared down" as it was to be a weekend retreat, and with the plan of bringing friends to stay, it had to accommodate several families at a time and also be suitable to rent out for holiday accommodation.

The completed home is unashamedly modern and stunningly efficient. Anchored by a solar heated concrete slab, the glass and steel rectangular structure is made up of eight "bays", each measuring three by six metres, with every room enjoying the jaw-dropping view and perfect northerly aspect.

The house is approached on the southern side, and it is

here the mechanisms for the energy efficient home are found; solar panels to the right and large water collection tanks to the left. To avoid the addition of another design element, only three of the four tanks are for water, the fourth is actually a shed used for storage of farm equipment. The list of energy saving devices is long and impressive. The walls are glass to minimise the use of artificial lighting; the roof has been pitched precisely at seven degrees, which invites the winter sun but affords protection from higher summer temperatures and allows for maximum water run off. Highlight louvre windows have been used on both the northern and southern sides to ensure cross-ventilation (therefore negating the need for ceiling fans or air-conditioning). The fridge, stove and oven all run on gas and the dishwasher has been programmed to exclude the drying cycle.

The entrance leads to a corridor that runs the entire length of the home, the backbone of the design. From here it's to the right for the sleeping quarters and to the left for the living areas. In a departure from the sleek lines of the building, activities in the kitchen centre around a generous, aged "farmhouse" table. "Having been bought up in the



A DAY BED BUILT IN TO THE SOUTHERN WALL PROVIDES EXTRA SEATING, EMERGENCY BEDDING, AND STORAGE.



THE HOME IS REACHED BY A SCENIC DRIVE THROUGH PASTURES AND BUSHLAND.

country; I have fond memories of family and friends gathered around the kitchen table having a yarn or sharing a good meal," says the owner. The benchtops and cupboards are made in practical marine ply with turpentine veneer and have been left with the edges exposed.

The living area adjacent to the kitchen features a Jetmaster fireplace which the owners say heats the whole house in winter. Thermal engineering of the home is so efficient, it can get too warm. In addition to the comfortable leather couches, a day bed built into the southern wall provides extra seating, emergency bedding if needed, and storage. The house ends with a glass wall of sliding doors that open to an indoor/outdoor entertainment area that can be protected from summer pests by retractable insect screens mounted into the underside of the steel support beams.

A short distance away is a purpose built open-fire pit surrounded by built-in circular seating. "Landscape architect Tom Gordon of Art Gardens Australia in Bungendore came up with the idea. Camp fires are a big part of being 'in the bush'; this was an unusual way of organising the idea and making it safer for the children to enjoy. It's already become a favourite spot to gather."

The eastern side of the home contains three bedrooms,

the master suite featuring a compact ensuite with an unusual shower recess that juts out from the eastern wall made of louvred windows that can be opened to enjoy the view. Extra bedding is provided by built-in day beds – again doubling as storage – tucked along the southern wall. The main bathroom features an enormous panel over the bath that opens upwards allowing the sounds, sights and smells of the great outdoors to be part of the bathing experience.

With the amount of glass, the home could be likened to a conservatory. The boundaries between the structure and the rural surroundings are pleasantly blurred. With so much beauty to appreciate outside, the decor has been kept simple inside. Polished concrete floors are warmed by oriental rugs and colourful prints brighten the neutral walls. Books, family knick-knacks and bright vases give the home a comfortable, lived-in look.

Landscaping is under way but in its infancy and will be kept to a minimum. The owners feel that with 160 acres of prime bushland to explore, a huge garden is not high on their list of priorities. "We come here to recharge our batteries and the simplicity and efficiency of the home makes that easy. Our boys adore it here – there is so much for them to do – an adventure is never far away!" **ML**