

home



THE HOUSE

A modern farmhouse that captures the spectacular views of the valley.

BUDGET
\$500,000

TIME FRAME

Three years, including 18 months to get DA approval and find a builder, and seven months' construction time.

FEATURES THE OWNERS ARE HAPPIEST WITH

The simplicity, the veranda including covered outdoor room, the contemporary "country kitchen" and flip-up wall panel to bathroom.

GREEN POINTS

The design rationale – the slab, the roof, the orientation – is all-encompassing. Everything is essential – there are no superfluous elements.

INSIDER'S TIP

Spend enough time to understand the site, its attributes and its constraints before starting design. (The clients camped in a number of locations on the site to ascertain the best views and cooling breezes.)

ARCHITECTS

Utz-Sanby Architects, 9904 2515

BUILDERS

Steele Associates, 9319 0333

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS

Partridge Partners, 9460 9000

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

Art Gardens of Australia, 6238 1782

Sneaky approach

The aspect and views of this weekender were carefully researched, writes Anne Susskind.

A long and winding road takes you to the Kangaroo Valley weekender, and the road's construction used up a fair chunk of the budget, but it was worth it, says architect Duncan Sanby.

A direct route, making a straight line from the main road, Mount Scanzì Road, would have cut into the green of the paddock in front of the house, ruining its view.

"We didn't want to be driving up the field, or looking at the road," Sanby says. "We wanted the building sitting in the paddock, with nothing else changed. When you make that kind of decision, you have to spend the money."

The ground in front of the house was graded, forming a gentle hill to hide the fence beyond which cattle graze on the 66-hectare property.

Yet the house itself is low-budget, with straightforward finishes. It is unostentatious and environmentally sustainable. It stands on the valley's southern slope, looking down on it, facing due north. The escarpment rising behind shelters it from the cold, southerly winds. Two heavily wooded "fingers" that follow the creek beds on either side provide a natural enclosure.

It doesn't feel big, particularly in the context of its huge site, but the house can accommodate a few families in its three bedrooms and corridors, with neatly built-in day beds.

The plan is simple: a 5.3-metre-wide rectangle, built on a concrete slab, divided into 3.6-metre bays by a structural steel grid, painted brown. "The beams [of the grid] run right through and a room fills each bay, creating a sense of repeated rhythm. The form has solidity to the south, and is open to the north. The concrete slab it sits on anchors it into the landscape," Sanby says.

Entry is via the back of the house, the solid part,

with the door in the centre. From there, it's like a long low shed, the metal cladding and water tanks making it look utilitarian and workmanlike.

On entry, you are faced with the only place in the house without the northern view, a small, unassuming hallway area. Sanby says he wanted to "reveal the valley" view slowly so you don't give the story away.

One can, however, look in either direction down a long corridor through floor-to-ceiling glass windows onto wonderfully framed angophoras. This corridor, says Sanby, forms the backbone of the building, its circulation spine.

From the entry, the choice is easy, right or left, to the living or sleeping wings respectively. The living area takes up three bays, or four if you count the veranda – a kind of outdoor room on the house's

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western end, an excellent spot for dining and watching the sun on the sandstone ridges, the effect of which changes at different times of day.

The kitchen and dining area (one bay) are separated from the living room (two bays) by a room divider, with a fireplace and bookshelves built in – a straightforward space, with comfortable dimensions.

Doors slide away to the view throughout. The off-form concrete floors are grey with a steel trowel finish, and there are louvers high up on both sides for cross ventilation.

The monopitch roof is sloped to seven degrees, which serves a dual purpose. Rainwater runs down

to be caught in four water tanks at the back of the house. It is also angled to maximise the winter sun, and keep the summer sun out, with the assistance of a slatted awning on the north side, which "helps feather the building out so it doesn't look too solid on the roof form".

In the right-hand wing are three bedrooms (one ensuite) and the main bathroom, quite monastic and simple in a long dormitory-like row off the corridor, all opening to the view. The bathroom, the only room with a solid wall to the view, has a free-standing bathtub, with a lift-up panel window beside it which, when open, seems suddenly to bring the outdoors right into the house.

The corridor in this wing has its height dropped down, with the rooms protruding above so that they get the same kind of cross ventilation (through the high-up louvers) as the living wing.

Detailing is uncomplicated: the joinery in the living rooms is mostly plywood, with a dark-coloured turpentine veneer because the clients wanted something warm to offset the concrete and aluminium and the glazing.

Whereas the site was initially without a road, water or power, the house is now environmentally self-sufficient. It requires little or no maintenance, Sanby says, and really is a lock-up-and-go.

The heating is provided by underfloor heating pipes, their hot water collected in solar tubes before being fed through the slab, supplemented by a gas booster when the water falls below a certain temperature.

There is no air-conditioning. "We'll push [environmental sustainability] as far as the client is prepared to go, which is not very far in urban Sydney. You design for natural ventilation, and they often say "we want air-conditioning anyway."



- 1 The monopitch roof slopes to seven degrees to gather rainwater and maximise the winter sun
- 2 The living area has motorised blinds to shut the place down during severe weather. There are room dividers to separate it from the kitchen and dining section.
- 3 The main bathroom has a freestanding tub and a lift-up panel window.
- 4 The main bedroom, featuring white linen, opens to the view.



Photos: Ben Wigley