

New Beginnings

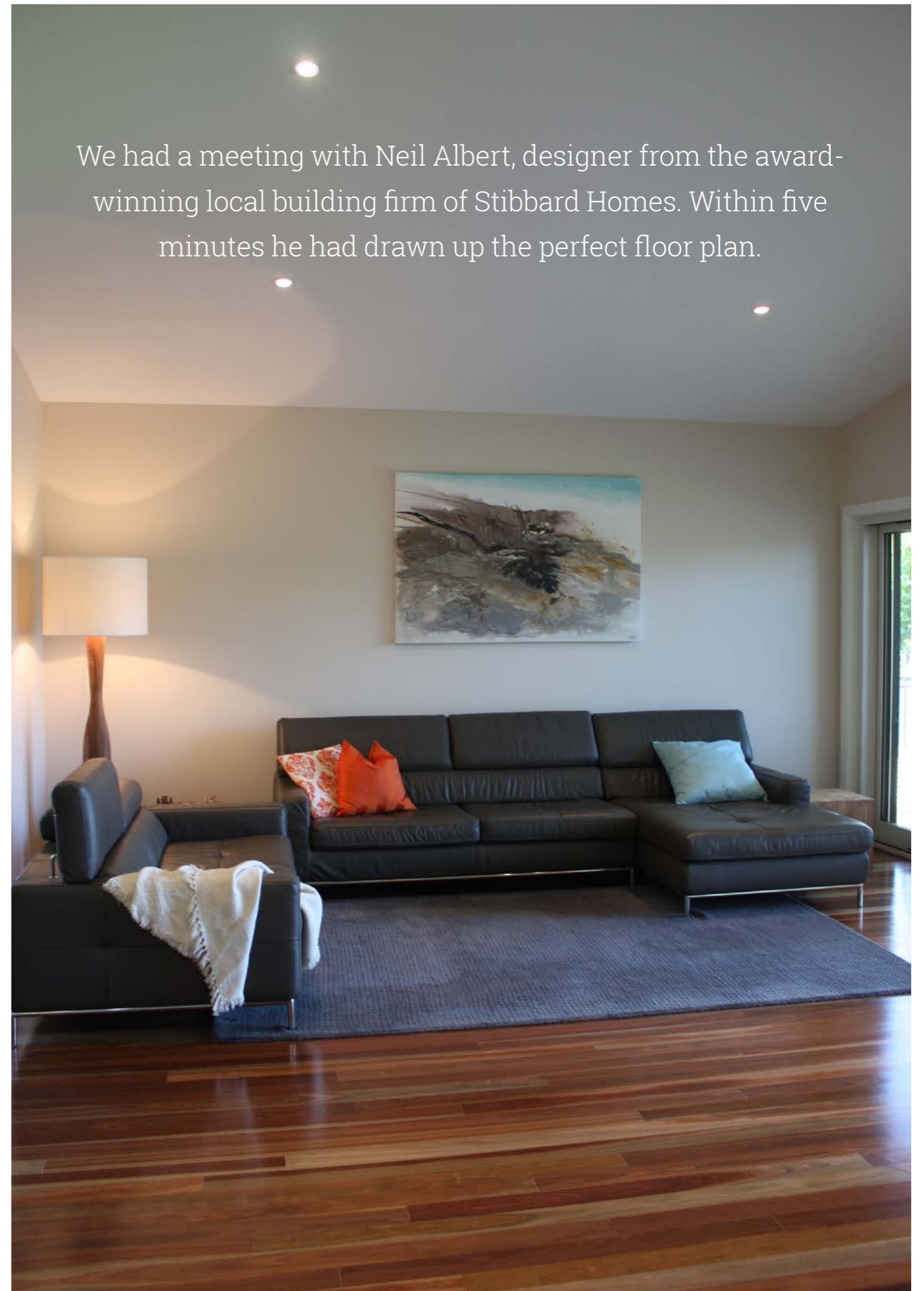
Story and Images Marilyn Collins

Four years ago, a Singleton Heights couple decided to relocate to the township, closer to their teenage daughters' schools and extra-curriculum activities. >





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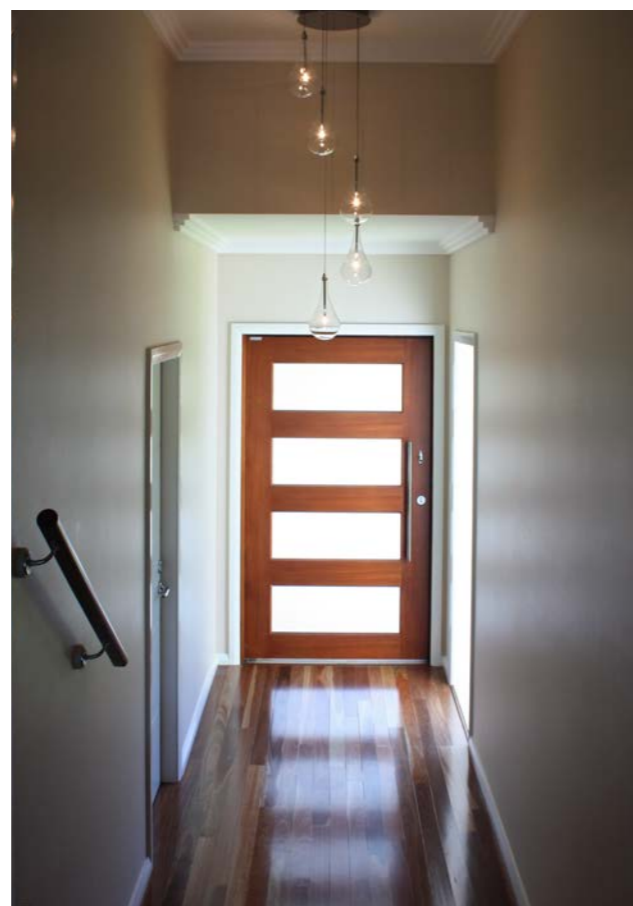


The redevelopment of former farmland, close to the Hunter River, is ideally situated, with a new neighbourhood of quality residences being built in the subdivision. Jayne and Glen chose a flat block at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac and started to design and build their new home.

"We wanted a home with a minimum of rooms, however in saying that, we wanted them to be large rooms," explained Jayne. "We had a meeting with Neil Albert, designer from the award-winning local building firm of Stibbard Homes, and he knew exactly what we meant and within five minutes had drawn up the perfect floor plan."

Throughout the building stages the couple were kept well versed with progress and Samantha Stibbard, Client Services Co-ordinator for Stibbard Homes, was able to assist them with their final selection of tiles and colours, and answer any queries during the entire process through to completion.

The street façade of the residence is modern and stylish. The external cladding is a combination of Austral Metropolis "Marcasite" face bricks, Weathertex cladding finished in Surfemist, Hardies Scyon cladding painted Dulux Bogart, with Colorbond Surfemist aluminium windows and doors and Colorbond Shale Grey roof, fascia and gutters. >



Stone cladding to the entry column is an attractive feature of the front of the home, flowing to the impressive pivot-entry front door opening into the hallway fitted with an overhead five-pendant drop-light fitting.

The design concept created is a four-bedroom residence with two separate living spaces, including open-plan living, dining and kitchen space. Outside is a covered Modwood deck perfect for recreation and entertaining. Expansive glass doors slide back to allow the indoor space to be extended to the outdoors when required.

"We are completely happy with the end result and after living in the home for more than three years we really wouldn't change one aspect of the build or design," said Jayne.

Due to the location being close to the river, council required a bearers-and-joists construction to meet flood-height requirements for the living areas, while a slab on the ground was possible for the garage and entry foyer. This allowed the entry to feature timber stairs leading up to the main living areas.

The selection of spotted gum timber flooring with bona traffic finish perfect for high-traffic areas was well considered due to its attractive appearance and durability. The timber flooring flows through the entire open-plan living, kitchen and dining area. The separate media/living room is ideal for those times when either adults or teenagers want their own space to watch their favourite television shows or to entertain.

The use of Dulux Hog's Bristle in varying strengths throughout the residence provides a neutral palette for décor. A white, crisp colour theme flows through the two-pack, polyurethane galley-style kitchen with built-in appliances and drawer space with Caesarstone Snow benchtops created by Osborne's Kitchens. White tiles with horizontal relief feature in the splash back and the island bench has three pendant lights overhead.

An Oliveri kitchen sink is fitted with Ideal Standard kitchen tapware and an entertainer's six-burner gas stove can cater for extended family gatherings. >





A butler's pantry adds to the storage potential and is used to keep kitchen appliances and phone chargers tidily away, keeping the kitchen pristine and neat.

The generous bedrooms are positioned off a long hallway. The daughters' two bedrooms are very spacious, both with walk-in robes and a study nook.

There is also a designated study room which could adapt to a single guest room. The accessible laundry has a wall of storage for linen and a long bench with cupboards underneath.

The main three-way bathroom has been designed for practicality so both daughters can access the bathroom at the same time. A cavity sliding door, that allows greater floor space, opens into the main bathroom area featuring the double sink vanity, and there is a separate bathroom/shower room and separate toilet.

At the end of the hallway is the master suite with a walk-in dressing room, dual vanity, shower and WC. The dressing way has two entrances – one from the bathroom and the other from within the bedroom for extra convenience.

Kado Arc under-counter basins were fitted to the vanities, with Caroma bathroom tap ware selected for the two bathrooms. The wall tiles are sparkling white and the floor tiles an olive shade, allowing coloured towels to add a splash of colour.

Throughout the home Jayne has placed sentimental pieces of antique furniture – each piece has special family memories. One daughter's bedroom is home to a lovingly restored antique washstand once owned by a great grandmother, as well as a tapestry footstool.

In the master bedroom, taking pride of place is a 100-year-old leather lounge chair with castors, owned by Jayne's grandfather and passed on through the family. "I remember my Pop always sat in this chair enjoying his afternoon beer on his front verandah," said Jayne. Amazingly, the deep aqua colour is still original and very much in vogue today.

Adding a modern touch to the furnishings is a family-sized timber table with bench seating on both sides capable of sitting the extended family at Christmas. Selecting new furnishings, rugs and décor from Habitat Living has allowed Jayne to stamp her individuality on the neutral colour scheme, adding her own flair and colour choices while maintaining a minimalistic, easy-care environment for a relaxed family lifestyle.

"Jayne and Glen were wonderful clients to work with and help achieve the end result of their beautiful home," said Samantha Stibbard. 📍

*Builder: Stibbard Homes
Kitchen: Osborne's Kitchens
Tiles: Jacoba Tiles
Furniture and Decor: Habitat Modern Coastal Living.*





Angels for Angels

There are some situations in life for which there are no words. The loss of the littlest life before life has even begun is one of the hardest. Sometimes though, as Penny Evans discovered, where there are no words, there can be gestures, an act of great kindness in a moment of inexplicable grief.

The Angel Gown Program is like no other charity or cause. It provides dignity in the most delicate of situations to the most deserving souls. Volunteers take donated wedding dresses and turn them into beautiful little garments for the babies that don't make it home from hospital.

The tiny size and sheer detail of each outfit take your breath away. The perfectly formed stitching and magnificent quality show that every piece is indeed sewn with love. It is an amazing juxtaposition to take a wonderful wedding dress, full of hopes, dreams for a future life and happy memories, and repurpose it for such a different moment, one where the hopes and dreams for the future will not be lived out. Yet still it is also about the memories, creating moments for the families to cherish, a chance to dress their child and honour them before having to say goodbye.

"In Australia, seven babies are stillborn every day, and that's not including those who pass away prematurely or have illnesses, so it's important to us to show to every family that every gown is made with love, honour and respect, and that it's just perfect for them," says founder Fiona Kirk.

The Angel Gown Program has just turned one-year-old in Australia. It was the sad tale of a friend of a friend losing their little girls at eight months of age to infantile leukaemia that inspired Fiona to make something special for the family out of her own wedding dress.

Since then she hasn't looked back and now, thanks to kind donations from brides all over the country, Fiona has 2,000 wedding dresses waiting patiently in her home to be deconstructed and turned into magnificent outfits for families in need of comfort. Another 3,000 were donated and deconstructed around Australia last year.

In the last 12 months, Fiona and her team of impeccable seamstresses and dedicated volunteers have already donated more than 4,000 outfits to families through 92 hospitals around Australia. And it's nearly all happened through word of mouth and social media.

The organisation celebrated its first birthday with a cocktail party in Sydney at the end of March, giving thanks to the hundreds of volunteers who have spread the program into all Australian states and territories. "But we're not just volunteers anymore," enthuses Fiona. >



Pat Cameron with Fiona Kirk and Fran Schutt.

"We've become a big family. Already there are more than 300 people involved, and many of them have gone through their own personal challenges in the last year and they all pitch in to help one another. They are the strength and essence of our organisation and are the whole reason we have succeeded," she says.

Every part of the dress is utilised in creating various sizes ranging from 20 weeks gestation to full term. It's difficult to fathom, but for the very tiny, premature souls too small for clothes, there are elegant little wraps, beautifully created out of satin and lace. And now, due to demand from hospitals, the program is expanding into outfits for children up to three years of age. Also, any leftover tulle is dyed and sewn into tutus, to become dress-ups for children with special needs or facing lengthy stays in hospital due to illness.

The level of care and emotion sewn into each garment is unparalleled. "Quality control is paramount. The last thing we want is a mother looking at a frayed dress in that moment; it has to be perfect," says Fiona. "However, we never reject a volunteer, and if they need help to improve their sewing, we assign them a buddy to help them learn to sew at our high standards," she says.

When we met, Fiona had travelled to Newcastle from Canberra to meet two new local volunteers who had just passed the keen eyes overseeing the sewing test, and to pass on their first set of patterns. Both women first heard about the program at an open day at David Lloyd Funerals at Lake Macquarie last year. Both have sewn for many years. Both can't wait to start helping.

When Pat Cameron from Neath begins cutting up her first dress she will be working with fabric very close to her heart. "Both my daughters have donated their wedding dresses, and they will be the first ones I work with.

The girls are happy to know where their dresses are going, and I just wanted to spread the love. It's so touching and although I haven't personally been affected in my life, I have heard other people's stories and I just wanted to help," Pat says.

Fran Schutt from Eleebana agrees. "Before, the families were often just given their baby wrapped in a blanket, and that was it; this is so much better," she says. "I think the hardest thing is to be planning to have this baby and then all of a sudden you have to find something special, and it's so terrible to have to shop for something like that, and no one brings a present for a deceased baby, so to be able to donate to those families and give them support and dignity, just being part of it makes me feel wonderful," Fran says.

Both women admire the brides caring enough to donate their precious wedding gowns to help others in need. "They've had their wedding and have happiness, and I think it must take a lot of courage and kindness to donate it, but to know it's pulled apart with care and dignity, and to give it a new purpose is so special," enthuses Fran.

"All sorts of people have donated," says Fiona, with a tear in her eye, "old brides, new brides, really, really old brides, including a wonderful handmade crepe dress from 1942, dropped off by the woman's son. It was a really big thing for him to hand it over, but I promised to care for it," she says. "The stitching was so neat, I was sad undoing it, but it was such a wonderful thing to have and to appreciate how it was made."

"We make a signature piece from each gown, trying to capture the essence of the gown in a miniature version," Fiona says. Fiona is clearly a perfectionist; her care for each piece carries through to the beautiful presentation of each gift being boxed up in layers of tissue paper with a poem and card for the families.

Each gown comes with a little angel pendant made out of crystals and mother of pearl. Fiona twists up to 100 in a night. It's a tiny keepsake for the family, if they chose to use the gowns for burials.

It is the special-care and neonatal nurses, not the Angel Gown Volunteers, who usually have the first-hand experience of handing over the gifts and helping families through the toughest of times. Sometimes Fiona takes personal requests for help including the day before we met, when a woman requested her own gown be used to make something for her baby, and the seamstresses had it back to her within 12 hours of the request being made. "Some families keep them, some bury them with their babies; it can give them a moment of peace and beauty and the chance to take special photos, and to have memories forever," says Fiona.

As the only registered charity in Australia currently providing gowns to Neonatal Intensive Care Units, demand is huge and there are dozens of hospitals on the waiting list. In 12 months the program has grown substantially, yet it is still majority funded by the volunteers involved.

Guardian Funerals has recently come on as a community partner. Fiona has hopes to continue to expand the organisation, with programs to support pregnancy, infant loss and premature births, and families who have children with special needs, or who are suffering a long-term or terminal illness.

It takes a big heart to give over your wedding dress, yet through the Angel Gown Program there is the chance to help heal a broken heart. There is empathy in the creation of each piece that means much more than recycled fabric is passed on. And the gratitude of those grieving cannot be underestimated for the generosity and grace they have received, which is truly the work of angels. 🙏

www.angelgownprogram.org.au

design with a difference



"A luxury bedroom doesn't compromise on anything."

A beautiful Master bedroom is the ultimate retreat with pampering amenities such as gorgeous beds, amazing sitting areas, custom wardrobes and a personal Ensuite.

The luxury look is all about combining "luxurious" materials in subtle shades. Including feature Upholstered wall panels or Wallpaper with a luxurious sheen. Some interesting bedside tables and decorative tall lamps provide a cosy light to read by at night.

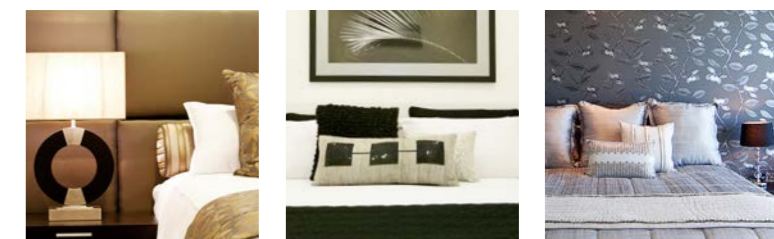
Nothing makes a bed look more inviting than luxurious layers of Linens and pillows. Layer quilts and throws at the end of the bed for added comfort.

Carmel will assist you to create a beautiful bedroom environment, reflecting your style and personality.



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