

Perfect Pavilions

Story & Images Marilyn Collins

Expansive spaces, an amazing design and carefree living give former Sydneysiders a dream lifestyle home which has a passive, environmental design.



For fifteen years, Barry and Christine Miller had an ongoing connection with the Hunter Valley as a weekend retreat destination and escape from their city life on Sydney's north side.

"In 2004 we stayed at Billabong Moon in Hermitage Road, taking along our kelpie dog, and saw how much she enjoyed running around the free open space," said Christine. "We had no real defined retirement plans at the time, so I surprised Barry by commenting: 'I want to live up here – not for a weekend, but forever!'" Within six months the wish had become reality.

The couple purchased 27 acres at Rothbury on the first

day it was listed and sold their Lane Cove residence within the first week on the market – it was all meant to be.

The Rothbury property had an extensive vineyard planted and an older-style residence which became their home for the next three years, both while planning their new residence and throughout its construction.

Two years after relocating, the couple, so impressed after viewing a pavilion-style home designed and built by Singleton home builders Stibbard Homes, decided to contract the firm to build their dream retirement home to suit their new carefree lifestyle and also to include separate and independent accommodation for Christine's elderly mother.

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Neil Albert, Stibbard's designer, created three defined living spaces linked by a covered walkway.

The first stage of the plan involved the clearing of seven acres of grapevines. The soil excavated for the 120,000 litre inground water tank was used in the creation of mounded gardens and the couple set about a replanting project of over 1000 native trees and shrubs, in an effort to restore the native habitat for local wildlife, with the assistance of horticulturist Peter Chapman and close friend Jim Doyle, who with Christine designed and created all the garden beds, as well as a pond and a chicken enclosure.

The first sloping, high-ceiling pavilion is the main designated living space, offering an open-plan living room, kitchen, guest bedroom and bathroom, laundry and a computer nook and spacious double garage.

The floors throughout are of wide, standard-grade blackbutt floorboards chosen for their characteristic knotted features and rustic appearance.

The kitchen is warm, inviting and classic, sparkling

white. The long, narrow room captures the rear views of the Brokenback Mountain and three acres of garden through the expansive glass windows with side louvre panels for ventilation.

The concept to include walls of glass resulted from eliminating the traditional above-counter wall cupboards, which really opens up the space and snapshots the vista beyond. There are no cupboards, only wide drawers with stainless handles throughout the kitchen. The Corian benchtops gives a streamlined effect as there are no joins or seams. The double Corian sink is integrated within the island benchtop, under which is fitted two drawer-style top-loading dishwashers, providing ease of access for loading and unloading. A large walk-in pantry was created for maximum storage and houses small appliances and even the DVD and workings of the television. The stove offers gas cook top and electric oven.

On the rear verandah, neatly tucked into an alcove, is the outdoor kitchen appointed with a gas barbecue and sink – very handy when entertaining guests. >



Far Left: Portrait of the family's pet kelpies takes price of place. Above: Open plan living room showcases custom built timber furniture.

Right: A special corner houses collectable china pieces favoured by the owners.







The open-plan living space features a gas log fireplace and bi-fold doors which open into a rear, gauzed verandah room, which is one of Stibbard Homes' trademark inclusions in most of their country homes. This is the perfect place to relax during any season, especially on a summer's day, capturing the vista of valley views and dogs at play. The interior and exterior corrugated walls add to the rustic country feel and design.

When you move into a new custom-built luxury home, the old furniture doesn't quite fit the bill. Barry wanted to use natural pieces and soft, warm materials to enhance the country look, so he commissioned a local Nulkaba craftsman to create furniture from stunning red gum as a surprise birthday gift for Christine. Actually, there was a piece created for each of her animals!

Throughout the home are original artworks depicting the couple's animals painted by artist Megan Barrass, a local artist.

The generous guest bathroom, which faces the front driveway, offers the luxury of a deep, soaking bath and a floor-to-ceiling tiled walled shower recess. The laundry is fitted with two front-loading washing machines (one for the owners – the other for the animals' blankets etc.) tucked underneath the benchtop. Convenient entry is via the back of the double garage or from the front alcove – a neat place to store muddy garden/outdoor boots. There is also a cellar/storage room off the laundry.

A double-sized guest room is located next to the bathroom and a computer nook fits snugly at the end of the corridor.

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Left: The guest room is located in the main living pavilion giving privacy to both the owners and guests.

The master bedroom is accommodated in a separate pavilion with an open plan luxurious bathroom with a deep-soaking tub and screenless shower.



The owners have their own private space – a master bedroom suite located in a separate pavilion linked by an open timber-floored breezeway. Security keypad entry to all pavilion doors saves the inconvenience of carrying around house keys, especially when working out-of-doors.

The wow factor for this area is the master en suite, tiled floor-to-ceiling with travertine tiles. Taking centre stage is a freestanding bath. The screenless shower has a sloping, well-drained limestone shower floor and opens completely to the great outdoors through double doors.

Every space has a purpose in the design concept, which includes independent living for Christine's mother. She has a sunny, well-positioned, two-bedroom pavilion with her own laundry, kitchen, living and lounge room and happily lives her life independently, yet metres away from her family if needed.

The move from the 'big smoke' allowed the couple to indulge their passion for animals. Heading the list are their two beloved kelpies, Layla and Moss. The menagerie has now grown to include two alpacas, three goats, three miniature horses, two Arabian horses on agistment, three cows, two donkeys in foster care from the Donkey Sanctuary, eight Sussex laying hens and two silky chickens, with always room for more.

Christine says: "We want to give every one of them the healthiest and happiest life that we can – hence the property has been aptly named '8 Paws and More'.

"We are very committed to the ideology that we will never use any of our animals for profit and will always treat them with the respect and dignity that they deserve. Everyone on our farm has a home for life and a lot of our friends have even expressed a desire to come back in their next life as one of our animals!"

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Above: The master bedroom pavilion. Top right: A covered walkway links the pavilions and doubles as the main entrance way to the living space.

Right: The outdoor kitchen at the rear of the house. Far right: The "Hilton" hen house.



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"For the last 10 years, I have also been a wildlife carer. I mainly specialise in orphaned baby flying foxes and have hand raised and released many babies over the years.

"It is a very time-consuming but rewarding job, as grey-headed flying foxes are an endangered species." This is an ongoing project that both partners are very passionate about and complements Christine's work with wildlife habitats.

On an environmental level, the home is appointed with solar hot water, 100% green power and low-energy lighting. Keen to do their part, the owners have the ability to compost most of their household waste. They use environmentally friendly cleaning products and grow their own vegetables and fruit, enjoying freshly laid eggs and pure tank water.

The hen house, previously a child's timber cubby house, is "The Hilton" of hen houses, and is securely fenced and netted, allowing the hens to 'free range' through the herb-and-vegetable patch.

This home is an incredible example of how different elements can work together harmoniously to perfectly suit the owners' desired lifestyle. Meticulous attention to detail and craftsmanship fully complement inspired architectural design.



Top: The rear view of the residence.

Above: Garden sculptures in the mounded native gardens.

Pic. left: Interior of the mother-in-law's living room and self-contained two-bedroom residence.