

Designed for Future Years

STORY AND IMAGES MARILYN COLLINS

After spending thirty-five years visiting their Port Stephens holiday home, the owners made a decision to upgrade and build a modern residence on the site, which now offers the continuance of those good times and a new era in their lifetime.

Throughout the Hunter district, there are many picturesque and quiet hamlets, of which Boat Harbour is one. This outlying suburb of Port Stephens is centred on a sheltered, sandy bay with Kingsley Beach just to the south, which is popular with surfers.

From the easternmost end of Ocean Parade, in the highest part of the suburb and adjacent to the Tomaree National Park at Morna Point, there are striking views of the coastline.

On a clear day it is possible to follow the coast southwards to the horizon well beyond Newcastle. Boat Harbour is also well known as the whale highway, as residents only have to stand on the beachfront to watch the whales' annual migration, which grows in numbers each year.

For the past thirty-five years, Gerry and Suzanne have enjoyed many a relaxing time at Boat Harbour, away from their busy professional lives and often joined by visiting extended family and friends. They have observed the ever-changing face of the hamlet - once merely a holiday destination comprising humble holiday homes. Yet today, Boat Harbour is a residential suburb comprising many architecturally designed luxury residences, many positioned to make the most of their glorious coastal views.

Gerry and Suzanne had the benefit of foresight to invest in a couple of surrounding properties near to their holiday home, which were used to accommodate the expanding circle of holidaying family and friends. They had a plan to one day utilise the available rear access as a driveway to the proposed, two-level residence which now stands on the site of their former holiday home.

"Our modest, two-bedroom fibro and weatherboard home served us well over those many years," said Gerry. "I remember a time when one friend came for a holiday with his nine children, who were bunked down on airbeds throughout the rooms and even in the garage. With the beach right across the road, it was the perfect place for a relaxing family holiday of sun, surf and fun."

When the decision came to eventually knock down the old cottage to make way for a new home, many friends came along just to bid a sentimental farewell to the old place and to say "thanks" for all the good times it had given them over the many decades.

When looking for a builder, Jerry and Suzanne, avid readers of Hunter Lifestyle Magazine, contacted Stibbard Homes at Singleton. "Seeing they had been such long-standing advertisers in the magazine from its inception and had won numerous MBA state and national building awards, we contacted them," said Suzanne.

"I was convinced from the onset of that first phone call it was the right decision," said Suzanne. "We made the initial trip up to Singleton to discuss our plans and designer Neil Albert immediately knew exactly what we wanted in our future home."

To add to the irony of their choice, Stibbard's Singleton office was just two doors down from where Suzanne's grandmother had once lived - a place where she had spent many of her childhood days. "Everything seemed to dovetail as if meant to be," said Suzanne.

Designer Neil Albert said his initial brief from the couple was to design and construct a contemporary beachside residence that would function both as a holiday home and, in time, a retirement location. With this in mind, level access into the upper living areas was considered essential.

This was made easier because the couple owned the two house blocks facing Boat Harbour Road, giving them rear driveway access straight into the single garage at the rear of the residence, thus creating a one-level lifestyle.

To meet the clients' expectations and deliver a contemporary beachside residence, attention to detail and the careful selection of construction techniques were considered critical.

For twelve months, due to the prevailing wet weather, Stibbard Homes worked with their tradesmen to form a tight team. This was absolutely integral to the outcome of the home giving the clients exactly what they wanted. ►





As soon as the first sod of earth was turned, the heavens opened up and it rained for weeks, making building process somewhat trying for the tradesmen before the home came to the lock-up stages.

Extensive screw piling was constructed prior to the foundations being prepared, and core-filled block work was used to provide utility areas and water storage set back into the sloped site.

“Our clients’ long association with the area and in particular this site, meant that the orientation and outlook from the living areas had been decided long before our design process began,” said Neil Albert. “To meet these requirements, all living areas and the master bedroom had to be located on the upper level. “

At first glance it is obvious that the dining, kitchen and living areas come together on the one level where spectacular views are invited in through huge glass panes and sliding doors which lead to a balcony overlooking the beach.

Gerry said in planning the actual footprint of the home, they were particularly observant to build so as not to block the views

of the surrounding neighbours, as a courtesy. The spectacular coastal view dictated the use of large panels of glazing with side panels of louvres incorporated to control ventilation and take advantage of the cooling coastal summer breezes.

To assist dealing with poor and sandy soil conditions, lightweight construction techniques were extensively used. External claddings on the exterior were a mixture of rendered Hebel power panels, Weathertex Weather groove, Hardies Scyon sheeting and Colorbond ultra-custom orb.

Open-plan living was the design chosen, which works extremely well throughout the living spaces.

Steel portal frames were used to construct the large-span curved roof, eliminating the need for internal support walls and opening the living areas up to the views.

From the rear garage and landing, you step straight into a casual sitting and eating area decorated with white cane furniture. The warmth of the Blackbutt timber flooring throughout the living space and hallway adds to the ambience of the residence, which is accentuated by colourful rugs. ►

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"The original plan called for a wall across this area but after reconsidering, we opted to keep the open-flow living plan and haven't regretted this decision, as in the winter it is the perfect place to enjoy a relaxing meal enjoying the winter sunshine," said Gerry.

During the summer months there are panels of louvre windows in this area which can be opened to allow breezes to flow through the interior.

Off to the side of the sitting room down the hallway are the laundry and a guest room with an interconnecting door opening into the bathroom, with a separate toilet across the corridor for guests.

The sparkling-white timber kitchen, built by Osborne's Kitchens, is well appointed, with pull-out drawers giving easy access to storage, a utility cupboard and island work bench fitted with a double stainless sink. Overhead cupboards have glass fronts, which enable Suzanne to display her colourful china and ornaments. Off to the side is a spacious walk-in pantry.

There is ample bench space, an important aspect as the couple are constant entertainers and Suzanne is a keen cook. The dining area is readily accessed from the kitchen, making mealtimes easy for the hostess.

Close by is the timber staircase framed by glass panels, leading downstairs into another separate living space and out onto the street entrance.

The lounge/living area enjoys superb coastal view through floor-to-ceiling glass windows which open onto a spacious front verandah. Osbornes were engaged to design and fit a wall of white shelving along one entire section of the living room to house the couple's collection of books, photos, ornaments and memorabilia from their overseas trips.

Suzanne and Kerry both enjoy the ambience of a wood fire and selected a wood box fireplace to be fitted, which warms the entire living space.

The master bedroom at the front of the upper level is spacious and has a walk-through en suite. ►



The first section has a double vanity basin, next is the bathing area with a shower recess fitted with a rainforest shower head and a spa bath in the main area. At the end of the corridor next to the bathroom is a walk-in dressing room with custom-made open storage cupboards and hanging space.

Suzanne drew on her former medical professional training to add many important key factors into the design to cater for “our old age”. Whilst not wanting to create a nursing-home environment, she made some decisions which in the long term will enable them both to be accommodated at home in their latter years.

She selected a style of door handle which required pulling to operate rather than turning a knob, making life easier.

“We also had the doorways made wider, and shower access easier for the possibility of a wheelchair or shower chair. The staircase also can be adapted to fit a stair lift, should the need arise. Hopefully, we won’t need these features but it was wise to plan for them during the building process, rather than later.”

Downstairs is a large tiled living area space, additional bedrooms and a tiled bathroom which has been designed not only for additional house guests but also to accommodate a live-in nurse or carer.

The downstairs area in summer is obviously particularly cooler, and there is ample space to establish a sewing and craft area in which to spend creative spare time.

Additional off-street parking for two vehicles is under the cover of the front verandah.

Gerry said the position of the home gives an uninterrupted view of the beachfront and coastline and is a prime position from which to watch the passing parade of whales at migratory times.

“Recently there were twenty whales passing at the same time, and it was a wonderful sight.

Over the years we were here for holidays we have seen the numbers grow and grow.”

The property has been entered into the 2012 MBA Excellence in Housing Awards. Stibbard Homes has won many awards and the company’s portfolio consists of new prestige homes with luxury appointments, demonstrating expert design and quality craftsmanship. This home is no different, with everything built to perfection. 

