

Simply elegant

For 15 years, homeowners Derek and Barbara had spent weekends in a unit on the waterfront in scenic Boat Harbour. When a block of land came up for sale right next to it, they simply couldn't resist.

Story by Cornelia Schulze, photography by Murray McKean

The couple wanted to build a holiday home with enough space for themselves, their children and grandchildren. A house, that would eventually become their permanent home once they were both retired.

They bought the land in April 2019, planned to knock down the old house on the site and to start building right away. But asbestos issues and COVID restrictions caused some delays.

"Covid slowed us down, but it didn't stop us," Barbara says. "We couldn't have lots of different trades on site at the same time, so had to space it all out." And then there was the rain. "Even if it was only a drizzle up the valley, we knew it would be bucketing down here," she adds.

While Barbara and Derek were looking forward to creating a beachside haven for the whole family, having at least as good a view from the new house as they had enjoyed from their unit was key.

"That was a bit of a concern," Barbara admits. "Being English, I am not much of a swimmer, but I love having extensive water views, so that was very important for me." While the couple were on the same page on making the most of the spectacular beachside location, they had clearly designated responsibilities for the overall project: Derek focused on the design of the outside of the home and Barbara was more involved with the interiors, the floorplan and the finishes.

"I knew that I wanted a very clean design, with simple lines, but I couldn't quite get the perspective right," Derek explains. "And then I saw these boxes piled up on a shelf in my office, and I knew that was it. That was the starting point for the whole design."

Building a dream team

Finding the right builder was easy: Singleton-based builder Stibbard's had built their home at The Vintage in the Hunter Valley and the couple had thoroughly enjoyed working with Neil Albert and Samantha Stibbard. Based

on Derek's vision, Managing Director Neil Albert began fleshing out the detailed plans for the new build.

"The elegant simplicity of the design successfully hides the project's significant complexity," he explains.

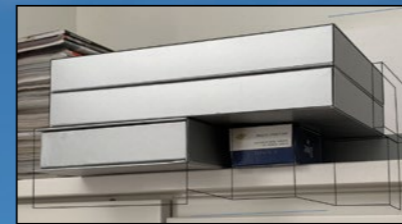
"Because of the rocky site, we needed both on-ground and suspended concrete slabs. Then we had to deal with groundwater pouring onto the site once we started cutting into the rock. And the cantilevered roof and balcony required an unusual quantity of engineered structural steel to allow for the walls of glass and the symmetry of the windows while avoiding any noticeable disruption of the spectacular views."

Ken Langford, Director at Langford Windows says: "With top of the range Slide Master Doors and commercial grade double glazing we were able to perfectly frame the ocean views while meeting all BASIX requirements."

With four bedrooms and four bathrooms, it is a substantial home. The floorplan behind the stunning façade has been designed to create generous, well-sized spaces that are big enough for the family to gather, without ever feeling too big when it's just Barbara and Derek.

"I wanted a home where we would naturally use all the different spaces," Barbara says. "I didn't want self-contained, separate areas, where we would be upstairs and everyone else downstairs."

"That was the main reason why the kitchen is downstairs. Everyone told me that I was crazy and that we should put it on the upper level because that's where



The stunning exterior of the home was inspired by a few humble boxes sitting on a shelf in Derek's office.





Polytec Venette in matte black was a perfect choice: it helps designate the kitchen as a separate space while its anti-fingerprint capabilities make for easy cleaning. Louvres in the splashback further enhance cross-ventilation. The laundry, another bathroom and Derek's office have been placed in the rear wing of the home. The stunning artwork was the starting point for the colour scheme in the dining area.



The couch in the upstairs living area mirrors the one downstairs – and comes with an even more spectacular view. Custom-built joinery (by Osbornes Kitchens) offers stylish additional storage space.

you have the best view. But with both the kitchen and the master suite upstairs, why then would we ever spend time downstairs? Besides, an upstairs kitchen just didn't seem right.

"Planning for our retirement, we have put in an elevator. It's yet another way to make sure that we will always use both levels of the house – with an elevator in place, there really are no excuses."

The house has an L-shaped footprint with a two-storey ocean front and a single level extension towards the rear, that connects the home to a three-car garage, the only structure they kept when knocking down the old house on the site. This rear wing is where Derek's office, the laundry and an additional bathroom are located.

Also on this level, but at the front of the home, overlooking the ocean, are a guest bedroom and the open plan kitchen, living and dining area that opens towards a wide balcony with glass railings to protect the views. Another alfresco area at the back has been an unexpected plus.

"At first, we weren't sure how we were going to use the outdoor area at the back, but it has become our favourite spot for



breakfast. It's where we get the morning sun and it's so well protected from the wind. We can even open and close the roof," Barbara says.

Designated spaces

Expertly designed and installed by Osbornes Kitchens, the kitchen is a stunning work of art. The massive stone benchtops feature suede-effect surfaces that are soft and velvety to touch and very easy to keep clean. The oversized island is the perfect spot for family gatherings.

Barbara relegated a full-sized sink to the butler's pantry at the back of the kitchen and opted for a "champagne sink" to be installed in the island.

"It's big enough to rinse a couple of dishes, but most importantly you can put in a bag of ice, a few bottles of wine and that's dinner drinks sorted.

"I really wanted this island to be the get-together space and the pantry at the back to be the workspace. I didn't want to be on stage when I'm baking a cake," Barbara chuckles. ▷



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She also wanted a custom-built, integrated full height wine fridge and another, oversized fridge for everything else. "I spent my whole life with small fridges, so this time I wanted lots of space and a fridge with French doors," she explains.

The kitchen design was a collaborative process between the couple and the experts at Osbornes. Director Ashley Osborne elaborates, "Integrated appliances and a subtle differentiation between the functional pantry and the spectacular kitchen were key requirements. Polytec's Venette was the obvious material choice. It offers a perfect combination between function and aesthetics with its matte, anti-fingerprint finish."

To bring in the gorgeous, sand-coloured couch in the living area, the glass doors at the back had to be taken out. The blue dining chairs are a reference to the couple's home at The Vintage.

"We have the exact same ones there, just in grey. We started with the artwork which we brought in from our other house and that set the tone for the chairs," Barbara says



Clockwise from top left: Drinks are always within reach with a wet bar on the upper level. The staircase had to be brought in fully assembled, the bespoke metal handrail was created by Graham Stainless Manufacturing. An upstairs sitting area is the perfect spot to watch the spectacular sunset.

They add a fresh pop of colour in an otherwise neutral colour scheme of whites and greys.

"I am not one for bold colours," she explains. She wanted a more contemporary style for their Boat Harbour home as a contrast to their Hamptons style residence at The Vintage.

"I'd much rather start with neutral tones, a bit like a canvas where you can add bits and pieces further down the road. I often start with just one thing and don't even know where it's going to go yet. I also think that you need to take your

time and live in a house before you put in feature walls or big statement pieces."

Never mess with Otto!

Barbara chose oversized grey tiles for the ground floor. "Tiles are more forgiving when the grandkids come in from the beach with sandy feet," she says. And they are the perfect backdrop for the stunning timber staircase that leads to the upper floor.

This staircase is where Otto von Schnauzer, the couple's schnauzer dog, made his preferences clearly known. ▷



Who wouldn't like to wake up to the views from this master bedroom? Right: the grandkids love to spend the night in these bunkbeds.



"We initially wanted floating treads, but Otto wouldn't have it," Barbara admits. "So, Neil had to completely redesign the staircase. It had to be brought in fully assembled – it took ten people to install it and we had to take out a few windows so it could be brought in."

Neil Albert also designed the bespoke metal handrail and vertical timber beams.

Next level views

On the upper floor, a second living area and adjacent wide balcony offer even better ocean views. With a wet bar next to it, a guitar and a piano at the ready, nothing will get in the way of enjoying spectacular sunsets, glass in hand and a favourite tune in the background.

The two guest bedrooms on this level are spacious with elegant built-in closets. One of them features bunk beds with enough space for six grandkids.

The master suite boasts a generous sized walk-in wardrobe, and an open

TALKING TRADES

Throughout the Hunter, Newcastle and up and down the coast, Neil Albert and Samantha Stibbard from **Stibbard's** create unique homes, inspired by their clients' needs and ideas. stibbardhomes.com.au, 0413 387 712

Osbornes Kitchens & Wardrobes designed, manufactured and installed the kitchen, bathroom vanities and custom joinery of this stunning home. osborneskitchens.com.au, 02 4932 7656

A local, family-owned and operated company, **Langford Windows** are committed to providing Newcastle's best windows and doors. langfordwindows.com.au, 02 4953 5000

Brad Graham from **Graham Stainless Manufacturing** created the magnificent metal handrail that complements the timber staircase to perfection. mail@grahamstainless.com.au, 02 4956 9111

bathroom with a freestanding bathtub, cleverly protected by a wall of half height.

"We hadn't planned it that way, but you can brush your teeth and still see the ocean in the mirror. Or simply lift your head when you are sitting in the bath and enjoy the view," Barbara smiles.

With the all-important views perfectly captured, is there anything Barbara would do differently if she had to do it all over again?

"Not really," Barbara says thoughtfully. "Maybe not build during a global pandemic!" ◇

A GARDEN TO MATCH

Derek is a keen gardener, so the landscaping for such a statement property had to complement the design. Tom Lantry had created the garden at the couple's Pokolbin residence and was called upon to work his magic with the design and planting at Boat Harbour.

With a focus on Australian natives, the outcome is a spectacular coastal garden that receives many positive comments from passers by.

The grand kids have taken charge of the curved garden path which is now fondly known as the *Thomas the Tank playing track*.

