



Tree dwellers

BANKS OF GLASS CONNECT THIS UNCLUTTERED HOUSE WITH ITS LEAFY SURROUNDS

OPEN HOUSE MARGIE FRASER

For a couple with no claims of design knowledge, Karen Peterson and Alec Begley are doing very well. Their new home at Ashgrove is a tribute to practicality, and the result of a well-considered brief outlining how they wanted to live in the space.

"We both like clean, simple lines and certainly didn't want clutter," Karen says.

"We love the feel of an old Queenslander," adds Alec, "with their high ceilings and the way they seem to settle so nicely into the landscape. We particularly wanted something that merged with the area, rather than plonking some huge masonry object in the middle of the block."

Their sentiments are music to the ears of anyone who is irritated by the current rash of bloated, grandiose structures squandering whole blocks and allowing no breathing space between.

Another major consideration was the desire to live among the trees. Both are avid gardeners, and the existence of magnificent gums and jacarandas was a good starting point for the forest they are now developing in their own back yard.

Karen had lived on the site previously, in an unremarkable 1960s spec house. After marrying Alec, the couple travelled the globe and decided to return and renovate the original house.

Architect Sue Rowsell drew up some initial plans but soon advised them that for just that

little bit extra they could demolish and rebuild in a way that would be the “perfect fit” for them.

“The idea was to create a small, comfortable home to suit their lifestyle and to take advantage of the lush green outlook,” Sue says. “They didn’t want a contemporary, hard-edged look. They had a number of older pieces of furniture that were to be accommodated, so it was a matter of finding the right balance between contemporary and more conservative forms.”

The plan was resolved with two double-height pavilions linked by a breezeway. Living spaces are to one side and bedrooms, laundry and bathrooms on the other.

“It was important to be able to walk in and look straight into the garden,” Karen says. “So the staircase was pushed to the side and the entry foyer left wide and open.”

The view of the back garden through a full-height wall of glass incorporates a water feature inspired by the couple’s travels in Spain.

Every room, in fact, enjoys a view to the garden through banks of louvres or timber french doors.

The house, like the old Queenslanders Karen and Alec admire, funnels the breezes. Airconditioning was installed in the living room but is only used on those few unbearably hot days each year.

Strong colours are reserved for feature walls



Outside in ... from far left, nestled among tall trees, myriad windows and glass panels afford a leafy outlook from most rooms; blue hues make for a cool exterior and bold kitchen statement. Photographs: **Richard Waugh**



and furnishings. The couple’s favourite hue, a powerful Saxony blue, colours the kitchen cabinets and the exterior cladding, adding a distinctive touch to the facade.

The home is a pleasant haven, which is shared with many visiting birds.

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HOME TRUTHS]

What was your aim? “To build something light and airy in the trees, with a small footprint on the site,” says Karen Peterson, right, with husband Alec Begley.

What is your favourite feature? “The general openness and the way it’s designed to open on to the garden. No matter where you are in the house, you look on to the garden.”

How long did it take? From October 2003 to May 2004.

