



STORY AND STYLING PENELOPE BARKER PHOTOGRAPHY MAX & GREG DEVINE

High Hopes

SEEKING RESPITE FROM INNER CITY LIFE IN SYDNEY, ANDREW AND JUSTINE BOUGHT A BEAUTIFUL BLOCK OF LAND INLAND FROM BERRY WITH VIEWS OF ROLLING HILLS AND THE COAST AND PROCEEDED TO BUILD A WEEKENDER WITH LOADS OF CHARM AND PLENTY OF ROOM FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

The house is positioned to take advantage of views to the coast.
Landscape design by Marcia Hosking, Kangaroo Valley.



With two small boys and busy legal careers, Andrew and Justine faced a quandary. "Our house in inner western Sydney is convenient but lacks room for the boys to run around," says Justine. "We came to the point a couple of years ago where we asked ourselves 'Do we move to the suburbs for more space or stay in the Inner West and find a weekend?' "

The pair looked first north of Sydney for the ideal location for weekends away but were put off by traffic jams. "Then one weekend we were staying in Kangaroo Valley and had an epiphany," recalls Justine. "We decided that weekend that this it - the South Coast is the area we want to look in. It fulfilled all my holiday fantasies of a place with rolling green hills down to the ocean."

On the way back to Sydney the pair looked in on a real estate agent in Berry who had a few suitable blocks for sale. "We went and looked at this one and thought 'Oh wow!'" says Justine. "We were totally seduced by the view! The real estate agent asked me what sort of house we envisioned for the block and I glanced down at his desk, saw a brochure from local builders Strongbuild and said 'One just like this!' Andrew met up with Chris Francis of Strongbuild to discuss the logistics of building on the steep site and we decided to bite the bullet. It all fell into place happily."

Opposite: the exterior is painted Dulux 'Linsae' with timberwork in Dulux 'Antique White USA', the roof is Colorbond 'Woodland Grey' and the brickwork in the outdoor area is matched to Colorbond 'Bushland'. This page, top left: Andrew and Justine with boys Daniel (left) and Tom and baby Sam; above right: the airy living room with furnishings from Coco Republic and coffee table from Doug Up On Bourke, Alexandria, NSW. Left: rustic farm gates lead to the winding driveway. Below: the main bedroom with bifold doors opening onto the wide verandah.



Justine and Andrew were further sold on Strongbuild's Classic Design system. "Style-wise their designs were spot on for what we wanted," says Justine. "We were also attracted by the fact that they manage the whole project and their system takes out much of the guess work. It saved us a lot of time and effort, which was especially important as we were both working and busy with two children."

Working with Strongbuild and local architectural designer Natasha Marshall, Justine oversaw the build details and interior design and decoration. "The style of the house lent itself to a certain style of interiors," says Justine. "We didn't want a repro country or colonial style but a modern take on a classic country house - not twee but still sympathetic to the style of the house. I pored over decorating magazines and stole ideas and scoured the internet, spending many hours online and dragging the kids around showrooms on the weekend." Keen art collectors, Andrew and Justine also collected art specifically for the house over the next year while the house was being completed.

"The painting over the fireplace - Washub Yabbies - The Great Escape by Andrew Bennett - was chosen well before the house was finished," says Justine. "We instructed Natasha that the fireplace had to fit the painting."



All was going smoothly until the discovery that baby Sam was on the way to join brothers Daniel, now eight, and Tom, now six. "Suddenly, the room we had planned to be a study became the baby's room," says Justine. "Sam had his first site visit when he was three weeks old!"

The house also grew along the way. "Andrew was intent on having a house that would accommodate three families comfortably for the weekend," recalls Justine. "We have much better quality time with family and friends down here than we would entertaining in Sydney."

"We spend lots of weekends with friends sitting around the large dining table and the firepit toasting marshmallows and damper. We're still novices at the pizza oven - the first batch we made were laughable but we have improved! The outdoor cooking and entertaining area has been a really worthwhile part of the design. The boys love playing outside. They head straight for a grove of trees they call 'the kids' area' when we arrive and busily work on it all weekend."

The whole family are hugely enjoying their weekends away in the country. "It's so close to Sydney yet it feels like another world here," says Justine. "We're tucked away in a secluded laneway but have gob-smacking views and we're only 10 minutes from Berry. Now we're looking forward to summer and heading for the beach!"

Opposite page: dining table ready for guests. Above: the upstairs guest bedrooms are comfortably furnished, with bay windows taking in lush rural views. Left: Andrew mans the barbecue. Below: the guest bathroom upstairs with Thonet chair and stool.



Andrew and Justine's house is available as a holiday letting through www.berrygetaways.com.au. For more information on Strongbuild's Classic Designs visit www.strongbuild.com.au