

Pacific Palisade

Combing indigenous building references and Modernist minimalism, this eco-friendly island house off New Zealand's northern coast is designed to bring people together.



Story by Melinda Williams
Photos by Emma-Jane Hetherington

Project: Hideaway Cove Bach
Architect: Tim Dorrington for Box Living
Location: Kawau Island, New Zealand



Kawau Island is a bush-clad islet

an hour's drive north of Auckland, populated by less than 100 salty locals - lovelorn sailors retired to their yachts; a local publican; nature-lovers and alternative lifestylers - and weekend tides of holiday-makers. From the bleached-grey wharf at Sandspit, watched over by wheeling gulls and hunched spoonbills, it takes just 15 bouncy minutes in an aluminium run-about to the small bay where Edoardo and Teresa Canal have built their holiday home. The water here is a clear, deep green, lucent with phosphorescence after dark. "At night, it's like the wharf's lit from underneath," says Edoardo. It's a magical spot, quite un-

touched, and that's the way the locals want to keep it.

Edoardo, a project manager and engineer, and Teresa, a former wine Master-turned-artist, have owned land on the island for eight years. Their first bach (the Kiwi word for holiday home) was a DIY Fibrolite cabin at a spot known as Cripple Creek for its difficulty of access. So when the couple learned that 20 acres of land further south, along with consent for an all-tides jetty, was for sale, they seized the opportunity. They wanted a cosy weekend and holiday retreat for themselves and their two daughters, Florence, 9, and Penelope, 7. They also wanted a

house that would sit lightly on the land in terms of resource use, and that could stand as a model for the other nine properties they intend to sell from the block to make a tight-knit holiday community.

The site, spreading back from a steep, tree-clad cliff towards a pine forest, is accessible only by private cable car. Conscious that all material would need to be shipped or helicoptered in, the Canals decided a prefab build was their most eco-friendly option. After researching various local companies, Edoardo settled on Box Living (see *Thinking Outside the Box*, p43), a Modernist-influenced, eco-friendly modular housing company

A decked path (this page) leads from the cable car up to the house. The staggered battens reference the design of the traditional

Maori pa (fortified village) that once stood near the site.



created by architect Tim Dorrington and construction experts Dan Heyworth, Nat Jakich and Nat Holloway. "I was digging quite deep to find anyone in New Zealand who could build architectural pre-fab style buildings," recalls Edoardo. "There were a few, but they really were conceptual - they had never done anything. I saw that Box Living had done a house, so I went out to see it, and it was exactly what I wanted. It was simple and very elegant, very well-considered."

Right from the start, the couple wanted to keep the site, which contained the remains of a pre-European Maori pa (fortified village) as pristine as possible. "We consulted with iwi [local Maori] and they liked the idea that we were putting some holes in the ground, clearing minimal space for a house, and once this is

gone..." says Edoardo, waving at the remaining earthworks, "you won't even know the house is here. I really celebrate having low earthworks. It's nestled in the bush with a sensible amount of distance from the trees. It's about being non-intrusive and preserving what's here."

Architect Tim Dorrington worked hard to incorporate systems that minimised resource use. Rainwater collects from the roof, and is heated by a wetback firewood stove (using fallen deadwood), and the house is massed to maximise solar gain and create passive ventilation. No air-conditioning is installed in the small, snug spaces gathered around a central outdoor courtyard. "At our other bach, we noticed that we were always living on the courtyard deck, rather than inside," says Edoardo. "So I thought, why have expansive rooms with lots of furniture rather than a ▶



Bedroom image by Melinda Williams

The master bedroom (top) and glass-wall shower overlook a plunging cliff. "As that gulch goes down, it's quite an impressive

outlook, and has the biggest trees on the site, so we wanted to create some drama, as though the house was hanging out over

the ravine," says architect Dorrington. "That became the logical place for the ensuite for the master bedroom."



nice clear outdoor space that flowed into the kitchen, and cosy spaces?" Double-glazed windows help with heat retention. Perhaps the greatest success of the build, however, which took a mere six months, was what wasn't used. "There was very minimal waste," says Edoardo. "At the end of construction, there were maybe two cubic metres of offcuts, and that was it. It was very well managed."

The finished building sits in an L-shape. One wing houses bedrooms, Teresa's art studio and Edoardo's bee-keeping room; the other has the kitchen and living areas, and an upstairs master suite that sits high on poles over the cliff. The decked areas and the staggered vertical battens that give the house a look reminiscent of the Maori *pa* walls are Vitex, a sustainably managed hardwood, and the framing is treated pine. "We were definitely into building something low-care," says Dorrington. "Everything outside is built to weather. All the timber will silver off and age gracefully, and internally it was pared-back to keep it easy to look after."

The couple hope their home will be a model for the other nine houses that will be built as they sell off the sections in their block. "The idea is that it

Portrait and honey image Melinda Williams

Edoardo's bee-keeping was the result of a conversation over a bottle of wine at a christening. At the island, he now has 12

hives, and produces a small annual run of organic Kanuka honey and a natural insect repellent.



Thinking Outside The Box

Four years ago, architect Tim Dorrington and construction experts Dan Heyworth, Nat Jakich and Nat Holloway launched their modern modular housing company, Box Living. Since then, the quartet has been commissioned for more than a dozen projects, including the Canals' Kawau House. By blending the skills of two companies (Dorrington Architects and Arhaus Construction) the team has created a sustainable design-and-build offering that's hard to find. "What we've tried to do is turn the design-and-build model on its head," explains Day Heyworth. "Usually, if you go to a house company, you'll get certainty of cost but crap design. If you go to an architect, you get good design, but real uncertainty of cost. So we've come up with a system that allows us to use an architect to configure the house and make it suit the site, yet we can build it quickly and price it with a lot of certainty. We can give clients the bespoke-ness of an architectural build in a really cost-effective way."

The Box modules are based on a 1200mm grid to match standard construction sheet sizing. The framework is built using a post-and-beam structure, and secured with a metal cross-brace, which is the key to the system's flexibility. "We add the cross-braces as we're told to by the engineer, and that ties the post and beam together to form the frame," says Dorrington. "That means the walls and partitions are not doing any structural loading." The standard sizing also means that waste is significantly reduced. "In standard house-building in New Zealand, you end up with about seven tonnes of waste at the end," Dorrington says. "That's all product that the client is paying for. By sticking to 1200 grids, we can get the waste down to under half that."

Sustainability is a key element of their ethos. "We use passive solar design, reduced energy consumption, proper use of material," says Heyworth. "We're very much into supporting local suppliers and trades. And the timelessness of the design is, I think, really important. You don't want something that's going to date."

develops at an organic pace," says Edoardo. "We want to create a bach community that's functional, somewhere you can get around easily, with lots of space for common recreational areas." There's a nice synchronicity in the site of a former Maori village transforming into a small community two centuries later. Edoardo made sure to designate the *pa* site as commonly owned land, so it's protected from building. "There's not much there now," he says. "Ramparts, midden, ditches and kumara pits are all that's left. You really have to use your imagination. They were all about light touch too, I suppose." ■■■

Depending on who you ask, the bay is called Smelting House Cove (after the copper smelter there), or Lidgard Bay (in honour of a former resident family), Squadron Bay

(following the purchase of Lidgard House by the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron), or Hideaway Cove (as the Canals call it).