

Bach to Basics

The wonderland of the West Coast is the perfect environment for a modern Kiwi bach.

Words **Soraya Nicholas** Photography **Harold Mason**

WHEN MARLBOROUGH COUPLE

Grant and Lis Johnston chose the West Coast of the South Island as their preferred holiday destination, they didn't have an exact location in mind. In the end, it took them at least two years of serious looking before they found the site that caught their attention. "We knew that the area appealed to us, because we wanted somewhere sunny, somewhere with native bush and somewhere that wasn't too far for us to travel to," says Lis. When they saw this site, they kept thinking about it, and "we were just constantly drawn to it. The thick bush and the potential for such an amazing view were what sold us, and we've never looked back."

With the land surrounding their primary home often plagued by drought, Lis and Grant love the contrast here, with green stretching as far as the eye can see. They wanted to capitalise on the outlook, with hopes of a "real treetop holiday home". When they met local architectural designer Carrynne Scarlett, they knew they'd found the person to help them achieve their dream home. As a member of the Architectural Designers NZ association (ADNZ), Carrynne has a plethora of knowledge at her fingertips and living on the West Coast gave her an added advantage.

"I understood what the Johnstons wanted, in terms of creating a dwelling that was far removed from their home in Marlborough. It had to be unique, and my brief was really to create a modern day bach, in the truest sense of

Native bird life is an important feature of this property, which sits on over two hectares of land. A consistent effort to eradicate possums, stoats and rats has seen the number of birds multiply.



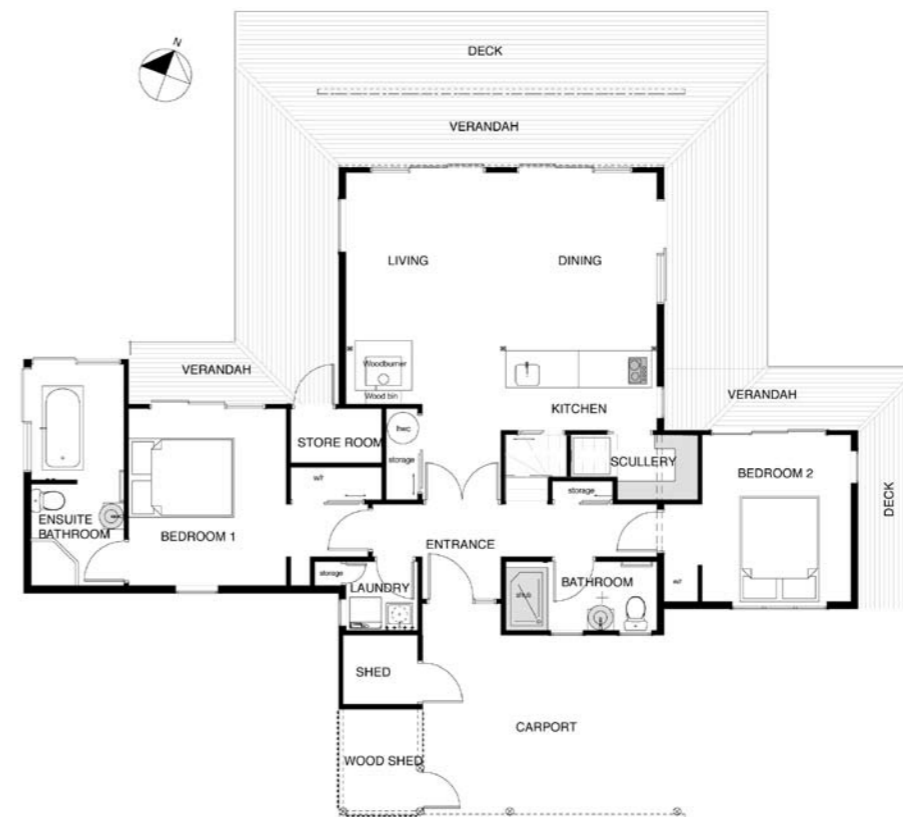
The design of the bach was influenced by the concept of a classic cabin, to create a special, camping inspired holiday theme.



the word,” says Carrynne. This meant that it had to feel different from being at home every time they arrived there. With a classic cabin in mind as a design influence, Carrynne penned a house that was modest yet spacious, with two bedrooms and a mezzanine level to deal with additional guests. The kitchen is in fact rather bare, and this is another feature that sets the bach apart from a modern home. “The cooking and eating facilities mean that the Johnstons really have to think differently about the type of meals they cook. It’s all part of the holiday atmosphere.” A quick glance at the kitchen shows that it in fact lacks all the modern necessities such as an oven or dishwasher, with simply a table height centre bench for food preparation. “There is a hidden scullery for storage, and they do have a microwave and fridge in there, but cooking is done in either a camp oven or on top of the wood burner,” comments Carrynne. The table-look of the bench is emphasised by the lack of



TOP RIGHT A sculpture made by Andy Craig, one of the builders, is a tribute to his time working on the home. He guarded the Nikau palms which were very special to Lis and Grant, and created the sculpture to guard over the palms in his absence. **BELOW** The open plan living area is located on the ground floor, with stairs leading up to an open mezzanine floor.



Q&A
with Carrynne Scarlett

What was your design brief?
To create a bach. Somewhere Lis and Grant could walk into and feel warm, so they could just jump in the car late on a Friday afternoon and arrive at night, knowing the house would be inviting. The house had to have the capacity to accommodate their two daughters with partners and potential grandchildren, which is why I designed the mezzanine floor in addition to the two bedrooms. They already have two grandchildren now so it has worked out perfectly. Because the home is set on 2.16 hectares of land, there was wide scope in terms of building, however we really wanted to minimise the amount of bush we cut away.

What makes this home unique?
It is a real modern bach, influenced by a classic cabin. Its design makes Lis and Grant live and think differently when they are here, as it’s completely different from being at home. There is no oven or dishwasher, so it’s about going back to holiday basics.

Is the completed home as you visualised it?
Definitely. It’s all about getting the design right before building begins, and of course working with a good builder. The client also engaged me to observe construction, which ensured everything went to plan.

Were there any design constraints?
Yes. The main constraint was working with the native trees that had to be retained, while maximising the view and utilising the steep hillside to its best advantage to fulfill the clients’ brief of living in the tree tops.

THE SPECS	Northern Buller			
	\$200 000 - \$300 000			
	202 sq m	1	2	2



Grant was determined to have a bath that could be taken out to the balcony, however Carrynne designed an inside bath with doors opening out to the bush to replicate the feel of being outside.



any visible pipes or drains, with all the plumbing and electrics running down inside the wooden legs of the bench.

The landscape was of critical importance to both Lis and Grant, and they were fortunate to find a designer and builder who shared this passion. “They were determined to tree-hug several large Rimus and Kahikateas!” says Carrynne with a laugh. “But the builders and I were happy to be mindful of the native bush. It is a special aspect of this property and it was incredibly important to Lis and Grant.”

Making use of recycled and environmentally friendly concepts was also important in terms of design for this home. Carter Holt Harvey Eco Ply was deployed for the ceilings and other interior features, and solar heating provides free hot water all year around.

Carrynne recounts having a problem sourcing second-hand doors though. “Lis asked me after the build had started if we could use recycled doors for the interior, but the reality was that she just wouldn’t have had time to look for them. In the end, they found some old forgotten doors in their shed, made from New Zealand Cedar. It was so exciting and unusual, and we incorporated them by restoring one for the front door and using the other as the dining table top.”

It was this kind of innovative thinking and approach to their design that made Lis and Grant cherish working with Carrynne. “The building team were great too. They were very respectful of the bush, only clearing the most minimal amount away, and they made the process thoroughly enjoyable for us.” ■

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