

Modern love

This contemporary stunner melds style and sustainability



FRANCES Cosway had long dreamt of owning a modernist home.

In particular, she hankered for a Kaufmann-type house: one of those resort-style homes in Palm Springs, California, with white walls, plenty of right angles and a desert landscape stretching off into the distance.

She knew she and husband Neil Dicker would never find one in Melbourne's Hampton, so, in December 2014, they bought a block of land instead, demolished the rundown and rotting house on it, and set about building their five-bedroom, three-bathroom dream home.

The double-storey modern beauty has an expansive living area and large study on the ground floor, with four bedrooms upstairs.

"We wanted a large block of at least 700sq m, and this is 766sq m," said Ms Cosway, who runs her own interior-design firm, White Pebble Interiors.

"We wanted a good garden for the girls (Lillian, 5, and Margaux, 6) and a vegetable patch as well."

The couple also wanted to prove it was possible to build a big modern home that was both attractive and environmentally sustainable.

"People think sustainable means you're going to build a straw house or mud hut," Ms Cosway said.

"We wanted to turn that on its head and show that you can build any style of house you want. It's what goes into the home, the fixtures and fittings you choose, that make it sustainable."

And theirs most certainly is. The house won a Best Ecologically Sustainable Design Award from Bayside City Council in 2015 and has a 7.3-star energy rating.

There are louvres that let the winter sun in and during summer prevent the sun from touching the glass, as well as high-efficiency glazing on the windows and doors.

The house is heavily insulated throughout and, at lockup, the frame was air tightened for draught-proofing.

The couple has installed 17 solar roof panels, solar hot water, and a 20,000-litre underground tank for grey water.

Ms Cosway said one of the big drawcards of building from scratch was making the most of passive solar design.

"We have east at the front; northerly light coming on to the living areas; and we have the west at the back of the house for the sunsets," Ms Cosway said.

"We have tiles instead of floorboards in the living room and they have a cement-based glue that maximises thermal conductance. All the winter sun comes in and heats up to 60 per cent of the floor in the living area."

Then there is the stunning natural freshwater pool at the back of the house, embedded in a native garden with large boulders and drought-tolerant plants.

"It's basically a water feature you can swim in," Ms Cosway said. "I love green water and my husband grew up near the Wannan Falls, near Hamilton, so it was a sentimental thing. All the waterlilies come out in summer and it's just gorgeous."

On the decorating front, Ms Cosway has spent a bit of time personalising the space.

"My natural style is very eclectic, and I think design is about your personal journey and story," she said. "You should go with your heart when choosing pieces."

Having lived overseas for 12 years, Ms Cosway has brought back from Holland, London and Morocco.

"I love the geometric shapes of Moroccan designs,"



Postscript

WITH FRANCES COSWAY

Was it difficult to find your home?

We probably looked for six months, so yes! We lost a block at auction, and I was devastated at the time. It seemed ideal. But, looking back, we are lucky we lost it because it was on a smaller block and gets a lot of school traffic, and yet it was the same price. So we did well.

What's next on your shopping wish list?

I would like a really nice European outdoor setting and probably an outdoor sofa.

Best kitchen gadget?

A Tupperware cutter that you pull the string on and it cuts up everything inside it. I also love my Magmix food processor.

How do you like to entertain?

Casually. We have homemade pizza night every Friday night and we often invite families from school. We also often eat outside on the barbecue.

If money were no object, what would you buy?

A really big block of land on the Mornington Peninsula and I would build a (Palm Springs-style) Kaufmann house with animals and chooks, and we would live between the two houses.

What does home mean to you?

Being comfortable and proud of where I live. I can't not be proud of where I live as it is my (interior-design) profession. But I also see what is happening overseas, in places like Syria, where I travelled to a long time ago, and I realise how lucky we are. So I feel grateful a lot of the time.



she said. "My style is very monochromatic and I am into texture and the depth of tones. I'm also really in love with indoor plants, as they give a sense of home. It's incredible how sparse things become without plants."

In addition to a large open-plan kitchen and dining area, there is a "winter room" behind the front study that draws in northern light. Ms Cosway admitted she had to convince the rest of the family to embrace it.

"Neil didn't want this room because we have never had a second living space before," she said.

"The whole family comes in here now, and Neil spends more time here than anyone."

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