



Happy feat

The welcome mat is out at the house that hugs a hill above Whale Beach.

Words **Marl Gibson**
Photos **Eric Sierins**

GENEROSITY of form is one thing, generosity of spirit quite another. And a house that embodies both, while hugging a hill overlooking a postcard-perfect northern view of Whale Beach, must surely be charmed.

Gone is the weekend, built in the early '70s, and in its place sits the surprisingly roomy full-time residence of a retired – but not retiring – couple. It is spacious for good reason – they have no intention of keeping it to themselves. “We wanted to be able to accommodate three different generations,” says one of the owners, explaining that they have five adult children and five grandchildren all living in Sydney.

Their wish was to have a house they could comfortably share but which also provided a self-contained space of their own. With a steep site dictating its own demands, the owners (along with architects Cullen Feng) decided to stack the house over three levels, each of which opens to a northerly terrace and the easy-inspiring views. The top level, reached from the road, is the owners’ suite; the middle one is the kitchen-dining-living area; and the lower one holds spare bedrooms and bathrooms for visitors. Also on this level is a lap pool that cantilevers out over the garden, at a right angle to the house, and has glass walls at the far end, providing dramatic – even underwater – views.

Throughout the house the architects’ expertise in another area – family life – has come to the fore. In the planning stages architect Michelle Feng and her husband, Jon Cullen, were invited to stay with the

owners at the existing weekend. “We were allowed to come and stay two nights in the old house to see what the issues were, which was a great help,” Feng says. At that time Feng and Cullen’s son was two, which also concentrated their minds on the needs of young children in the new house.

They now have two children and, Feng says, their experience helped hone the practical design, such as having bathrooms near the bedrooms where the parents will stay and not having children sleep “two storeys away from the parents”.

The house’s practicality is a beautiful feature in its own right, obvious on entering the front door. A building on such a steep site (there is a drop of 11 metres) needs stairs and, once inside, a travertine-clad staircase opens up impressively over the three levels, bringing light deep inside via its glass roof.

The first level, which leads off the entry hall, holds the owners’ living space: kitchenette, bedroom, study and bathroom with Japanese bath, all floor-to-ceiling views. This space was the easiest to design, Feng says, because it needed to contain so many elements. The result, however, is a collection of linked, uncluttered spaces, with enough room for storage, including a chute to whiz things down to the laundry on the middle level.



The home’s different levels and the depth of its decks were designed to provide views to the beach from sitting positions, while hiding the roofs of properties further down the hill. From the main entertaining area opens up impressively over the three levels, bringing light deep inside via its glass roof.

The couple see the mid-level as the family’s “meeting” place and it’s easy to picture large groups around the table (an Eimmobili UFO from FY2K, one example of the modern furniture throughout).

There is a multi-purpose/media room on the lower level for that kind of fun. Also on this level are three double bedrooms, bathrooms and access to the terrace and the pool. Landscaped with shrubs and boulders, the garden is already productive: a new lemon tree has borne its first fruit which, as we head back up to the house, the owner picks and later puts in the bowl on the dining table.

A small detail, like the many others that have gone into making this house beautiful and comfortable, not just for the owners but for their extended family and friends. Generous indeed.

1 With a steep site the owners decided to stack the house over three levels each of which opens to a northerly terrace.

2 Modern designer furniture features throughout the home, enhancing the light uncluttered spaces.

3 The lap pool cantilevers out over the garden at a right angle to the house and has glass walls at the far end providing dramatic, even underwater, views.

4 The Japanese bath has spectacular ocean views.

5 The main kitchen on the middle level includes a hidden walk-in pantry.



The aim
To design a new house for a retired but active couple that could accommodate three generations.

How long
Design 18 months, building 18 months.

Favourite features
She says: “What’s not to like?”
He says: “The swimming pool.”

Insider’s tips
Find a creative architect who is very detailed and a builder with site-specific experience who takes pride in their workmanship.

Green points
Most of the internal joinery is timber veneer rather than an exotic species.

For maximum thermal performance the house is double brick with reinforced concrete floors.

The northerly orientation of the living areas maximises winter sun and external sun-shading minimises summer sun.

There is cross-ventilation on each level.
Three water tanks collect roof and terrace stormwater for re-use with irrigation, the laundry and toilet flushing.

Architect
Cullen Feng, 9310 4365.

Builder
FS Hough, 9880 9055

Landscape architect
Peter Glass & Associates, 9905 2721.