

ON THE

With a flexible single-storey floor plan, this light and luxurious home on Sydney's northern beaches suits the needs of everyone in the family

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LEVEL



STYLING ASSISTANT: ALTHEA TENNANT.
NU LINE FIBRE CEMENT EXTERNAL CLADDING. BGC

cheat sheet

Who lives here Jenny Geeves, an underwriter for a life insurance company; her husband John, a plumber; daughters Sophie, 21, and Chloe, 17; and Lily, a cavoodle.

Style of home A dark 1950s fibro cottage on Sydney's northern beaches that has been turned into a light four-bedroom oasis.

🕒 Jenny and John bought the house in 2003, and architect Rachel Hudson was commissioned in 2013. The building work was done in two stages totalling 22 months and completed in December 2017.

\$\$\$ The final budget for this renovation was approximately \$800,000.



DECK Stacking doors slide away to connect the house with its covered entertaining area. "We didn't want the sun beating down on us while we're out here," says owner Jenny. **EXTERIOR (opposite)** The extension's sawtooth roof, made from Lysaght Custom Orb steel and painted Colorbond Dune, has north-facing highlight windows.

Sometimes, life throws a curve ball, which forces even the best-laid plans to change. Such was the case with Jenny and John Geeves, who, in the mid 1990s, built a stunning hillside home in Newport on Sydney's northern beaches.

"It was a beautiful split-level house with fabulous ocean and bush views and a lovely gum tree growing up through the back deck," says Jenny. "A lot of heart and soul went into the design."

Then, in 1997, the couple's first daughter Sophie was born prematurely, leaving her with significant disabilities. And as Sophie got older, Jenny and John realised that the home of their dreams had the capacity to become a nightmare.

"Sophie has cerebral palsy and uses a walking frame, so the stairs presented a real challenge for her," says Jenny. "By the time she was about five, we realised her physical capabilities weren't going to get any better, so we started looking for a single-level property that would be more user-friendly for her."

As beautiful as their home was, the family – which by then had expanded to include daughter Chloe, now 17 – were ready to move into something that would be easier for everyone to live in. "I wasn't sorry to say goodbye to it," admits Jenny.

In 2003, they leapt at the chance to buy a single-level fibro cottage in the nearby suburb of Avalon. The three-bedroom house was fairly small and dark – but it was also 500 metres from the beach and local shopping strip and, most importantly, on a level block with no steps inside or out.



BAR STOOLS: LES INTERIEURS. BIMALA TRAY (NEAR COOKTOP), INARTISAN. OVEN (OPPOSITE), SMEG. HIGHLAND GAS COOKTOP, WINNING APPLIANCES. BASKET (ON TABLE), MANYARA HOME

KITCHEN & DINING AREA (this page & opposite)

Jenny and John chose a Corian benchtop and integrated sink in Glacier White. The cabinetry is Dulux Vivid White, as are all the walls and ceilings. A sliding mirrored splashback allows dishes to be passed between the kitchen and a walk-in pantry. Significant pieces in natural materials include the Mark Tuckey dining table; pendant light (above table) and wall-hanging (far wall), the latter two from Les Interieurs. Caravaggio 'P3' pendant lights (over bench) and CH24 Wishbone chairs, all Cult.



"The front of the house is unassuming so people get a surprise when they step inside and see how it opens up"

JENNY GEEVES, HOMEOWNER

The Geeves family moved in with the knowledge that they would have to renovate in the near future, but it actually took another 10 years for them to finally start the process.

“Sophie had a lot of [medical] appointments early on and it certainly wasn’t an easy time,” says Jenny. “Doing the renovation was something that went on the backburner until we had a bit more space in our lives to be able to think about it. “It also took us a while to find an architect we felt comfortable with, and who shared our style. When I met Rachel Hudson, I said to John, ‘I think we’ve finally found our missing link.’”

Having waited for so long, the couple had a clear idea of what they wanted. Natural light was key. They were also after more space, including an extra bedroom and living area, a covered outdoor entertaining area and a pool. “Even though the beach is nearby, getting Sophie there can be really difficult, so we wanted her to be able to swim at home and enjoy herself,” says Jenny.

Rachel’s solution was to design a new extension along the eastern boundary of the 1000-square-metre block, with a striking sawtooth roof (inspired by the Dia:Beacon gallery in New York) to harness the northern sun. This new pavilion – the result of a 15-month construction that started in August 2014 – houses a second living space, dining area, home office, kitchen and pantry, and opens up to an entertaining area and pool.

The existing cottage was also reconfigured over seven months from May 2017 to include an extra bedroom, ensuite and laundry. Sophie’s needs have been subtly accommodated throughout the home, with wider doorways and hallways. “We also purposely didn’t build an upstairs main bedroom suite because I wanted Sophie to be able to access every part of the house,” Jenny explains.

One of her favourite features in the new extension is the internal sliding doors, which allows the different areas to be closed off completely if desired. “Or you can leave it open plan, as we do 99.9 per cent of the time,” she says with a laugh.

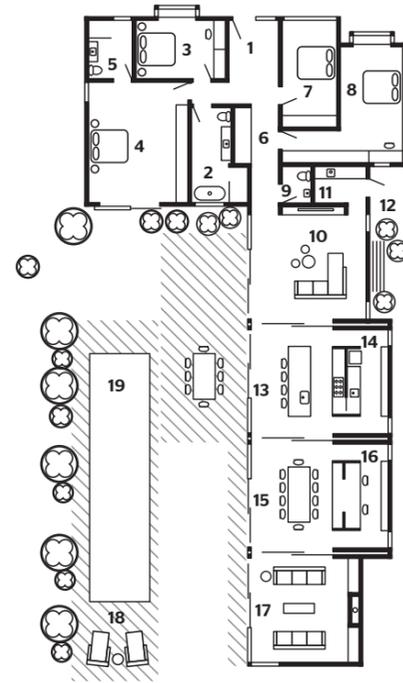
As for the interiors, the couple’s brief was for robust, natural materials that would age gracefully, hence the wood and concrete. They also wanted a predominantly white palette, balanced with pieces selected by Rachel and interior designer Pamela Makin of Les Interieurs. “We get a big splash of green from the tropical garden, so we didn’t need any more colour inside,” says Jenny. The concrete basin in their new ensuite wasn’t an easy decision. “I love concrete floors, but wasn’t sure I was going to love a concrete basin,” she says. “It took a while to get used to it, to be honest, but I think I’m there. John loves it, though.”

With the renovation over, this family couldn’t be happier with their bright, informal beach house. “We love it,” says Jenny. “It has certainly met our request for space and light – so much so that Sophie sometimes complains it’s too bright!”

See more of architect Rachel Hudson’s work at rachelhudson.com.au.

View the Les Interieurs portfolio online at lesinterieurs.com.au.

The builder on this project was Matthew Dampney at dampneys.com.au



- 1 Entry
- 2 Bathroom
- 3 Bedroom
- 4 Main bedroom
- 5 Ensuite
- 6 Hall
- 7 Bedroom
- 8 Bedroom
- 9 Powder room
- 10 Family room
- 11 Laundry
- 12 Drying area
- 13 Kitchen
- 14 Pantry
- 15 Dining
- 16 Study
- 17 Living
- 18 Paved area
- 19 Pool

RUG (OPPOSITE), INTERNATIONAL FLOORCOVERINGS AUSTRALIA. CUSHIONS AND THROW, SAARDE-PLATTER AND VASE (ON TABLE), ARTHOUSE CO. ARTWORKS: (FROM LEFT) DARKEST HOUR BY ANGUS MARTIN, EVERYTHING BY ANTONIA MRLJAK

LIVING AREA “It’s great when we have friends over as we can sit here while the kids hang out or watch TV in the family room,” says Jenny. This zone can be separated from the dining area by internal sliding doors and, as elsewhere in the new pavilion, the floors are polished concrete with a clear sealer. Gervasoni ‘Ghost’ sofas from Anibou. Coffee table and basket from Les Interieurs.



bright idea

With an all-white palette, contrast becomes even more pronounced. In this living area, it shows up in the form of a Horizon gas heater from Jetmaster and fireplace that was framed out, rendered and painted black. Balancing it visually is the dark rug between the sofas. Focal point sorted!

“The original cottage was a dark little cave but now the light is wonderful. It’s such a mood lifter and so good for your soul” JENNY

“We didn’t build an upstairs main bedroom suite because we wanted Sophie to be able to access every part of the house” JENNY

lessons learnt

“Splitting the project into two stages was a bonus”

JENNY GEEVES, HOMEOWNER

“We didn’t have to move out during the build, which saved us money and meant we were available to make decisions. It also meant we had time to rethink the plans when our need for a separate home office changed, enabling us to reconfigure the rooms to get a better outcome for the main bedroom. My advice to other renovators is to be open to change and not to rush things at the beginning just to get started.”

MAIN BEDROOM Pine V-groove ceiling boards are also used on the walls to add texture, while the American oak flooring is limed for a relaxed finish. Jenny turned to Les Interieurs for the pendant light, bedside table and stool, as well as help choosing the artwork, *High As Hope* by Antonia Mrljak. As for the view, “The garden beds were designed by Gardenvogue Horticulture after each stage of the renovation,” says architect Rachel Hudson.

BEDLINEN PHIMISTER BROWN SEAGRASS CUSHION, INARTISAN
RUG, INTERNATIONAL FLOORCOVERINGS AUSTRALIA



“We asked our architect Rachel to be involved in the selection of fittings, furniture and lighting, which made the decisions so much easier” JENNY



GREAT FINDS

fibre fest

Mix it up with a cross-section of natural materials in organic shapes



FROM TOP LEFT Yuli decorative wall plate, \$145, Barefoot Gypsy, Portsea natural rug, \$249, Matt Blatt. Mango plates, \$13.95 each, House of Orange. Ay Illuminate 'Z2 blond' cotton-cover pendant light, \$900, Spence & Lyda. Daou cushion in Ivory, \$49, Freedom. Bimala serving tray, \$149, Inartisan.



ADDITIONAL PRODUCT SOURCING: NATALIE JOHNSON, PENDANT LIGHT (ABOVE LEFT), LES INTERIEURS; TAPWARE (ABOVE RIGHT); PHOENIX TAPWARE; CUSHIONS, INARTISAN (ABOVE LEFT) AND SAARDE (OPPOSITE); RUG (OPPOSITE); INTERNATIONAL FLOORCOVERINGS AUSTRALIA

FAMILY AREA A Frankie sofa from Fanuli is deep and comfy. The coffee tables, baskets for the feature wall and wall-hanging are all from Les Interieurs. **SOPHIE'S ROOM (opposite left)** "The existing angled bay window was rebuilt with orthogonal [perpendicular] geometries, new windows, joinery and custom upholstery," says Rachel. **BATHROOM (opposite right)** Subway tiles, a basin by Classic Concrete Co and floor with underfloor heating complete the look.