

DUNE BUDDIES

A new Coromandel bach built on beachfront family land is home away from home to three siblings and their posse of kids

WORDS CLAIRE MCCALL / PHOTOGRAPHS TESSA CHRISP



THIS PAGE The view from a Hahei beach holiday home built for three siblings on land their family has owned since the 60s; architect Tim McCoy oriented the main living room to make the most of the views down the length of the beach; interior designer Tomi Williams of Indigo Design chose the summery Acapulco chairs from Collect Living. **OPPOSITE** The tractor had been on the family farm for more than 20 years when it was brought to Hahei and given a makeover by the local garage; the kids love hitching a ride on the tractor tray.





THIS PAGE (from above) With so many mouths to feed, the large island bench is ideal; the plywood pendant lights were designed by AUT student Justine Keyworth; on wet days the children use the dining table for artwork: "The bench seats accommodate lots of kids and we slide them under the table to allow room for foot traffic," says Nikki Flexman. Miranda and Billie decorate a tree from Mixt in Kingsland. **OPPOSITE** The owners asked interior designer Tomi Williams for a living room that was not white and bright, so they could retreat from the sun; she chose Resene 'Concrete' for the walls and added colour with the Sloane chairs, from Forma, upholstered in Kona Ocean by Warwick; the knitted Donna Wilson pouffe is from Bob and Friends.



WHEN JAMES FLEXMAN watches from the deck of the family holiday home as his three children and their cousins build sandbanks to dam the creek on Hahei beach, his mind does a backflip. It's definitely a case of déjà vu: "My kids are getting fun out of doing exactly the same things that we used to do when my grandparents owned the place."

The property in the dunes has been integral to the Flexmans' lives since 1967. Although a roomier house now occupies the land, the simple pleasures have remained constant. Diving, snorkelling, boating, gathering fruit from the neighbourhood trees and heading to the dairy for a daily excursion are still the essential elements that make up the holiday package.

"My grandmother was the driving force in buying here," says James. Back then the local policeman doubled as a real estate agent. The 868sqm section cost £1500. >





For many years, a caravan, tents and a long drop occupied this beachfront spot overhung by a glorious pohutukawa. In the 1980s, James' parents built a two-storey colonial-style cottage on the section. Upstairs, a bunk room and extra foam mattresses accommodated the many children who came to play and stay.

This tradition continues. A two-storey house built last year is owned by James, his sister Emma and brother Andrew. When their parents died, the siblings opted to sell the family farm and put the money into creating a place befitting the site and the family legacy. All the siblings are married and each has three kids, so the new dwelling had to sleep, well... quite a few.

As James' wife Nikki explains, "Pleasing so many people could have led to complications so we hired an architect and an interior designer. If there were any disagreements between us, we'd be guided by the professionals."

Tim McCoy of McCoy + Heine Architects was given the brief to make the most of the spectacular views from every room. They asked him to create an open-plan living zone that welcomed large groups and a more sheltered alfresco area the family could retreat to when onshore winds were blowing a storm. >

*"If you give one child a snack,
you'd better make sure you have eight
more of the same for the others"*

THIS PAGE Nikki makes lunch for her daughter Miranda and niece Billie.

OPPOSITE (from top) Maggie minds her youngest cousin, Pippa. The home is furnished with old and new – the Jordan sofa (from Forma) is a recent purchase but James bought the telescope for his father: "We relocated it here from the family farm so the memories of his parents could live on in Hahei," says Nikki; the Pols Potten glasses, from Bob and Friends, are brought out for Christmas. If the wind is howling in from the beach, the owners can hunker down in the rear courtyard, which has easy access to the kitchen.

"We also said there should be no master bedroom with en suite, rather just separate bathrooms, since all the adults had equal shares," says Nikki.

The little cottage, so much a part of what had gone before, was sold, then carefully lifted onto a truck and moved to a nearby block. "My parents had commented on how they thought any new house should mimic its footprint," says Emma.

As it turned out, Tim McCoy did not agree. He reoriented the living room to look west down the length of the beach, rather than north across Mercury Bay to the Red Mercury islands. Then he used vertical shiplap cedar and pine plywood for the cladding and swathes of glass to bring a contemporary feel. A timber-battened brise soleil on the exterior filters the light that floods into the north-facing seaward side of the home.

The confident structure and thoughtful detailing has meant accolades at the Master Builders Awards for builder Damian Percival, as well as at the New Zealand Institute of Architects' Local Awards. But medals, of course, are not the ultimate prize. Being able to keep adding to the photo albums is.

In the kitchen, interior designer Tomi Williams of Indigo Design specified engineered stone in a modern grey tone for the 5m benchtop. Every inch is well used. "We all love to cook," says Emma. "And we all muck in." With so many mouths to feed, each meal becomes a production. "If you give one child a snack, you'd better make sure you have eight more for the others."

The house is furnished in modern yet casual style, taking its colour cues from the sea. Tomi softened the neutral walls, painted in Resene 'Concrete', with beachy elements such as stained plywood kitchen cabinetry and plywood pendant lights. Accents of orange and blue in accessories such as candleholders and striped rugs lend a sense of fun and a holiday spirit.

The clever layout of the home means the adults can keep an eye on the children, while also maintaining a sense of separation. If Emma is making lunch at the kitchen bench, she can easily see through to the youngsters in the snug TV room on a winter's morning. While James is enjoying a summer beer on the deck, he can watch an impromptu swingball competition on the lawn.

When the day fades, the kids put on their PJs and retire to the communal bunk room, anticipating another adventure tomorrow at "Poppa's beach house". That the children still think of this as their grandfather's home is a cherished link to the past. "My brother was married on the property," says Emma. "And my mother's ashes were scattered in the bay in front of it."

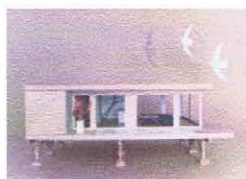
Everyday life here shares equal importance with the special occasions. Such are the ties that bind – bonds forged in this place for nearly 50 years. >



THIS PAGE (from top) At day's end, the door's always open for friends to drop in for sundowners. During the day it's just a few steps to the sand and the venerable pohutukawa that offers welcome shade from the midday sun; at night the home glows like a welcoming beacon. **OPPOSITE** (from top) On wet days, the television room is the place to be; Tomi Williams designed the modular sofas so they could be moved around to accommodate any mix of adults and kids; the striped Armadillo & Co rug is from The Ivy House; the Andrew Martin wallpaper looks like a bagged concrete wall. Cousins Charlie and Emily in the bunk room, which accommodates all the children (early mornings are the order of the day); each bunk has its own bulkhead bedside light in orange powder-coated aluminium. There is no master bedroom in the house but all the rooms have an equally impressive view of Mercury Bay.



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The shell strands decorating the deck were bought at the nearby Coroglen Farmers' Market. We wanted to decorate the house with as much local stuff as we could. (Emma)

Q&A

Our first Christmas in the new house last year was:

Satisfying. The house was our Christmas present to each other. It was finished two weeks before the holidays. (Emma)

The kids celebrated the arrival of Santa by: Making paper stockings and lining them up at the window in the living room. The children, who are aged between one and eight, all did that. We also made a mash of Weet-Bix and cornflakes for Santa's reindeers. Then they all got up at 5.30am on Christmas morning! That day they went to feed the eels in the creek and even named three of them – Fin Boy, Jack and Peebee. (Nikki)

Step one in catering for Christmas with so many people resident in the house involves: Heading to Pak'nSave before the drive from Auckland on Christmas Eve. There's no supermarket in Hahei. We bought six trolleys of groceries last year. On the big day, we each take responsibility for a different dish. Also, we use the barbecue morning and evening. (Nikki)

If there was one thing we could do differently it would be: A second dishwasher would have been great. When you have 16 people here at once, it's going all the time. (Emma)

Design idea we're most pleased with: The hot-water outdoor shower. It means the kids just run up from the beach, strip off their togs and wash off the sand, which leaves the indoor bathrooms pretty unoccupied. (James)

Emma Burn, James and Nikki Flexman