

This page Metal screens shroud the dwelling when the owners are not in residence.

Opposite Looking like it has just landed, the dwelling stands on black steel poles with two irregular shapes placed loosely on top, and an equally irregular roof.



# A barefoot love shack for two on a white-sand beach



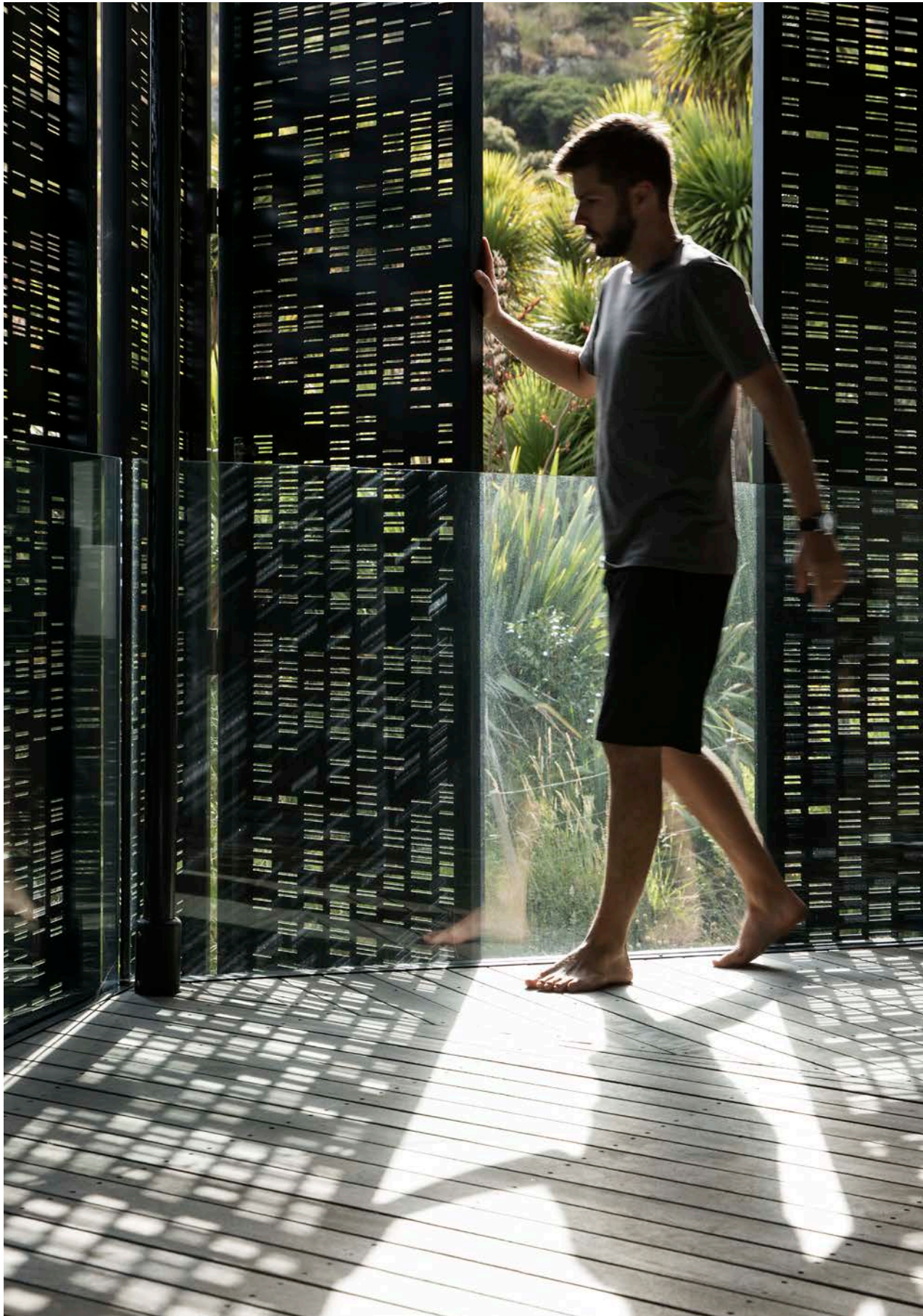
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**Otama is one of the most perfect beaches on the Coromandel Peninsula.** There's squeaky white sand and gentle rolling surf, an estuary and bleached grassy hills behind. It's three hours from the nearest city over narrow, winding roads and, until recently, the road from State Highway 25 was unsealed and occasionally treacherous. Sometimes, in the middle of summer storms, the one-lane bridge floods.

Architect Ken Crosson knows the area intimately. His own bach – the winner of both our Home of the Year in 2003, and Home of the Decade in 2006 – sits on a hill at one end, with a commanding view over the Mercury Islands. So when he was approached by the owners of this site to build a house in the dunes, tucked into a nook at the other end of the beach, he was justifiably nervous about what the community would think.

The site runs down through the dunes to a beautiful little corner of sand; a track runs through the spinafex and most of the land appears to belong to the beach, rather than a private owner – something the architect and his clients were keen to maintain. There's no front fence, no boundary between what's private property and what's not. "It's kind of nice to let the public realm be the public realm," says Crosson, who designed a small beach house that occupies a vastly smaller footprint than he could have legally built, pulled as far back against the hill as possible. "We were all keen on that. The owners are very quiet people, and they didn't want to show off."

The owners requested a "barefoot love shack" in the dunes, and the driving idea became to create something that was a complete contrast to how

you live in the city. It's big enough for them and a couple of guests; there are plenty of spaces, but no superfluous square metres. Before Crosson and his team started designing, they assembled a library of contrasting images to inform the process. "We wanted it open, off the ground," he says. "We wanted levity and lightness, a structure that talked about the New Zealand context and way of life. Every decision in terms of design reinforces that."

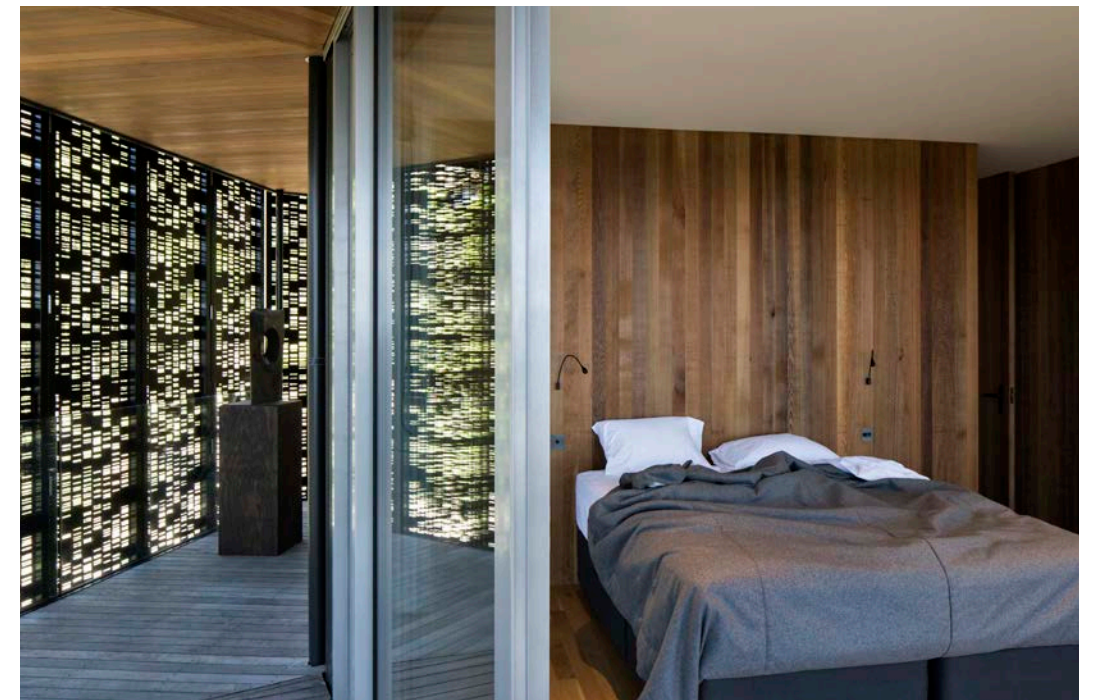
The result is a small house that you might compare to a landing ship, amoeba or lighthouse. Two black steel-clad storeys of irregular and seemingly random shapes sit loosely in the air on black steel poles; the space beneath is filled with light. The approach is from a parking pad, up steps and along a steel bridge – or, if you're one of the owners coming back from an early morning swim, up a rope ladder and through a trapdoor in the bedroom floor.

The home has two bedrooms and two bathrooms downstairs, an open-plan living area upstairs. The entire interior is lined with band-sawn cedar, which runs across doors and along the ceiling. It's like a deftly detailed and built piece of cabinetry that affords the feeling of respite and retreat: it smells glorious. The lower level is enclosed, private. Upstairs is more open, with a floating ceiling that drapes over the top floor, a move that opens up glimpses of views through clerestory windows. It's here the house starts to really make sense – Crosson wanted something ephemeral and floaty, with shifting elevations that create a series of experiences and spaces inside.

The design is carefully calibrated to bring in views and exclude others – the seemingly random facets

**Left** Laine draws the screens in the perimeter walkway on the first level.

**Right** A sculpture by Chris Charteris on the bedroom deck.





**Below left** Frances looks west along the beach.

**Right** For beachgoers, the home's muted tones help it recess into the site.

**Below right** A path leads to Otama beach.





**Below** The ceiling dips and dives, as trippy as the exterior. The custom walnut table is by Ken Crosson Architects. The 'Laleggera' chairs by Riccardo Blumer are from ECC.

**Right** The cedar-lined 'barefoot love shack' is essentially designed for two. The hanging chair by Nanna Ditzel and 'Mola' sofa by Cameron Foggo for Workshed are from Backhouse.



“We were trying to get away from that neo-modernist thing and do something specific to views and context. That was the big driver at the end of the day – it was pretty simple.”





of the top-floor living room are, in fact, oriented to maximise particular views – hills, mountains, beach and water. “We were trying to get away from that neo-modernist thing and do something specific to views and context,” says Crosson. “That was the big driver at the end of the day – it was pretty simple.”

You see that thinking clearly in the metal screens that shroud the dwelling. The owners wanted to close the house completely when they were not in residence, and they wanted privacy for the bedrooms. In this salty environment, Crosson could see the value in metal screens to wrap the house, but didn’t want blank steel. “They wanted to be able to keep the sun out, but you don’t want it dead inside,” he says.

Eventually he settled on the idea of folding perforated screens, which he developed to incorporate the owners’ DNA, the sequence cut into the very fabric of the house. “It’s actually about them,” he says. “It’s an abstract pattern with a beautiful play of light, which is specific to them.”

**Below** Just as it landed, the house looks ready for take off.

**Opposite** A chunky first step sits solidly on the floor, the rest float above it. The design was full of quirks and challenges for Whitianga-based builders Percival Construction.









# Design notebook

Q&A with Ken Crosson  
of Crosson Architects



## How did you create a structure that talked about the New Zealand context?

We typically research local context extensively and draw threads to generate an architectural response, which is woven with the clients desires and brief. Our touchstones became a combination of elevated walkways and buildings, with timber and metal forms seen in the process of gold-mining in the area.

## How does the home work in the landscape?

The house presents a lightweight connection to the site. While it's elevated on steel piloti, it's actually quite recessive in the landscape as viewed from the beach – the finishes are muted and blend comfortably into the bush. This is becoming even more so as the new planting matures, thanks to fantastic landscaping design from Bridget Gilbert.

## What made you put the house on stilts?

It was a combination of the brief, which called for a modest house in scale, but the nature of the site meant we also needed to capture the stunning beach and ocean views. To be able to get the living zone as

high as possible, with the bedroom level also enjoying the view, we developed a stacked plan. The piloti serve to further elevate the house, creating a sheltered ground-level condition, and a dramatic sense of arrival with a series of ramps and steps that float above the site. This entrance experience continues the sense of a meandering journey from the beach.

## What do you enjoy most about the design?

Working with our incredible clients – they gave us a fantastic brief and allowed us to push the envelope with our response. It was a slightly unusual process given that they lived in New York City and were unable to visit during the design stages or the build – we met regularly by Skype and monitored site progress by webcam.

Also, the perimeter of folding perforated metal screens. The play of light through the perforations, and the ability to open up or close down completely or anywhere in between, really creates a sense of drama and playfulness that reflects the spirit of our clients.



1. Vehicle platform
2. Parking
3. Stairs
4. Entry
5. Bedroom
6. Bathroom
7. Floor hatch
8. En suite
9. Laundry
10. Living
11. Dining
12. Kitchen
13. Deck
14. Roof hatch

