

**(THESE PAGES)**  
Nicky Meiring and Lance Herbst's Great Barrier Island bach is designed to be *au naturel*. It nestles into the land to provide privacy from a road at the brow of the slope that separates the property from the beach. A tower, dressed with timber slats, houses a tank and gravity-fed water system. A new addition is the semi-outdoor shower off the deck at the base of the tower.



# BEACHBREAK



A HUMBLE BACH ON GREAT BARRIER ISLAND EMBRACES A SIMPLICITY THAT ACKNOWLEDGES MOTHER NATURE AS THE UNDISPUTED HEROINE OF DESIGN

TEXT by Penny Lewis PHOTOGRAPHY by Jackie Meiring





**DESIGN NOTES**

■ Nicky and Lance opted not to install a generator at the bach, for both lifestyle reasons and to avoid noise and fumes. At the moment they have one solar panel to supply power for a stereo, but they are investigating further solar power solutions to heat water.

■ The corrugated iron water tank's capacity is 4500 litres.



**(FACING PAGE)**

Shoji-style sliding screens made from timber battens and translucent glass fibre sheets shelter the deck, which serves as the main living area.

**(ABOVE)** Nicky and Lance bought these chairs from a junk shop. Lance made the table from an old timber garage door.

**(ABOVE RIGHT)** A wood burner keeps the place cosy during winter visits.

**(RIGHT)** Nicky's brother Andrew and neighbour Michael Wheatcroft head from the bach over the dunes for a surf.

"THE BACH AS A CULTURAL ICON IS INTRINSICALLY DEVOID OF PRETENSION"

Nicky Meiring and Lance Herbst don't crave convenience when they go on holiday. The couple, who both trained in architecture in their home city of Cape Town, South Africa, embrace New Zealand's archetypal beach experience when they travel to their bach on Great Barrier Island, about a half-hour flight from Auckland.

Family members Jackie Meiring, Alex Twigg and Andrew Meiring often join them for weekends and holidays, which are all about enjoying the surroundings rather than living in the lap of luxury.

There's no electricity at Nicky and Lance's plywood, corrugated-iron and timber-batten bach – and that's the way they like it. "We wanted to make the experience of staying at the bach slightly inconvenient, to enjoy the rituals of creating light with candles and heating water. We didn't want a city house at the beach," Lance says.

The pair were first introduced to the Barrier during the summer of 1994/95 by friends Greg and Mandy Liggins, who organised a caravan for them to hire. Greg and a friend had built a bach on the island 25 years

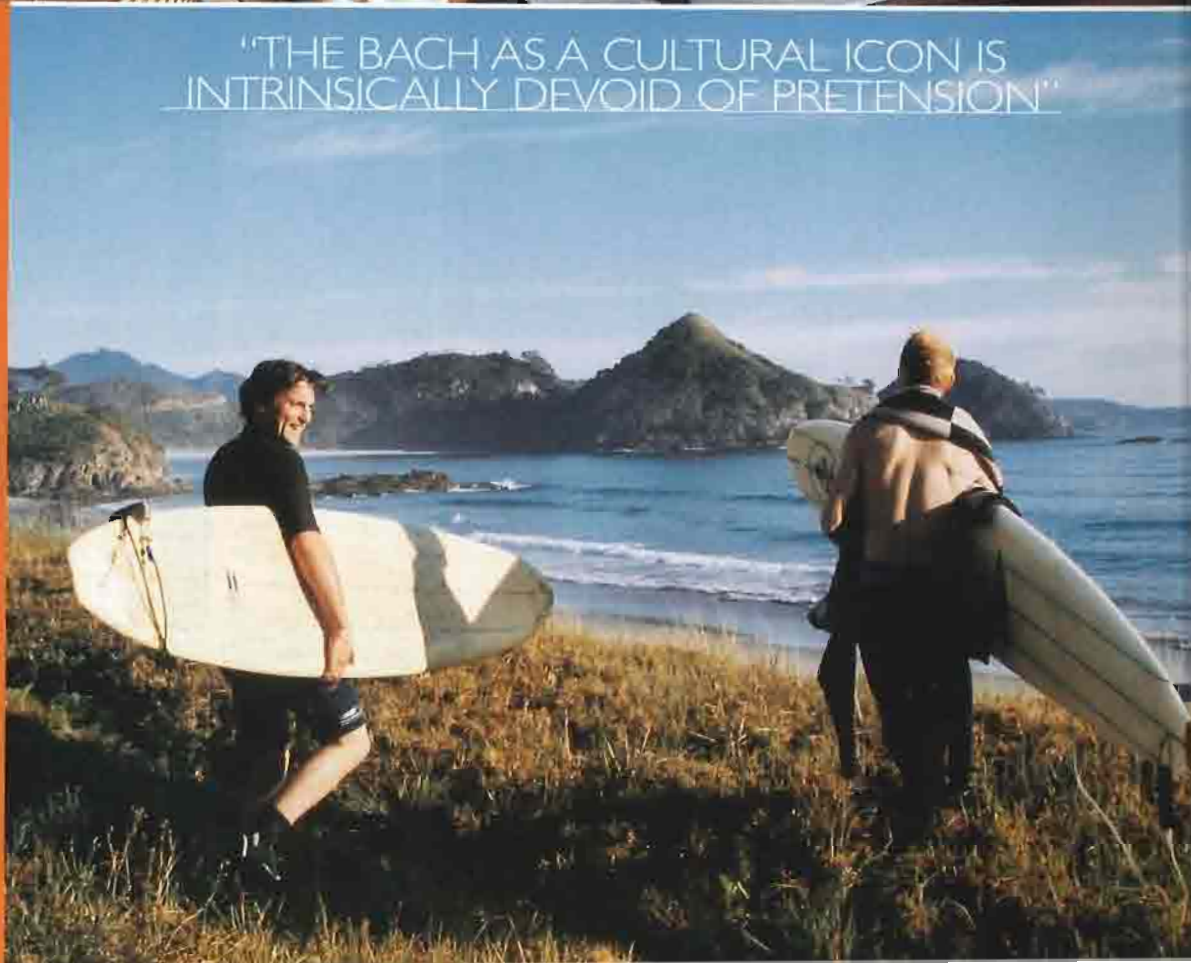
ago and his enthusiasm for the Barrier was contagious. "Greg was really inspirational. His bach was pretty much a box made from demolition timber, but it had so much soul," Lance says.

Nicky and Lance fell in love with the island during their caravan holiday. "It's the whole idea of crossing the water and leaving your troubles behind. We love the Barrier's unspoilt beaches – nature reigns supreme, rather than the intervention of man. There has been low-key development – all the baches there have grown out of the spirit of the island," Nicky says.

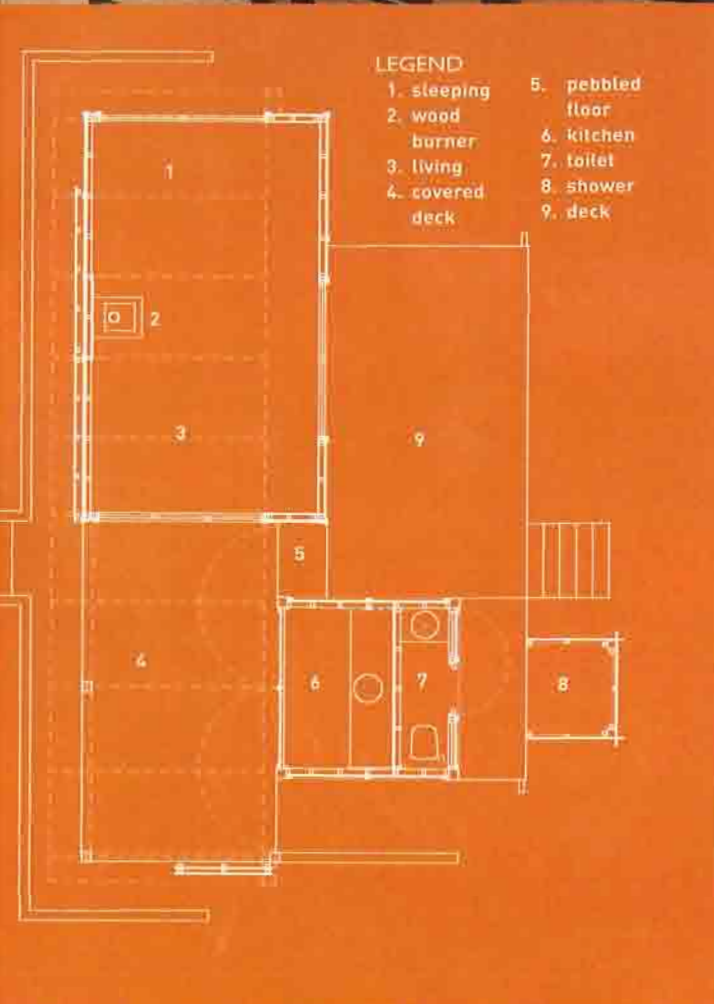
After a stint back overseas, Nicky and Lance returned to Auckland and in 1999 bought their 850-square-metre section, which is nestled behind sand dunes, looking out to the surf.

They set about designing their own retreat, inspired by the traditional Kiwi bach. "The bach as a cultural icon is intrinsically devoid of pretension," Nicky says.

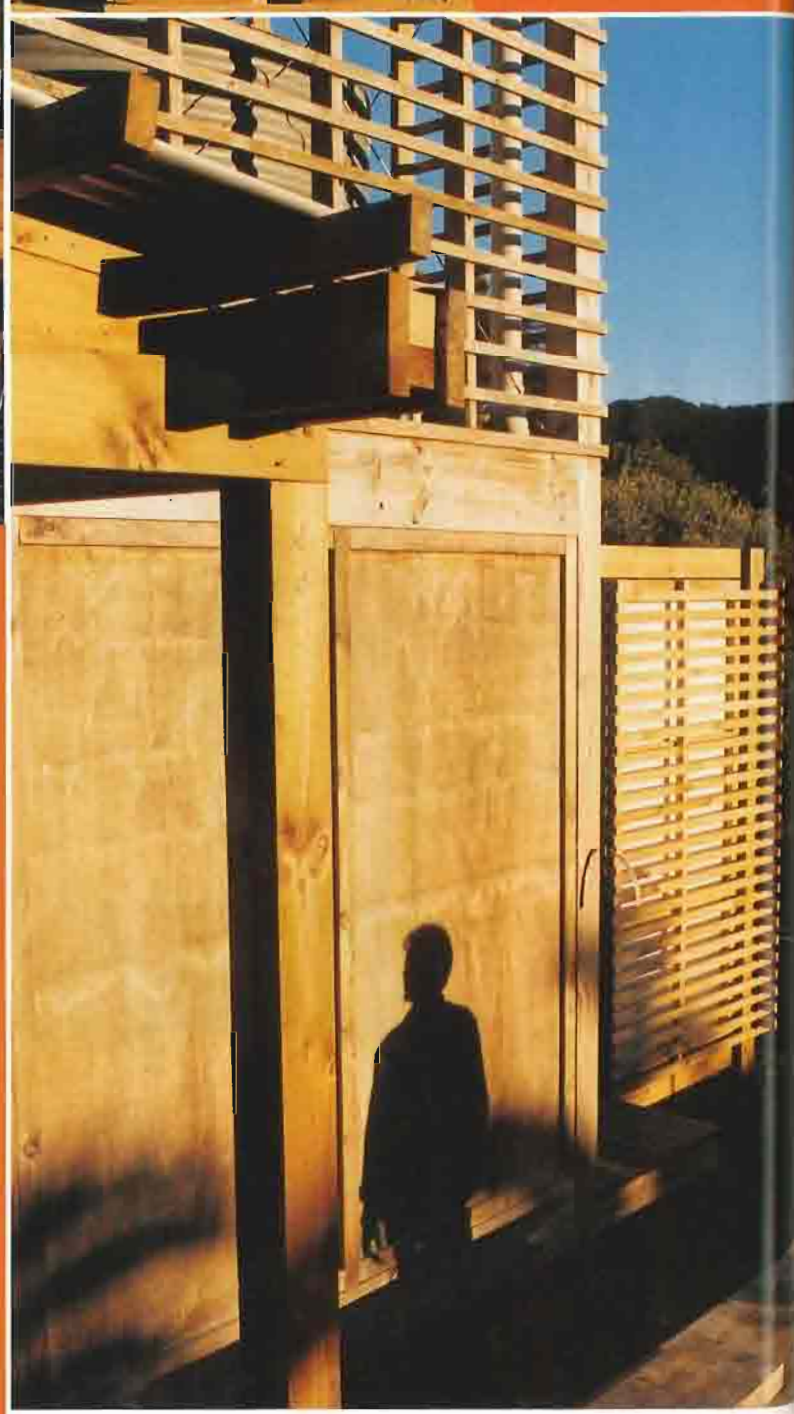
Determining the position of the bach called for careful consideration. A public-access road runs along the crest of the dunes fronting the







**(FAR LEFT)** Translucent sheeting is used for skylights over the covered deck and living/sleeping pavilion. Nicky's sister, photographer Jackie Meiring, is a frequent visitor to the island.  
**(LEFT and BELOW)** The bach's EcoPLY-treated pine and corrugated-iron construction was inspired by the honesty of the traditional Kiwi bach. The materials were also the most economical and appropriate for the surroundings.



**(THIS PAGE)** The back deck looks out to a sheltered garden, with mature olive trees and a hammock. Andrew Meiring and Lance Herbst (playing guitar) get into the spirit of island life.



**MIKE BUILT A BOX WHERE THE FRONT WALL WAS EFFECTIVELY TWO LARGE DOORS THAT COULD BE OPENED AND BOLTED IN PLACE**

beach. Lance says there was a fine line between capturing a view of the sea and the need for privacy. "We could have built to look out to the view, but the view would have looked right back at us," Lance says. The rear of the property backs on to riparian wetlands, with an empty section next door and mature trees on the other side, so the only aspect where privacy was an issue was the front.

The couple opted to carve the land in two, building in the middle of the section. "By doing this we created a microcosm of the island, with a sunny, dry, exposed garden at the front and a lush, sheltered, private back garden," Nicky says.

Phase one of Nicky and Lance's design was driven by the need for water. Builder Mike Norrish, who has a place on the Barrier, built a 2.4-metre by 2.4-metre plywood and timber-batten structure, topped by a water tank and corrugated-iron gull-wing roof. Logistics of the gravity-fed water system dictated the tank be elevated, while the angles of the roofline removed the need for cumbersome guttering to collect water.

The bach features an EcoPLY exterior, with treated pine studs and nogging and kwila decking. "We have used timber throughout because

it seemed like the most appropriate and economical material to build with. It also touches the land lightly," Nicky says.

Mike built a box, where the front wall was effectively two large doors that could be opened up and bolted in place. The doors front on to a tongue-and-groove kwila deck, which was sheltered initially by a canvas awning. A 700mm section at the back of the box was sectioned off for a hand basin and self-composting toilet.

A kitchen built into the main body of the box uses space very economically. Food and beverages are kept cool in two gas-powered under-bench fridges. Food is cooked over two freestanding burners, while a sink completes the rudimentary kitchen fitout. Timber framing doubles as shelf space, in addition to shelving attached to the plywood walls. There is storage underneath the bach for fishing gear, surfboards, gas bottles and the sewage tank.

Nicky says the local response to this initial structure was very enthusiastic and vocal. "The bach gained some wonderful nicknames, including the 'gin still' and 'psycho water tank!'" Five-year-old Sam Liggins called it the building with wings like a gull, she says.





## Q&A

**NICKY MEIRING** – architect  
**LANCE HERBST** – architect

**Where do you draw your architectural inspiration from?**

Primarily from the field of architecture – the greatest moments of inspiration are achieved from experiencing great buildings.

**How would you describe your architectural style?**

We have developed a similar approach to the design of buildings from our time together at university and a number of projects we have jointly designed. Although our major influences are from modernist buildings, we believe the style of a building is ultimately determined by the forces that influence a project – brief, context, budget and materials.

**Is there anything you wish you had designed?**

Nicky – Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye at Poissy-sur-Seine in France, Lance – Eero Saarinen's TWA terminal at JFK International airport, New York.

**What is your favourite piece of furniture at home?**

We agree on four Casala white, moulded plastic chairs and a 60s chrome and white glass pendant light fitting that we salvaged from a renovation job.

**Besides architecture, what are you passionate about?**

Striving for balance in life and fly fishing, in no particular order.

**Who are currently your favourite international designers?**

The Italian Aldo Rossi for his rationalist buildings, Oscar Niemeyer for his sculptural buildings and Herzog and de Meuron for their play of light and materials.

**What's your favourite local building?**

West Plaza, downtown Auckland.

H&E

## "IT'S ALL ABOUT BEING AWARE OF YOUR ENVIRONMENT – WHY HIDE FROM THE BEST STARScape IN THE WORLD?"

Phase two saw Nicky and Lance cover the existing deck, add a sleeping wing and build a deck with a view of the mature olive trees on the back lawn. With no glazier on the island, Nicky and Lance sought alternative materials to build with. Their solution was to continue the motif of timber slats by designing large, Shoji-style sliding screens, backed with thin, translucent glass fibre sheets, reminiscent of rice paper. The translucent sheets are also used as skylights to admit soft, diffused light inside. At night the bach emits a beautiful glow as candle light illuminates the inside.

The screens aren't just pretty – they provide a layer of defence against the weather. "We live on the deck all the time, but the screens can be slid across to offer protection when the wind is coming in from the north-east," Lance says.

When Nicky and Lance leave the island, all the screens are shut and the bach is sealed up like a box – ensuring security and protection from the weather. Then there's always the pleasure of "unwrapping" the box the next time they visit.

The original structure and later wing are linked at a junction marked

by a roof and change of texture underfoot. Where all other flooring is tongue-and-groove kwila, here a layer of pebbles signals a transition point. This split between the two pavilions sets up an axis that connects the stairs in a retaining wall at the front of the bach with stairs that link the back deck and garden.

Nicky says the separation is intentional. Anyone walking from the bedroom pavilion to the kitchen needs to cross the deck. "It's about being aware of your environment – why hide from the best starscape in the world?" she says.

Building the Meiring/Herbst bach in stages has brought advantages. "Building in phases is a wonderful opportunity to experience the site and refine your design," Lance says. The newest addition is a shower off the back deck.

Further plans include building a sleeping pavilion so the existing structure can be dedicated to living space. Landscaping projects will focus on creating a rock retaining wall and adding a barbecue area as well as a pétanque court. But that's about it. After all, baches should be about holidays, shouldn't they?

**[THESE PAGES]** The sliding screens allow the bach to be shut up like a box when not in use. When Nicky and Lance are there, candlelight and the translucent glass fibre sheets make the structure glow like a lantern at night. Nicky collects mussels from the rocks down at the beach.