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**LINDALLE** BACH

HERBST  
ARCHITECTS

GREAT BARRIER  
ISLAND

2006

Previous spread: View from the upstairs bedroom over sand dunes towards the horizon. Next stop: Chile.

## THE LINDALE BACH ON

Great Barrier Island is the latest and most sophisticated in a series of beach houses designed by Lance and Nicky Herbst in the decade since they migrated

from Cape Town to Auckland. Deceptively simple in its appearance, the bach, on closer inspection, is a complex building that exhibits the architects' attention to detail and their consuming interest in assemblage. It demonstrates, too, the progress of the architects' ongoing experiment with what New Zealanders would regard as *the* national material — timber — and *the* national type — the bach. And, not least, it expresses some rather definite ideas about the conduct of holiday life. The architects have a vision of the good life on Great Barrier Island, and it certainly isn't suburban.

Lightweight construction has typified New Zealand residential architecture ever since people first arrived here. One could say that, in regards to our houses at least, we've always trodden rather lightly on the land, not that we were following some environmentally conscious path. (If God hadn't meant us to live in wooden houses, why did He give us all those beautiful native trees?) But although our history is built from wood, the timber tradition is rather paradoxical: it speaks of transience as well as settlement. As Auckland architect Pip Cheshire has put it, 'We're still pulling the packing cases up above the high water mark.' (*Urbis Design Annual*, 2003). Cheshire might have been talking about the architecture of Auckland in particular, but the point seems to have general application to settler New Zealand. Perhaps a certain architectural flimsiness is only to be expected of a migrant nation at the end

of the world; our national anthem, one occasionally thinks, shouldn't be 'God Defend New Zealand'. More honestly, it might be 'Should I Stay, or Should I Go'?

Visitors, too, have often remarked on the character of New Zealand housing, being variously charmed or appalled by its ephemerality. Coming from Cape Town, 'a city of brickwork and masonry', Lance Herbst found New Zealand's 'world of lightweight' liberating. For a while, he says, 'it was a question of how light can we go?' (*Architecture New Zealand*, January/February 2003). Herbst Architects has pursued this interest in levity — not to be confused with insubstantiality — in their Great Barrier Island baches. (The practice is now designing its sixth bach on the same Great Barrier beach.) The client for this beach house was familiar with both the island and Herbst Architects' work. 'He came to us and said, "Do what you do",' Lance Herbst says. The client did not want 'a mansion on the beach — something that screamed out opulence', and that's one reason, Herbst says, along with a programmatic response to site, a diagnosis of the nature of holiday architecture, and the observance of height-to-boundary regulations, that the house is split into several elements. This formal separation has allowed for a modesty of scale; after all, as Herbst says, 'It is a beach house!'

Construction is expensive on remote Great Barrier, but an uncompromising client gave the architects generous scope to demonstrate, with the help of able builders, their mastery of detailing and skill with materials. The budget enabled Herbst Architects to realise an expressive architecture of timber and stainless steel: the house is bonded by steel plates, pins and bolts

- 1 workshop
- 2 boat shed
- 3 bedroom
- 4 bathroom
- 5 covered deck
- 6 dining
- 7 kitchen
- 8 living



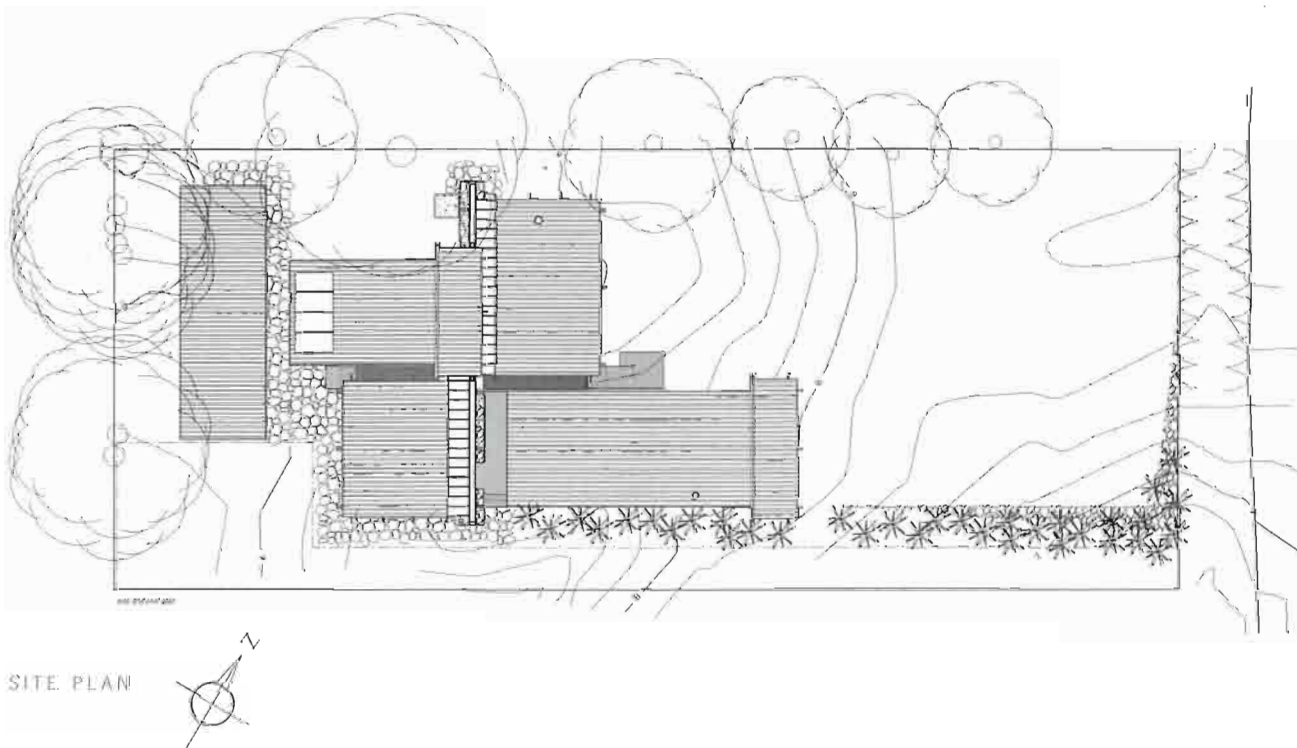
— a thousand of them. A method of assembly combining strength and lightness means the house is both pushed apart and held together. (The plan itself expresses this equilibrium between separation and connection, with the central gabion wall acting as a fulcrum.) An accretion of material layers imparts refinement and encourages legibility, although the bach is no quick and easy holiday read. Nicky Herbst talks of the house's 'slow release of experiences'. Perhaps one could also interpret its layers of materials as levels of meaning, or even, as in some arcane discipline — high diving, or performing on the parallel bars — as degrees of difficulty. These might seem fanciful comparisons, but the Lindale Bach is a work that clearly reveals the evidence of challenges sought in order to be artfully overcome.

While the architects have put the bones of the house on display they were also able to, as Lance Herbst says, 'explore the nature of the skin'. This is a real concern to Herbst, as the very lightness that he finds compelling in local architecture is now being compromised by mandated building practices. In response to the recent 'leaky building crisis' New Zealand buildings, Herbst says, 'are becoming dense and heavy, bogged down with waterproofing'. Forget floating; they're starting to look as though they can't even breathe through their thick and often lumpy skins. In this house, though, the architects have separated the 'wet' elements — that is, those that can get wet — from those that must remain dry.

The Lindale Bach, in a real sense, is built on an understanding of the way people behave on holiday, at the beach. There's a little behavioural guidance on offer, as well. In the design, the architects have taken account

of what they describe as 'holiday rituals'. For example, the fishing trip is a quotidian occurrence on Great Barrier: out in the morning, back late in the afternoon. So the south-west deck — one of two roofed decks offering alternative shelter from the winds coming off the sea to the front and the mountain behind — is proximate to the drive, and ready to receive the catch of the day. The architects are firm in their conviction that bach life is lived outside. There is one 'almost winter' communal space in the Lindale Bach — the living area — and even that is sunken so as not to hinder through-views from the rear deck. 'People just gravitate to the outside,' Nicky Herbst says (well, yes; with these decks, they would).

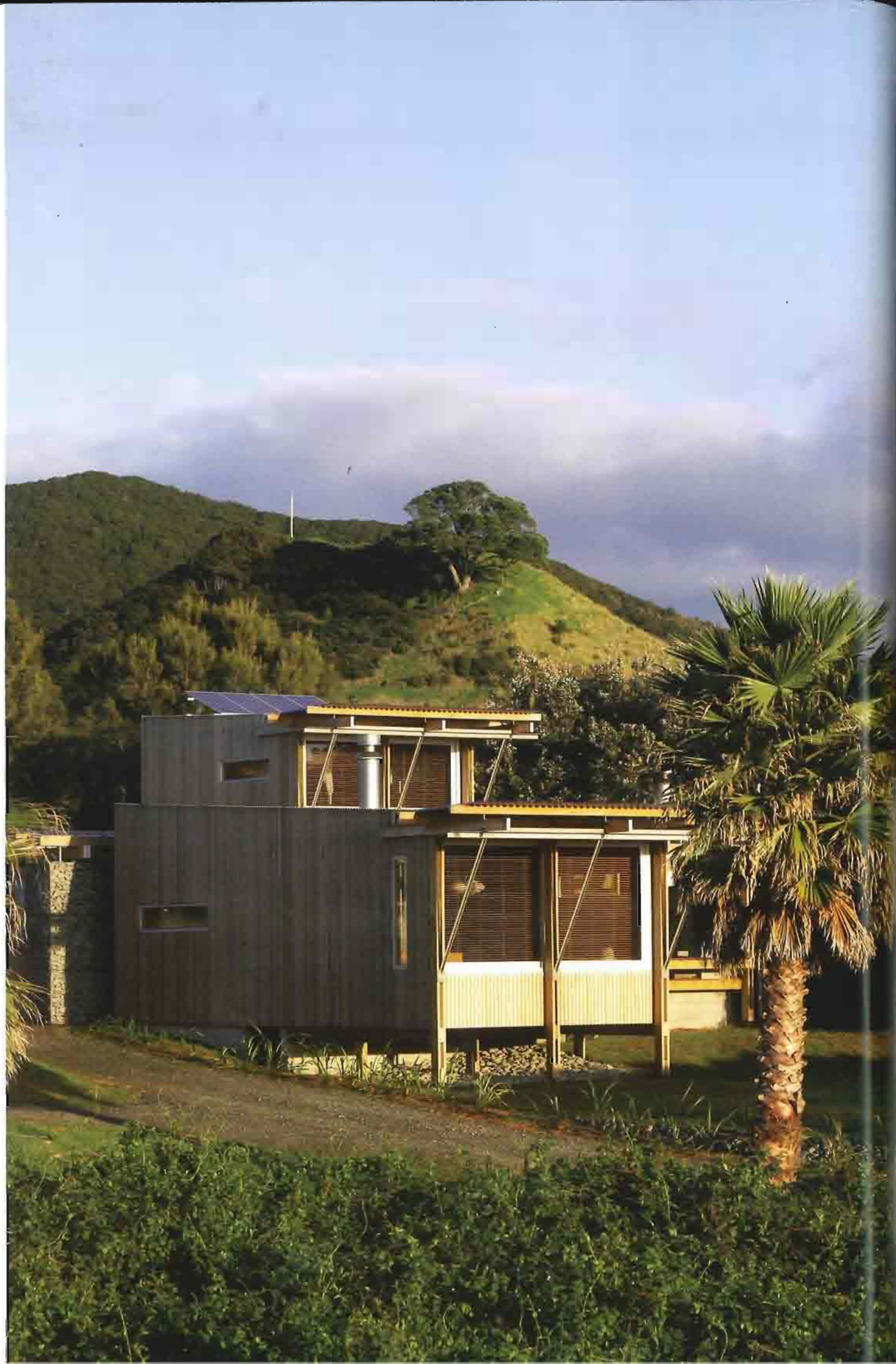
For the Herbsts — and, presumably, for their client — a holiday at a beach, especially at a beach on Great Barrier, is not a comfortable blob-out surrounded by all mod-cons. The preservation of the 'rituals' of holiday life — the regular 'events', whether they be swimming or showering, fishing or cooking, that provide the daily rhythms of a vacation — entails a sacrifice of convenience. Lance Herbst puts it more strongly: 'Convenience robs a holiday of its rituals.' The architects are not quite as prescriptive as they once were in their attitude to comfort and amenity — 'Now we at least provide cover when you're going from the living room to the bathroom' — but they still ensure that holidaymakers on Great Barrier are aware of the preciousness of the island's resources. 'Out on Great Barrier,' Lance Herbst says, 'we under-light our buildings. If you want more light, use the Coleman.' One way or another, you *will* have beach experiences at the Lindale Bach.



The bath, showing the main  
bedroom designed to peek  
over the dunes to the ocean,  
with photo-voltaic solar panels  
on the roof above.



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Above: Eaves provide shading and conceal the collection of potable rain water.

Left: Cedar cladding, showing the external structure of the sliding doors.



ve: The living area, on the  
ward' side of the house, is  
red to allow views' through  
n the dining and kitchen  
s.

at: Looking through the  
en to the gabion spine:  
bench at right provides  
n storage.

