

Dream Home

Access all areas

This sea change was surprisingly easy, writes **Jane Burton Taylor**.



Idyllic ... (from left) the view from the verandah of the ground-floor guest accommodation, which will be home to a full-time carer in the future; the house is built in two lightweight pavilions. It has automated windows and sun shading, grab rails throughout (designed to be unobtrusive) and a ramp connecting to a boardwalk across the garden to the waterfront. Photos: Brigid Arnott

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Though Victoria Chance and Dean Nottle were prompted into building their dream house due to an unforeseen circumstance, the result went far beyond what either imagined. The couple, who had watched enough *Grand Designs* programs to know such dreams can turn ugly, say for them, it was surprisingly easy.

The impetus to design the house came 10 years ago when Dean was diagnosed with a degenerative muscular illness. When he only required a walking stick, they could live comfortably in their Willoughby house. But once he needed a wheelchair, it meant either a serious renovation or a fresh start.

"We realised if we sold, we could build a properly accessible house up here [on the central coast]," Chance says. "The finances were comparable, so we decided to do it."

Even before they found land, the couple interviewed several architects and settled on Macmasters Beach-based Dianna Thomas.

"There were a number of things that appealed about her," Nottle says. "Most importantly, although she confessed she knew nothing about building an accessible house, she wanted to learn."

Six months later, Chance and Nottle found an old fisherman's cottage. The house was beyond help but the site was idyllic,

overlooking water and an easy walk or wheelchair trip to shops. Thomas says from day one, the balance between privacy and being able to engage with the surroundings was her main focus.

"The house was designed so Dean could be in contact with the outside world from every room, not just [to see] the sky and the treetops but to get outside into the fresh air from every part of the house," she says.

LIFE BALANCE

Consultants advised on details such as the angle of ramps and dimensions of turning circles. They also talked with Nottle about how he wanted to live in the house on a daily basis. The most critical counsel was from the architect Harry Sprintz, an expert in this area.

"[For example] we never considered building a two-storey house," Nottle says.

"Harry said we should not limit ourselves or our vision. He told us a lift was a viable thing; that it does not take up any more space than a stairwell and is more affordable than it used to be."

LIFT-OFF

When Thomas delivered two schemes, a single- and a two-storey home, the couple felt confident opting for the latter. "We fell in love with the one with two storeys," Chance says.

THE AIM

A house designed in response to its waterfront site, with universal access and minimal maintenance.

TIME FRAME

Two years.

INSIDER TIPS

Do not underestimate what you need to put into it yourself; you are your own expert.

FAVOURITE FEATURES

He: The accessibility and the relaxed lifestyle.

She: People talk about bringing the outside in. Our house brings the inside out."

GREEN POINTS

- ▶ Highly insulated walls and ceilings.
- ▶ Lightweight construction.
- ▶ Recycled-timber flooring.

- ▶ Sun shading and operable louvres.
- ▶ Cross-ventilation via breezeway and small motorised louvre windows.
- ▶ Rainwater recycled in house and garden.
- ▶ Water managed on site.
- ▶ Local native plants in garden.

ENGINEER

G R Eddy & Associates, 4365 4949.

ACCESS CONSULTANTS

Harry Sprintz, 4237 7727; Mark Relf, 0417 467 007.

LANDSCAPER

Chris Peel, 0411 053 668.

BUILDER

Robert Calabria, 0402 813 441.

ARCHITECT

Dianna Thomas Architect, 4382 6532.



Content owners ... Victoria Chance and Dean Nottle; the breezeway and all internal corridors are wide for easy use in a wheelchair and a lift connects the two levels. Photos: Dianna Thomas, Brigid Arnott



Get the wood on hungry hordes

Is summer a better time of year to do a pest inspection? And if renovations have been done recently, is it best to wait six months before doing a pest inspection? And are there some parts of Sydney that are more prone to termites than others?

Carla, Dulwich Hill

The good thing about termites is they don't discriminate. North, south, east and even inner west: it's all subtropical to them. Sure, like Sydneysiders, certain species have their preferred pockets but they all eat wood. What's more, even though they don't swarm in winter like they do now, they eat all year round. Finally (and three questions was really pushing it, by the way), don't wait for the renovation dust to settle. They won't.

We bought a house recently that had a trampoline in a side courtyard when we inspected it. Now we have taken possession of the house we see the trampoline was hiding part of a collapsed wall. The neighbours say it crumpled about two years ago, so obviously the previous owners put the trampoline there to hide it. What can we do?

Adrian, Allambie Heights

What did your building inspection report say about the wall? You did commission such a report, didn't you? Obviously, without one there may be many defects that have gone unnoticed by you that cost far more than a new wall. What's more, that bit in the contract about how you are buying the house as it is means the vendors won't be coming back with

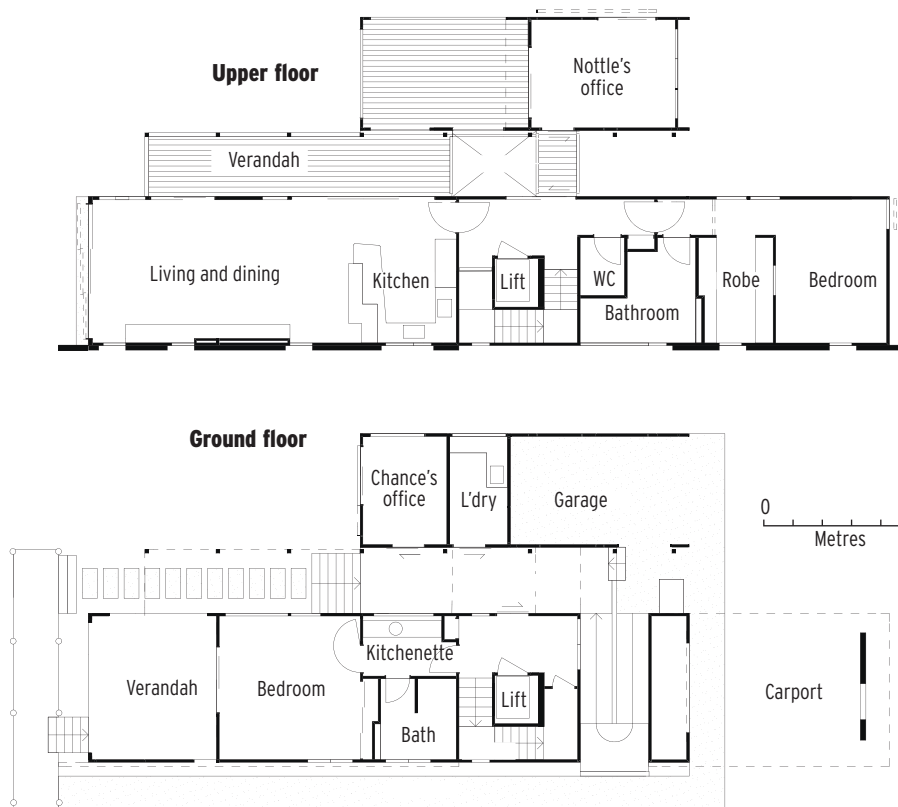
a cement mixer in tow. If you did get a building report and it had no mention of the fallen wall, then that's where you put all the blame (see below). Without such due diligence, well, I don't want to write the words "you've no one to blame but yourself" so I'll just leave some dots and you can fill in the space ...

Can you sue the building inspector if they miss something important in their report?

Charles, Maroubra

You can and must. How else are we all to justify the pages of disclaimers tacked on to every building inspection report, rendering them all but incomprehensible to anyone without a PhD in contract law. First, check the inspector has professional indemnity insurance (it would be rare they did not but not unheard of). For those without the requisite tertiary qualifications, now is the time to call your lawyer. As Paddo property lawyer Neil Matthews explains, they will then assess if you do have any basis to sue for negligence and, if so, send a letter of demand to the building inspector for the amount you want in damages to have said problem fixed. The building inspector will then panic about what this will do to their future premiums and forward that letter to their insurer, at which point lawyers on both sides will then slug things out on their own letterhead, leaving you to better appreciate why everyone bangs on about the need for a building report before you buy.

Send your questions to Lucy at macken.lucy@gmail.com.



Nottle says: "With a water view, it seemed better to have two rooms looking on to the water, instead of just one."

The block faces west to the water, so Thomas sited the home lengthways, oriented to the north, with two pavilions – one for work, the other for living – linked by a central breezeway.

Chance's office is on the ground floor of the smaller pavilion and Nottle's directly above. The adjoining pavilion has a guest bedroom, kitchenette and living space downstairs (for a full-time carer if needed) and upstairs is Chance and Nottle's bedroom and a living room overlooking the harbour and opening on to a long, north-facing verandah.

The house was built on time and budget. And most importantly, the tailored design works for the couple now and will continue to do so well into the future.

"It is just right living here," Chance says.

Nottle adds: "It is a very relaxed life. It is great to wake up in the morning and wheel down the hallway and see nothing but trees and water and boats."



Custom ... the design is private yet open.

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► Steel work	27,273
► Carpentry and labour	269,823
► Steel roofing, gutters, cladding	40,909
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► Waterproofing	1820
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► Balustrades	18,182
► Windows and doors	46,691
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► Painting	20,909
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► Solar hot water	4364
► Builder	76,023
► Architect	74,806
► Engineer and consultant fees	6114
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