

Good RELATIONS

An architect's bold plan for a plot on Sydney's Northern Beaches benefits his nearest and dearest while redefining the notion of a family compound.

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LIVING *this page and opposite* Homeowner Ruth had two non-negotiables for her architect husband: a separate TV room and a real fireplace. Wood stove, Abbey Fireplaces. Cushions, Planet and Adairs. Burnished-concrete floors. **Smart buy:** Fusion day bed, from \$2949, BoConcept. *For Where to Buy, see page 232.*



This is the life

This home combines the openness of a holiday house with the best aspects of suburban living. "When we were kids, my brother and I were friends with the neighbourhood kids and we'd often go off for hours with them," says owner Ruth Richter. "There's the same sense of freedom here because we can open the gates and the children can go between the houses and play in one another's backyards."

KITCHEN/DINING The kitchen benchtop is made from Paperock, a water-resistant and VOC-free recycled-paper and resin composite. "It's affordable and ultra practical – you can put hot pots directly on it and scratches don't pose a problem," says Nick. Cube mosaic tiles, Classic Ceramics. Appliances, Winning Appliances. Pendant light and dining chairs, Cafe Culture+Insitu. Dining table, Oishi Furniture & Homewares. **Smart buy:** Paperock surface, from \$101/m², Paperock.

OUTDOOR ROOM Rosy the Burmese cat prowls the deck. The bifold windows used for the kitchen servery are from AWS. Replica Tolix stools, Zanui. The blackbutt dining setting was made by Nick and his father. *For Where to Buy, see page 232.*

FEATURE PLANTS

BACKYARD
Australian
native violet

Thalia geniculata
'Ruminoides'

Slender weaver's
bamboo (*Bambusa*
textilis gracilis)

Dwarf papyrus
Viburnum



Often when a couple embarks on a building project, one partner is the risk taker, while the other plays devil's advocate, throwing up 'what ifs', 'buts' and 'maybes'. Ruth Richter, the owner of this home on Sydney's Northern Beaches, says she was the latter when her husband Nick, an architect, outlined his grand plan to build their own home. "My brother and sister-in-law were in a similar situation to us," says Ruth. "They wanted to move out of their unit, so Nick said: 'Why don't we look at blocks of land together?' I wasn't keen - the idea of building from scratch seemed very daunting."

The costs were a concern too, but Nick had it covered. "I proved we could make it work financially," he says. "By spending a little more capital and building granny flats on each block, we could earn significant additional income."

Having convinced his family to take the plunge, Nick found the right site, managed the legalities of sub-dividing the block and designed the homes. The result is a micro community of four dwellings, with family living in close proximity, yet enjoying plenty of privacy thanks to clever spatial planning.

The four buildings are arranged in a C shape; Nick and Ruth's home, which they share with their children Hugh, six, and Eva, four, is at the centre of the block. The ground floor is given over to communal living: a TV room by the entrance and a vast open-plan kitchen/dining/living area. A striking steel staircase separates the kitchen/dining space from the living zone, where a window seat is the perfect perch to supervise children in the garden. Upstairs are the home's three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a study nook.

Nick had free rein with the design, aside from two requests from Ruth. "I wanted a wood-burning fireplace and a TV room, but they were the only specs I gave him," she says. ▶



◀ “We all trusted Nick in terms of the design and finishes,” says Ruth. “Nick would bring home two options and I’d choose my favourite - I’d much rather do that than spend hours looking at different products. Nick’s the designer and we have similar taste, so I knew it would be fine.”

The process took slightly longer than anticipated - the land-title split was the main culprit - but despite that hiccup, the project came together smoothly. The result is testament to the confidence and trust invested in Nick to deliver two bright and cheerful family homes.

“For me, the best thing is seeing my family enjoy the benefits of what I have created,” says Nick. “It’s like a gift to my family. And people come for dinner and I see them really enjoying this house, which is also rewarding for me.”

Ruth admits that her initial scepticism has been replaced by a sense of gratitude about her family’s good fortune. “I’m really happy with how practical and functional the house is. There’s nothing we don’t use,” she says. “It’s a simple house, not fancy or expensive, just exactly what we need.”

“The thing I love the most, though, is that we live next door to family,” she says. “It’s really special for the kids to have that close relationship with their cousins.” ▶

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‘I’m really happy with how practical and functional the house is. There’s nothing we don’t use.’ Ruth Richter

LIVING *above and opposite* Low-level windows on the south-west facing living room wall allow for cross-ventilation without loss of privacy. “Placing the windows at this level leaves the wall free for artwork,” says Nick. “And we’ve planted rosemary and lavender under these windows, which infuse the house with a lovely scent.” Vitra Noguchi maple coffee table, Space. Vintage Danish sofa, Vampt Vintage Design. Saba New York armchairs, Cafe Culture+Insitu. Side tables, Planet. Artworks by Paul Nolan (left), Greg Harkness (timber frames), Penny Harkness (rear wall). Flowers, Seasonal Concepts.

Designer buy: Hare+Klein Etched silk-hemp rug, from \$6950 (2.4x3m), Designer Rugs. *For Where to Buy, see page 232.*

Paint colours are reproduced as accurately as printing processes allow.

Built to order

With the bank balances of two families to consider, cost-effective design was top of mind. “Every square metre adds to the cost so I was very conscious of the total floor space,” says Nick. “The floor plan is highly refined and efficient, with minimal hallways and modest room sizes.” Privacy can also be an issue in communal living. Nick’s solution was to position the backyard and living areas at the opposite end of the plot from the granny flat.

THE PALETTE

Resene Alabaster Half
interior, throughout

Colorbond Surfmist
upstairs ceilings/roof,
exterior cladding

Try this accent

Taubmans Alpinia



