

## Barnstorming with Belinda

*Winner of Best Retreat at the 2017 Home of the Year awards and recipient of an NZIA (New Zealand Institute of Architects) award for Auckland homes, Belinda George's Pukapuka home is now in the running for an NZIA national award.*

Belinda's parents own a farm at Mahurangi West and she has been coming to the area since she was 15 years old, horseriding and exploring those beautiful surrounds. It is not surprising that she and husband, David White, ended up buying a block of land on Pukapuka Road. 'We soon found that we were coming up here every weekend and didn't want to go back to the city. So, we decided, what the hell, we'll sell the house in Saint Mary's Bay and build up here.'

A family of keen horse riders and skiers, they spent a lot of time driving around the countryside, and Belinda and Dave both found themselves enthusing over the sheds and barns they saw. 'We both had an obsession with that sort of form,' says Belinda. 'And it was a nice response to our very rural piece of land. It was about respecting the surroundings and working with them. It took me a while to get there but it turned into the idea of a cluster of sheds.'

The house sits comfortably on a plateau on the property, surrounded by farm paddocks and bush, and does indeed strongly reference rural work sheds with a strong emphasis on timber and corrugated metal.

In order to accommodate their two teenage children, Belinda's ideas allowed for the concept of separation but togetherness. The family can achieve their privacy but the flow around the building and back through the courtyard keeps everything and everyone connected.

To visit this abode, for me, was to really revel in the use of the timber, both inside and out. Belinda explains; 'Because this timber has been sitting in a river for 150 years, it has all these lovely greens and purples, textures and colours. The living area is all rimu, there is kahikatea through the hallways, and matai in our bedroom.' In fact, the beautiful, rich river wood turns up all over the place, even as small features in the bathrooms.

In winter, when I visited, the house was closed up, cosy and inviting, particularly with the big wood-burning stove chugging away. Belinda tells me, 'We spend a lot of time of time outside so it's nice to come back to a really internal space, a cosy space. The timber helps create that.' And in summer, the doors can be thrown open to the expansive decks and views.

Working together this closely on a project was new to Belinda and Dave but they both agreed that it was one of the best things they have ever done together. 'We've previously tried to keep our work separate because we're quite single-minded, but we both loved it,' says Belinda. 'Dave was so patient, and gave me so much space to design it and think about the conceptual stuff. I did at least 10 models for the new house. He could have been like, "Hurry up!" but he gave me that time.'

Belinda and Dave both credit the strong concept with setting up the success of the project. 'If we got to the point where we were making a decision and we were thinking different things, we could always refer back to the concept we had agreed on. The love of the shed, the simplicity of the shed and the honesty of the materials were always there.'

With ultimate freedom there is also ultimate responsibility and, as Belinda puts it simply, 'You have to live with it and like it.'

And like it they do. This is a group of buildings that make for a fascinating, warm, inviting home and stand as a testament to this family's dream home in the country.