

# A SHORE THING

It was always going to be good with a designing couple's new holiday home

Words MONIQUE BALVERT-O'CONNOR / Photographs TESSA CHRISP



**THIS PAGE** The kitchen in Charlotte Martin and Aaron Guerin's Waihi Beach holiday home where fresh white walls contrast with the warmth of timber; the doorway in the background leads to a spare bedroom that has a loft above. **OPPOSITE** Charlotte, centre, on the beach with (from left) Ollie, Ben, Wills and Aaron.

**THESE PAGES** Aaron was committed to ensuring the beach house would fit into its surrounding environment; the couple loves the green outlook – here they are on the deck off the main living area that’s also accessed from the spare bedroom.





When Charlotte Martin and Aaron Guerin first saw the site that now houses their beach pad, it instantly felt right and they made an offer on the spot. And it appeared greater forces agreed. “When we walked on this section the wood pigeons flew over and there were monarch butterflies,” Charlotte says. “I know it sounds cheesy, but the universe was calling us.”

And now that their Waihi Beach house is completed and perfectly in line with what they wanted, they’re thrilled they heeded the call.

Charlotte and Aaron, directors of LAD Architecture, have always loved Waihi Beach. They can round up the three boys, bundle up the two dogs and an hour and a quarter later they can be on the sand. Cambridge is home base for this couple and Ben, 16, Ollie, 12, and Wills, nine, as well as Monty the toy poodle, Noodles the Maltese/chihuahua and new addition Teddy, a schnauzer/Jack Russell. A new Cambridge house is on the horizon, but for now they live in an ex-state house that they bought 20 years ago and then renovated.

Their Waihi Beach house is testament to Aaron’s skills as an architectural designer, and to Charlotte’s design flair that favours Danish decor touches, New

**ABOVE** Monty, left, and Noodles know where the living is good; the artwork by Mary Martin is apt as the family is often greeted by kingfishers when they arrive; the coffee table is a mid-century G-Plan Astro, the woodburner is a Warmington Studio and the pendant light is by Maker Design Studio; the timber slat feature wall leads down to the master suite. **RIGHT** (from top) The family, from left, Aaron, Ollie, Ben, Charlotte and Wills. Timber detailing is continued outside as a feature above the outdoor fire.







Zealand art, plants and organic elements aplenty, and light features sourced from her sister's business, Mr Ralph.

Black Colorsteel – accessorised by blonde cedar highlights – clothes this house, which is essentially two-storeyed but spans four levels and includes 133sqm of decks at various heights. “We always knew we would have predominantly Colorsteel as the exterior and we chose black to anchor ourselves in, to essentially hunker into the surrounding bush, rather than declaring, ‘Hi, here we are,’” Charlotte says.

As the home's designer, Aaron knew from the get-go that the build was going to be challenging, given the significant slope of the site. While the boys shrieked as they rolled down the steep section, their father called in the geotech engineers and before long, work began on retaining walls.

“The constraints of the site, including maximum height permitted, determined what we did,” says Aaron. “The neighbours were worried they would lose their views. But I presented our concepts to them and used 3D imaging to satisfy them, making



**THIS PAGE** The timber wall forms the spine of the house; these stairs lead down from the main living area to the second lounge that doubles as the home's main entry area. **OPPOSITE** Charlotte loves a natural, organic feel such as the cedar on the kitchen island; Nigel Cotterill of NDC made the wooden discs that were added to the light bulbs.

‘I know it sounds cheesy but the universe was calling us’



**THIS PAGE** Painted panelling in the master bedroom was more affordable than having cedar everywhere says Charlotte; the artwork is by Melbourne-based New Zealand artist Sarah Kelk. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) Jute rugs feature throughout the house. A cedar wall in the downstairs bathroom; the horizontal window has a view of a solid retaining wall but star jasmine will soon cascade over it; Charlotte refers to the bath as “black beauty”. The downstairs spare bedroom repeats the use of painted wall panelling. The boys’ shared bedroom doesn’t need to be big as it opens out onto a spacious deck; the bunks were made from leftover flooring timber.



lifelong friends through this process,” he says. Cold drinks and iceblocks were delivered by those neighbours during hot construction days.

When the family look out the south-facing kitchen window on the top floor, they are level with the neighbours’ lawn. The view to the north gives a real sense of the sloping site and its elevation. Northward, the view is over rooftops and to the ocean beyond.

A row of upright ‘Maori Princess’ pōhutukawa will block out some of the rooftops one day and provide a wonderful sense of seasonality, Charlotte says. Other plantings include nikau that hug the house and will provide foliage to be enjoyed from the main living area when they grow tall enough. Charlotte



**THESE PAGES** The view from the driveway looking back at the house; the entrance is at the far end and the deck above it comes off the master bedroom; the platform off the boys' bunk room includes an inbuilt nikau feature garden.



**THIS PAGE** (from top) Ollie ready to hit the waves. Aaron and Charlotte felt the family could do with one more dog especially as toy poodle Monty is “a wise old man at 14” so they now have Teddy, a schnauzer/Jack Russell. **OPPOSITE** The upstairs deck is especially appealing in the evenings with the fire going; the timber wall and slats are blonde cedar.



loves the sound of bamboo in the breeze and has planted it to be enjoyed from the barbecue area outside the kitchen.

Cedar is a big player in the house's interior. “We wanted the house to feel homely,” Aaron says. “Some contemporary homes can feel sterile and soulless. Timber has been injected for warmth, the grain and the scent. It also feels relaxed and introduces the mid-century element we love.”

The best views are from a loft, accessed by ladder in the top spare bedroom.

“It's a place of intrigue, a suntrap, a place to escape to with a magazine, a lookout for checking the surf, and it was a great vantage point once when we had an electrical storm,” Charlotte says.

The staff at LAD Architecture had hands-on, on-site involvement in this project.

“It's been a huge learning experience,” Aaron says. “We wanted to learn how our plans are translated on site by the tradespeople and we got to see the challenges on site. We learned new skills and it gave us all an appreciation of how long things can take, particularly if you want to do things well. When I look around, I see all the considered details – how they work so well for our family and the beauty in them too. This gives me joy.”

Charlotte loves the bush backdrop, the ocean view, the moods evoked by different spaces in the house and the natural light that floods in. The effect is “soul food”.

She says it's not unusual for people to walk down the driveway and say “wow” when they see their house. “It's really satisfying as we take pleasure in seeing other people appreciating it too.” ■



## Q&A

**One property must-have:** No lawns. But planting we love. It's all about being down at the beach, at the skate park or basketball courts with the boys, so the section had to be low-maintenance. *(Aaron)*

**Kiwi artists we're showcasing:** Cambridge artist Mary Martin, Raglan artist Jane Galloway and Wanaka artist Sophie Melville. And above our bed we have a piece that celebrates native birds, which is apt given we often wake to tūī birdsong and go to sleep to morepork, plus we're in the flight path of kererū. *(Charlotte)*

**Best piece of advice:** Trust your instincts. Once you've made design decisions and feel at peace, stop searching as you may start to second guess yourself. *(Charlotte)*

**Favourite walks:** There are beautiful walks galore on our doorstep. The DOC Trig Walk provides a great vantage point to admire the vast coastline. Orokawa Bay Walk (or run if you're feeling keen) goes for miles along the coastline – Monty and Noodles are very keen on this option. There are also the nearby Karangahake Gorge Walks. *(Aaron)*

*Charlotte Martin and Aaron Guerin*

