SYDNEY
AUSTRALIA

NEW BUILD BEAUTY

HINDSIGHT

FOR BUILDER BEN AND INTERIOR DESIGNER SIMONE, A KNOCKDOWN/REBUILD WAS THE ONLY WAY TO GET THE PERFECT HOUSE FOR THEIR LARGE FAMILY. CAREFUL PLANNING OF EVERY ASPECT WAS KEY TO THEIR SUCCESS

WHO LIVES HERE?

BEN MATHEWS, A BUILDER, AND HIS WIFE SIMONE, AN INTERIOR DESIGNER (THE OWNERS OF SOUL OF GERRINGONG BOUTIQUE ACCOMMODATION), AND THEIR FOUR BOYS MARLEY, 12, ARCHIE, 10, TULLY, EIGHT, AND KOAH, FOUR.
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While the idea of ripping down a home and starting afresh is daunting for most, for this family of six it was the beginning of a new adventure. After living in the existing house in the beachside suburb of Cronulla in Sydney's south for a year, Ben and Simone knew how to achieve their dream home: by starting from scratch!

The creative couple worked with their architect to plan and design the knockdown/rebuild. They chose to keep the ground floor structural footings from the original house so machinery was not required. Otherwise, the demolition was, as Ben explains, "like building a house backwards. You start with the roof and work your way down."

Being able to complete the build through their construction company was a major advantage, and the couple easily came in on budget "thanks to years of experience". Just six months after demolition started, the family moved into their new home – and straight onto their next project, turning a derelict property in the NSW south coast suburb of Gerringong into a boutique hotel, which opened to guests late last year. →

"We wanted natural light in the heart of the home so added a light well above the open shelving"

THE KITCHEN

Special space The dropped ceiling – required to house plumbing for the second storey – and herringbone tiles from Tile Bazaar make lovely features in the kitchen. The bar stools are from Freedom.

THE DINING AREA

Look on up A pitched roof and exposed beams add interest in a tonally neutral space. Built-in storage came courtesy of Kelloway's Kitchens, the dining table is from Bisque Interiors, the chairs are by Relax House and the pendant is from The Family Love Tree.

SECOND BEDROOM

Sneaky shelves Every bit of extra space has been utilised for storage or as display nooks.

LESSON 1

BUILDING CAN BE CHEAPER THAN RENOVATING!

To create a home that best suits your family, Ben would "build over reno any day". Working around older structures that may not be up to today's building standards and with potentially faulty electrics and plumbing could be more costly than a new build, he explains. "By building from scratch, you're able to design a space to exactly what you want and need, instead of trying to work around existing layouts. This will result in the best spatial planning for your family."

LESSON 2

USE SCALE AND HEIGHT TO MAKE A ROOM LOOK BIGGER

While the ceilings needed to be dropped for practical reasons, Ben played around with them to create drama and the illusion of more space. "A mixture of pitched, flat and lowered ceilings adds the wow factor while making a room feel way more spacious," he says. Another easy trick to add the illusion of more space was to increase the door height. "The standard door height is 2.1m, so we increased this to 2.4m high in all rooms," Ben explains.

LESSON 3

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR VIEW – BUT REMEMBER PRIVACY

Windows work both ways – offering outward views as well as potential for neighbours to gaze in. When specifying louvres and fixed glass for the large windows in the two upper bedrooms that overlook the pool and rear garden, Ben and Simone hadn't thought about the lack of privacy from their back neighbour. The solution was inspired by a treatment they'd stumbled across on a trip to Byron Bay – plantation-style fixed exterior shutters.

WORK IN PROGRESS BEN AND SIMONE'S TIMELINE

YEARS 1–2

SEPTEMBER 2014
Purchased property (the same day their previous property sold at auction).

DECEMBER 2014
Moved in and knocked out walls to create an extra bedroom to fit their family of six.

JULY 2015
Engaged architect who lived and breathed their plans to make sure everything was how they wanted it.

DECEMBER 2015
Received council approval for plans. Spent 12 weeks planning all aspects of build and packing. Boys had their last play in the oversized backyard.

MARCH 2016
Demolition commenced and furniture ordered (was selected when drawing up plans).

APRIL 2016
Build works commenced: pool dug and concrete poured, framework up, roof installed, trades roughed-in.

MAY 2016
Exterior cladding, windows and doors installed. Walls sheeted with plasterboard and V board (cement fibre board).

JULY 2016
Cabinetry installed. Fit out – all trades back to finish.

SEPTEMBER 2016
Landscaping and pool finished, furniture arrived, house styled. Family moved in! →

MASTER BEDROOM

By the seaside The home's coastal location inspired this room's colours and decor, including the custom denim bedhead by Beds Ahead, Major Minor bedlinen, carpet from Carpet Court and pendants from Temple & Webster.

THE LIVING ROOM

Room to relax Simone created a tribal style downstairs, mixing natural fibres and colours with the warmth of a tan sofa from Freedom. The artwork is from Laneway Prints.

THE BATHROOM

Rub-a-dub-dub The huge bath was a trade buy from Harvey Norman. Dark towels echo the exterior finish while the Loft Furniture stool lends a beachy vibe.

SECOND BEDROOM

Clever combo Simone found the side tables at a warehouse sale and topped them with breadboards from Target. The bedhead came from Naturally Cane Furniture and the linen is Major Minor.

LESSON 4

LIGHT WELLS CAN WORK IN LIEU OF SKYLIGHTS

Having lived in the old house for a year prior to the rebuild, Ben and Simone knew they wanted as much natural light as possible to enter the heart of the home in the kitchen, dining and living rooms. “Due to the second storey, we weren’t able to use skylights, so Ben came up with the brilliant idea of adding a light well above the open shelving in the kitchen,” Simone says. “We were able to create a 60cm light well that floods the kitchen with light.”

LESSON 5

MIX UP DECOR STYLES TO AVOID A SHOWROOM VIBE

Simone has a neverfail approach when it comes to furnishing and decorating a new home. “One of the first rules when I started working in design was the 70/20/10 ratio,” she says. “You never have one style, otherwise it will feel like walking into a showroom.” In this case, she mixed 70 per cent coastal style with 20 per cent classic and 10 per cent tribal, illustrated by the beachy cane bedhead and indoor greenery, patterned cushions and rugs and classic shape of the bath. →

THE BUDGET BREAKDOWN

- ☐ ARCHITECT **$20,000**
- ☐ ENGINEER **$5000**
- ☐ COUNCIL PLANS **$7000**
- ☐ DEMOLITION **$12,000**
- ☐ BUILDERS **$325,000**
- ☐ WINDOWS & DOORS **$30,000**
- ☐ FLOORING **$20,000**
- ☐ PLUMBING **$35,000**
- ☐ ELECTRICAL **$30,000**
- ☐ WATERPROOFING **$6000**
- ☐ TILING **$14,000**
- ☐ PLASTERING **$25,000**
- ☐ V-BOARD **$10,000**
- ☐ PAINTING **$40,000**
- ☐ AIR-CONDITIONING **$15,000**
- ☐ LANDSCAPING **$15,000**
- ☐ POOL WORKS **$35,000**
- ☐ CABINETRY **$40,000**
- ☐ APPLIANCES **$8000**
- ☐ TILES **$15,000**
- ☐ BATHROOM FITTINGS **$15,000**
- ☐ FURNITURE & STYLING **$20,000**

TOTAL: $742,000

THE LIVING ROOM

Forward thinking
All the furniture was selected while the plans were being drawn up, to ensure the rooms could accommodate it.

THE EXTERIOR

Sitting pretty
A classic colour scheme works well with both light and darker timbers.

LESSON 6

GET ADVICE ON PLANTS AROUND POOLS

Pool landscaping requires careful selection of hardy plants that will survive in a tough environment. Ben and Simone sought guidance from Brandon Wallis of SiteDesign + Studios. His advice was to look for hard-leaf species with a slight gloss, which are good for pools with no western sun, and he suggested tall Kentia to provide shade, privacy and a holiday vibe. For pool compliance, you should also never plant trees near non-climbable zones.

LESSON 7

KEEP YOUR POOL MATERIAL CHOICES COHESIVE

One of the most important factors when planning a new backyard that includes a pool is to ensure the size of the pool and its surrounds are in proportion to the backyard. The family wanted a grassy area, where the boys could kick a ball, as well as a pool. Once size was sorted, they chose a beadcrete finish on the base "as you can mix the colour of the glass stones to create the colour of your choice", mosaic tiles for the sides, limestone coping and merbau decking.

LESSON 8

SOME PAINT COLOURS WILL COST YOU MORE

Choosing a dark paint job can actually be more expensive and laborious than a lighter shade. Ben and Simone knew before the build they would paint the house dark, and chose Dulux Domino. "I wanted a classic coastal home with drama," Simone says. They didn't factor in that dark paint costs more per litre and that contrasting colours require a more finessed finish (for example cutting in wall edges where rollers can't be used), which increases the labour costs.

text and styling tahnee carroll | **photography** lynden foss

> When planning a pool, think well ahead. If you want it ready for Christmas, start at least six months ahead

Splish splash Excavation of the pool was one of the first jobs completed after demolition of the old house.