



Far horizons

Nestled into the hillside high above the sea, this family retreat references small cliff-top villages in the Mediterranean

Take one spectacular view and a building site of 1148ha and you have the key ingredients for a holiday home with a difference.

This property, in the picturesque Bay of Islands, has a particularly steep terrain with a building site on a ridge overlooking a sandy beach. The cliff-top position of the house, which was designed by architect Neville H Price, meant the views could be maximised and the building tucked within the natural contours of the hillside.

The main contractor, Eddie Cooney of Black Watch Construction, says the owners wanted to

incorporate similar materials to the architect's own home on an adjacent lot. This features time-honoured materials and finishes, such as coloured plaster walls, stone floors, and antique clay roofing tiles.

To create a sense of permanence and solidity, the new house is built from Polyblock reinforced with concrete. This provides the deep reveals that define traditional European buildings.

But the Mediterranean influence extends even further. The massing of the architecture is reminiscent of a hillside village in the South of Italy, France or Greece. Designed as a series of



Above: Like a hilltop village in the Mediterranean, this house presents a series of similar architectural forms, punctuated by distinctive tower elements. The house has a Polyblock reinforced concrete construction, with coloured plastered walls and 400-year-old Italian clay roof tiles.

Left: A cantilevered infinity-edge pool extends out towards the ocean beyond. Glass pool fences ensure the picturesque sea views are unobstructed.



Top: The house and landscaping were designed to follow the natural contours of the ridge on top of the hill. A series of terraces step down to the pool.

Above: A strong sense of symmetry defines both the architecture and the landscaping. Two guest houses, one on each side of the house, are mirror images of each other, and reached by covered walkways.

linked elements, the house spreads out along the ridge, the more horizontal forms balanced by symmetrical tower elements.

"Both the house and the landscaping have a strong symmetry," says Cooney. "The layout of the rooms in the main house is very symmetrical as they spread out from the central stairwell and lobby. And the two guest wings, one on the east side of the house and one on the west, are mirror images of each other."

Cooney says at the request of the owners, the house was precisely aligned to face due magnetic north. This precision meant there was

no margin for error, and new technology was incorporated to ensure measurements were exact for perfect alignment.

To accommodate the gradient, the house sits on two levels, with the main living area on the upper level. Price says the house was designed to go through the ridge on the hill, rather than sit on top of it, so the building appears one level from the driveway. While the house was always designed to nestle into the ridge, now that the extensive landscaping is taking shape, the house is beginning to grow back into the land, which helps disguise its size.



The architect says the house, although large, needed to be flexible enough to accommodate a crowd of 14, or sufficiently intimate for just one person in residence. Consequently, it is designed for formal gatherings as well as casual beach house family living.

The centrepiece of the living room, or great room, is a fireplace made from local stone, which soars 7m to the vaulted ceiling beneath the pitched roof. Natural materials also feature on the ceiling, and all overhangs, which are lined with island kauri.

All the main rooms, including family living



Above: Tumbled limestone tiles from Turkey feature both inside and out, enhancing the seamless flow from the great room on the upper level. High glass above the 8m-wide opening ensures the interior receives plenty of natural light, even with the large overhang.

Left: The architectural symmetry is apparent in the main entry on the lower level. Other rooms on this floor include a theatre, bedrooms, wine cellar and games room.



areas on the lower level, open to large terraces and stairs leading to a cantilevered infinity-edge pool. The great room has an 8m-wide opening for an easy indoor-outdoor flow.

Cooney says access constrictions meant the landscaping was built before the house, and the palm trees craned in right at the start of the build, which was treated like a commercial, rather than a residential project.

"The sheer size of the house and the weight of the roof meant it needed to be engineered and constructed like a commercial building, with concrete beams and posts cast in situ."



Facing page: With its soaring pitched roof, stone fireplace surround and island kauri-lined ceiling, the great room has a strong visual impact.

Above: A coffered ceiling in the formal dining area echoes the shape of the table.

Left: The kitchen features a large island-style peninsula. Brazilian granite benchtops are paired with timber veneer cabinetry.



Architect: Neville H Price, ANZIA, Neville H Price + Associates (Kerikeri)
Interior designer: Andi Wheeler
Builder: Eddie Cooney, Black Watch Construction
Pool and spa design and construction: Hydrazzo in Mediterranean Blue from SSL Group, built by Stonecraft Construction
Pool tiles: Winckelmans in Matt French Blue
Sauna: The Sauna People Co
Kitchen designer: Italy & Kitchens
Exterior cladding: Sika plaster system; timber stained with Resene Woodsman
Roofing: Antique Italian tiles sourced by architect; Hitchins waterproofing system to flat roof
Doors and windows: Vantage Aluminium Joinery
Flooring: Limestone tumbled tiles from Turkey, sourced by architect
Wallcoverings: British Plasterboard, from Trowel Trades Albany
Interior paints and varnishes: Porters Paints Interno lime wash
Lighting: ECC Lighting
Heating system: Warmfloor Heating Systems; Real Fire fireplaces; air conditioning in theatre and wine cellar supplied by Clarkson Electrical
Blinds: Shutters by Weathermaster Northland
Kitchen cabinetry: Timber veneer
Benchtops: Brazilian granite sourced by architect
Refrigeration: Liebherr; wine refrigeration by Vintec
Ovens, cooktop, ventilation and barbecue appliances: DCS
Dishwasher: Bosch

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Left: Both the guest houses have private terraces. Rooms within the tower elements have double-height ceilings that create a spacious, airy feel. Several of these rooms, including some tower rooms in the guest houses, accommodate bathrooms. In the master suite, an elevated spa bath is positioned within a tower with a window providing extensive views.