

SATURDAY

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WE HELP YOU BUILD

Back to the bush

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The modular sofa from Jordan blends into the wall, drawing your focus to a framed photo by Phillip Philippou. The window frame at the far end almost looks like an artwork.

Off the grid gets gorgeous

A sympathetic interior scheme is a blueprint for a new and beautiful way to live outdoors, writes **Robyn Willis**



Put simply, there's nothing ordinary about this project. A country escape for Carnival Australia executive chairman Ann Sherry and her family, the 242ha site in the Southern Highlands was already home to a pair of 'shacks' which Ann and her family had installed on the site 10 years ago.

Designed by New Zealand architect Ken Latona and constructed by Smart Shax, the dwellings are completely off the grid, with no access to town water or electricity. There's no glass in the windows, only screens and wooden shutters to guard against the threat of bushfires. Veteran landscape architect William Dangar created a garden that also complied with fire restrictions, as well as being both beautiful and low maintenance.

Ann says it has always offered a sense of being in the environment while maintaining their need for sanctuary.

"This is one of my happy places," Ann says. "You can see the stars at night and there's so much wildlife — I feel good when I am here."

From the outside in

While the garden was looking better than ever, after 10 years the interiors were looking a little tired. Interior designer Karen Akers had already worked on the owners' city home so she was an obvious choice when a refresh was in order.

"We use it all the time but it needed a bit of zing — and Karen is fantastic with colour," Ann says.

Karen took her cues from the site, bathing the two properties — with three bedrooms between them — in a eucalyptus green colour called Te Aroha from Dulux.

"The whole house was white when I got there but I wanted to bring the outside inside and view the whole site as one," says Karen.

"That colour green is quite intense but it doesn't read like that en masse.

"I covered the sofa in the same colour to make the space feel bigger when there is so much going on."

Alan Mullany from Mullany & Co slept on site for five days to complete the painting.

Keeping the colour scheme simple and sympathetic to the outdoors meant that the interiors worked with the landscape rather than against it.

"You try to keep the palette monochromatic with minimal features so that the outdoors remain as one of the elements (in the design)," Karen says.

"If there's too much going on, your eye just can't settle."

The integration of indoor and outdoor spaces has been so successful that you have to look twice at the window in the main living area to be sure that it's not a painting.

When art meets nature

Art has been a key part of this design with Karen drawing on the collection of indigenous art Ann and her family had kept in storage.

"They had a large collection of indigenous art which I welcomed, especially in this





Art meets function in the spectacular handwoven pendant light suspended over the timber dining table.



PROJECT

Owners

Carnival Australia executive chairman Ann Sherry AO and her family

Designer

Karen Akers
karenakers.com.au

The problem

A beautiful off-the-grid property that was looking tired

The site

A large site with views in the Southern Highlands

Design solution

A new colour scheme using the owners' art collection

How long did it take?

Two months

THE SOURCE Houses on site Smart Shax, smartshax.com.au Garden William Dangar, williamdangar.com.au Walls Te Aroha from Dulux, dulux.com.au Painter Mullany & Co 0420 750 231 Quilt covers Vintage linen range from Adairs, adairs.com.au Dining room pendant light Hand woven light by the Tjanpi Desert weavers from Koskela, koskela.com.au

environment because it really suits the bush location," Karen says. "Some of those pieces Ann had tucked away since the '70s and '80s and they had not seen the light of day since."

Karen had some of the works reframed to give them a contemporary edge and then used the artworks as inspiration for the rest of the design scheme.

"The living room rug is Moroccan but I love the pattern in it and the colours, and there's a casualness to it that I wanted to bring to the room," she says. "It connects well to the Aboriginal artwork as well."

In the dining room, Karen chose a large and spectacular handwoven light pendant made by indigenous women and available from Sydney retailer Koskela.

"Having previously worked with these clients, it was partly a case of 'whatever you think'," Karen says. "The light fitting wasn't cheap but they love it."

In keeping with the relaxed casual feel the owners were aiming for, furniture is light and flexible while linen quilt covers from Adairs add a bit of textural luxury.

Since the work finished, Ann says their country retreat is more popular than ever, including with the local wildlife like wombats, wallabies and koalas.

"We always feel a part of the outside — which is what I love about it."

Pictures Thomas Dalhoff

Daily Telegraph



The Moroccan rug picks up the bright colours of the bush