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# Top-Shelf Country Living

Words: Victoria Tait, Photography: Sarah Rowlands

## What was the brief for this design?

The site for this project is very exposed given its open rural setting. So, the brief was quite rigid in its requirement for shelter and privacy. The budget wouldn't stretch to the luxury of large landscaped bunds and structures in conjunction with the house construction. It became apparent quite early that a courtyard layout was going to work best in this situation. Sheltered landscape planting and land formation would be undertaken by the client in due course.

Spatially, this form also lent itself best to their requirement for a distinct separation from the bedrooms to the living portion of the house.

Sick of getting robbed in New Zealand by power companies they had asked to ensure the heating was less reliant on the "grid". As water heating is a sizeable component of the average power bill and there was no desire to go gas, we developed an old-school train of thought with modern technology. A wood-fired wetback system backed up with solar hot water (evacuated tubes) on the roof for the summer months was adopted. They are by no means off the grid, but certainly happy with the outcome. The wetback also charges the hydronic system in the exposed slab throughout the living and bathroom areas. It is at its absolute maximum for the 6kW and square area it is servicing.

Materially, the brief was uncomplicated and honest, leaving it pretty much up to me. The okoume plywood and cedar batten cladding were derived for their economy construction efficiency as was the commercial-grade roofing. The exposed slab and other interior finishes are left as practical as possible for a relaxed family farmhouse.

## How did the rural setting influence the design?

The photo [top image] that Sarah (Sarah Rowlands Photography) took for my ADNZ | Resene Architectural Design Awards entry that really captures what I was trying to achieve in the design from an exterior perspective. It's a long-distance shot with the frame just clipping the pasture line and the house poised against the tall trees to the south. I think in that photo, for me at least, the ideas I put on paper with the rural setting in mind have worked.

### **Can you describe the ultimate vision you had for this project?**

I wanted to design a house that sat nicely on the landscape, but also had a presence. One that evoked a smile upon entry, didn't burden them financially but, most importantly, made the owners house-proud.

## Did you know you were designing an award-winning home?

Hell no! I knew, as the spaces were coming together and the finer details were being finished off, that we had something special. The owners were stoked, and the builders (Sinclair Builders Ltd) were proud, as they should be. There was some tricky detailing that they've completed very well.



### **Were principles of sustainability considered and/or implemented?**

Where possible materials and products used were assessed on their sustainable merits, but we certainly did not start out with the intention of applying for accreditation in this field upon completion.

### **Are there any unique features within this home?**

Well, obviously the two cedar bay windows on the north gables make somewhat of a statement. Functionally, they work well in both the lounge and main bedroom as great spots to chill and read a book in the sun, watch the weather change or, as they've discovered this past spring, rain shelter underneath for the lambs. There are quite a few little details that you probably wouldn't notice at first glance, but this is what I enjoy; the making, putting things together, in unorthodox ways.

### **What is your favourite feature of the house?**

I do love the bay window seats, but also a couple of steel and timber shelving units I designed within the lounge and main bedroom wardrobes. These I installed myself with the clients one weekend. They consist of folded 5mm plate steel and American white oak timber all held together with bespoke wedge connections. It's certainly very satisfying when these little details come together, and the desired result is met.

### **Were there any major hurdles to overcome – be they structural or location based?**

The only real issue that comes to mind is meeting the new Waimakariri District Council floodplain heights: we had to elevate the slab. So, this resulted in quite a bit of extra concrete in one particular area as the bearing capacity required us to go deeper. It also put a delay in the construction programme. However, other than that, and a few dramas with the concrete polisher, everything went ok.

The Springbank Downs house was the national winner of the Residential New Home Between 150sqm And 300sqm category at the 2016 ADNZ | Resene Architectural Design Awards.