



OPEN & INTIMATE

"THIS IS OUR 25 YEAR HOUSE,"
SAYS DALLAS DAMS OF THE MINDEN
HOME THAT CEMENTS THEIR ROOTS
IN THE BAY OF PLENTY.

By Liz Fench; Photography; Monika Hilleary



Dinner guests will notice that once the meal is served the lights in the kitchen lower, those over the dining area focus and soften and exterior landscaping is highlighted. They won't notice that Richard touched the words 'dining scene' on his screen as he nonchalantly strolled past.

The monitor also helps keep the home energy efficient. When there is no one staying the guest wing can be shut down. Yet one touch will have heated towel rails warming the minute overnight visitors arrive.

No need to turn on the computer for the latest news and weather on the 'net. The magical monitor is also connected to the outside world.

While Richard encourages salivation over the wonders of technology coffee and biscuits appear on the thick composite stone bench. It's good coffee too, yet there is no sign of a coffee maker. This is because behind the sleek public kitchen is Dallas' pride and joy, a wide galley, not a butler's pantry but a full second kitchen where all the dirty work takes place at the second sink in the stretch of stainless beside a cupboard containing everything that plugs in, and opposite a wall of lacquered storage space.

Storage may seem boring but it is exactly that which enables this family to be untidy tidily. Cupboards scarcely noticed swing open to reveal the stuff of a busy life. Enough shoes for a centipede line the shelves in the country house inspired back porch.



RICHARD DAMS is English. Dallas is a kiwi. In 2001 Richard took a trip through China. Dallas was tour guide. Back in England their friendship evolved into romance, marriage, and a move back to Dallas' home country. They tried Auckland first but soon realized that the Bay of Plenty held what they were looking for in life.

After numerous forays down to view property one thing became clear. Every house that was even close to the vision they had for their future home bore the Brendon Gordon signature. They met the man and found him as good as his work.

The focus moved to finding a perfect site. This two-and-a-quarter acres cut off a farm above the Minden lookout had no drive formed, no site preparation done, lots of imagination needed, but views worth crossing the world for. Brendon was brought for a look. They agreed on its potential to create a one level home that encompassed the wish list and practical needs of a young family.

In May last year - endless hours of planning, 80 truckloads of pumice and two years of construction later - the Dams family moved in.

In this expansive home, where floating ceilings soar and double height windows frame panoramic views, there is one small feature with a big job. A monitor set in the wall beside the kitchen is its nerve centre. The bunch of wires that end behind this box touches every aspect of this home. The glee with which Richard demonstrates it reveals a residual touch of teenage!

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A NEAT FREAK

Richard freely admits to being the neat freak. He's also safety conscious, a must with two energetic small boys. This may be an angular house but it's also a home with no jutting edges, nothing for kids hooning around to hurt themselves on.

The inset hearth of the lounge fireplace is just one example. The shelf set in the solid wall opposite is another. The fact that these walls mirror each other and provide an oasis of solid in a sea of glass; and that this room may be huge yet feels balanced and right is due to what Brendon in architectural speak refers to as "structural communication and scale of elements". While three stacking sliders link loggia on one side with breakfast patio on the other, the glazing surrounding the living end has been kept closed. "It forms an eddy beside the busy thoroughfare."

Jack and Flynn, three and two respectively, race their little motorbikes down the 46 metre hall innocent and uncaring that the tongue and groove ceiling above them took four weeks to install, one board at a time.



When the boys have disappeared from their playroom and an ominous silence descends the first place Dallas looks is the den. "They will be plopping balls down the pockets of the pool table".

While the rest of the home is all about light and outlook this room harks back to the cozy lofts of older buildings, right to the brick wall that could have been there for ever. While Richard realizes his dream of a den with a big pool table it also doubles as a library and is perfect for family time. "We all curl up on the couch together and watch TV," says Dallas.

This room is designed for evening gravitation, evidence of the thought that went into getting the right spaces in the right places. Now, morning sun warms the guest suite and streams across the kitchen. It bathes the living area most of the day then spends late afternoon in the master bedroom, and evening across the tennis court.

COMMUNAL SPACE

Independence and interdependence of spaces was also a priority, hence the home, at over 500m2, is at once open and intimate. "We can have two or three families staying with no stress," Dallas explains. "There is fantastic communal space but plenty of places to disappear." So it was no problem when Richard's parents stayed for five weeks over Christmas. On New Years Eve the family relaxed with a wine and a grandstand view of the fireworks at Mount Maunganui.



...MORNING SUN WARMS THE GUEST SUITE AND STREAMS ACROSS THE KITCHEN. IT BATHES THE LIVING AREA MOST OF THE DAY THEN SPENDS LATE AFTERNOON IN THE MASTER BEDROOM, AND EVENING ACROSS THE TENNIS COURT.





In a setting where the rise in the garden has been deliberately shaped to obscure the road, where continuing undulations and planes of hills frame the view to the harbour, it comes as no surprise that friends exchanged wedding vows on a golden December day on the wide flat lawn in front of the home. Yet the couple chose to have photographs taken in Dallas and Richard's bathroom!

Their chosen background was the screen doors, a "piece de resistance" in a home where restraint has dictated that colours are timeless and repeating themes keep décor seamless. Here bamboo encased in Perspex is doubly effective when reflected in the bathroom mirror opposite. Dallas is delighted with Brendon's flight of fancy.

Before this risks becoming a eulogy to the designer it should be stressed that project management was a team effort between Brendon, Richard and Dallas, and builder Bruce Armstrong. This is a home where the hidden is as important as the "in your face" factors. Richard's presence on site nearly every day meant small but vital decisions never stopped the work flow.

The Dams are thriving here. Brendon is satisfied that the home "combines classic aspects where symmetry and balance are resolved but also has some little surprises". Surprises like LED sensor "runway lights" that guide the night walker, a hidden "man space", a changing room bench in the boys bathroom, shelves within drawers...

When 25 years are have gone by and the boys have grown up playing on the all weather tennis court and cavorting in the pool, have left, then come home to marry on the lawn; will their parents really be able to leave the layers of memories for their long term plan of moving to "a little house at the beach"? ■