

EXTERIOR Set on a hilltop, Angela and Chris's bushland retreat offers panoramic views. White Lettini 'Slip-in' sun loungers from Top3 By Design are perfectly positioned to take full advantage of the Hunter Valley scenery. "I love being able to sit anywhere out on the verandah and soak up the amazing view," says Angela. >

ASPECT

*oriented*

Nestled in the heart of NSW's Hunter Valley, this remote and self-sustaining holiday home showcases its many eco attributes with contemporary style

STORY & STYLING MARY TEMELOVSKI PHOTOGRAPHY CATH MUSCAT

A tree-filled patch of bushland buried deep in the heart of the Hunter Valley in NSW is not where most of us would think to build a holiday home. Luckily, Angela Williams and Chris Medland are not most people. In fact, they plunged straight into the deep end, buying around 200 acres of affordable land in an area notorious for extreme temperatures, just two hours' drive north of Sydney.

Chris, who runs an engineering consultancy firm specialising in environmental and sustainable technologies, didn't balk at the challenge. "I wanted to prove it could be done and on this scale," he says.

"He's a 'can do' man," says architect Joel Farnan, whose firm Farnan Findlay Architects was commissioned to design the eco retreat. The engineer and architect had previously collaborated on an early renovation of Angela and Chris's Darlinghurst terrace and have worked together on other commercial projects. "They wanted a simple, no-frills green retreat that wouldn't sacrifice any of the creature comforts they are used to living with," says Joel.

In this secluded inland setting, the house is now at the end of a long winding drive from the front country gate, past a small cottage shack, then up a dirt track to the top of the mountain. "Our Wollombi builder thought he was the brunt of a colleague's joke when he was told the exact location of the house's intended site!" says Chris.

The house took 12 months to design and be approved by council and only nine to complete. "We wanted it to be a modern interpretation of the iconic symbols of the Australian outback, the old water tank and windmill; but instead of a windmill pumping water up from the tank, our wind turbine generates electricity for a TV, computers, the fridge, stereos, a dishwasher and washing machine," says Chris.

Angela, Chris and their boys Max, Oliver and Llewellyn love the peace of their hidden bush oasis. "We fit right in now," says Angela, laughing about their early days roughing it in the tiny solar-panelled cottage, often hotter inside than it was out. "It gave us the chance to observe the seasons here and get to know the place better," says Chris. "When our boys have grown up, we want them to look back and say to us, 'You built *this* here?'" For this family, the journey towards a greener life is almost as gratifying as the destination.

**CLEAN GREEN ENERGY** The home's remote location put a question mark over the issue of electricity. The cost of linking the house to the main power supply was prohibitive, especially when the environmental and financial impact of clearing two kilometres of bushland was added. Angela and Chris instead chose sustainable energy: "Our wind turbine generates electricity for all our household appliances while solar power panels and batteries, along with the satellite dish, incur no long-term power costs," says Angela. Also water conscious, Angela and Chris had four large rainwater tanks installed. "They hold 120,000 litres of water and are always full."



**DECK (top left)** "We enjoy having people here and entertaining in an informal way, so this space is perfect for relaxed lunches or dinners," says Angela, a furniture importer. Reclaimed Panton chairs surround the custom-built dining table, which features a tabletop made from the beams of an old warehouse. **LIVING AREA (top right)** "This space gets the most traffic, so I wanted to keep it simple and comfortable," says Angela. Her love of modern design brings together an Eames lounge chair, a Murai stool from her business, Youshiki, and an Anthologie Quartett light **(bottom right)**. "I couldn't resist it," she says. A Saarinen dining table from De De Ce and Arne Jacobsen 'Series 7' chairs finish the sophisticated look, in front of a double-sided Chiminees Philippe fireplace built into the freestanding feature wall. **CORRIDOR (bottom left)** In summer, the heavy grey slate wall keeps the bedroom wing cool, while a slow-combustion wood burner keeps the bedrooms warm in winter. >



**KITCHEN** (this page) Angela and Chris initially wanted a stainless-steel benchtop, but found this ironbark top by accident on a visit to a local carpenter's workshop – it took eight men to carry it into the house! “The top was cut from a tree 120 years ago – I love the grain and texture,” says Angela. A freestanding bench was custom-built to accommodate the remarkable find, with a sink from The Sink Warehouse adding a modern touch.



**VERANDAH** (top left) With the roof providing shade in summer, the vast verandah also allows winter sun to filter inside. The down-pipes are mounted at a slight angle, creating the impression that the roof is also slanted. **BATHROOM** (top right) A combination of chocolate brown and rusty red complements the white walls of this bathroom, with sleek fittings from The Bath House a modern touch. A deep freestanding bath contrasts with the epoxy resin floor, while a Marimekko towel from Roundabout playfully picks up on the colour scheme. **MASTER BEDROOM** (below left) A Jeffrey Makin charcoal sketch draws the eye to the bedroom's taupe walkaround feature wall, while the bed, from Spence & Lyda, showcases Red Arne cushions from Kas Australia and an earthy-toned Bholu throw from Roundabout. A matching bedside table holds a Hoya cut-crystal white vase, a gift from Chris to Angela found on a business trip to Japan. “We wanted an easy space,” says Angela. >



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**BOYS' BEDROOM (below)** Loft beds, designed by architect Joel Farnan, in the boys' shared room feature found sapling trunks. The room is a hub of activity, especially if there are "sleepover parties, with air mattresses all over the floor," says Angela, pictured left. A lightweight and well-crafted Hollie table and chairs set from Angela's furniture business, Youshiki, is perfect for the space, with a vibrant 'Magic Forest' rug from Designer Rugs adding a splash of colour. For more details on Angela's imported designer furniture business, Youshiki, call 0413 749 368 or visit [www.youshiki.com.au](http://www.youshiki.com.au).



**SWIMMING POOL (left)** Angela and her son Louis take a dip in the infinity pool in complete privacy, thanks to the surrounding bushland. The pool, a key feature in the family retreat, was a "non-negotiable element," says Chris.

**EXTERIOR (below)** The home was designed as two separate wings – one for the open-plan living area, the other for three bedrooms, two bathrooms and the connecting middle deck outdoor dining space.



**NATURAL COOLING AND CENTRALISED HEATING** A low-hanging roof provides both shade and shelter, moderating the home's internal temperature, so no airconditioning is necessary. Grey slate masonry along the back shaded wall keeps the adjacent spaces cool. In cooler weather, a central slow-combustion wood burner heats up the bedrooms, with discarded branches readily available. The concrete slab flooring has high thermal mass, regulating temperatures by absorbing, storing and re-releasing heat energy.

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## Inside story

**Who lives here?** Angela Williams, 38, who runs Youshiki, a contemporary furniture import business; her husband Chris Medland, 44, an engineer and owner of an engineering consultancy firm; their sons Max, 11, Oliver, 10, and Llewellyn, five; and Toby, a beagle x King Charles cavalier. **What do you love most about the house?** Angela: "We wanted a house that was rough and tumble enough for the boys but also something nice for us. The house is very sensitive to its location; it captures all the breezes but also blocks out the most likely

directions of potential bushfires. It's also an easy house to keep clean with very little dust, because the air is so clean up here. **What's the smartest design feature?** "We designed a bushfire detection system. An SMS message to a mobile phone alerts us of any potentially hazardous weather conditions. By logging onto a webcam, a water pump can be switched on remotely. It covers every window, the eaves at the back of the house and the entire roof. The house can be drenched in water from all the rainwater tanks for up to

an hour and a half. The pool and dam in front of the house can also be drained." **Do you miss having neighbours?** "Well, we're surrounded by native wildlife. We're always spotting wallabies, koalas, echidnas, lyrebirds or watching eagles soar above us in the sky." **Do you entertain much?** "Friends and family visit, and Chris even has staff conferences up here. We've become good friends with our builder and locals, who sometimes drop by to socialise or for a swim in the pool."

ILLUSTRATION [WWW.KENZEDESIGN.COM](http://WWW.KENZEDESIGN.COM)

