



EARTH & SKY

A dramatic Waiheke home combines all the elements of its owners' creative vision – from Japanese-style bathing to an indoor waterfall

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THIS PAGE William and Alice, two of Louise Thomas and Michael Holden's three children, stroll past the waterfall in the atrium of their Waiheke Island home; the front entrance is in the background and entryways on either side lead to the two bedroom wings. **OPPOSITE** The infinity pool is five metres wide, narrowing to four metres as it heads towards the sea and surrounded by similarly tapered decking; the idea, says Michael, is to draw the eye to a vanishing point.

THIS PAGE The Charles and Ray Eames recliner (centre), a present for Michael on his 50th birthday, is perfectly positioned to view the tapered pool and vista beyond. >



THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) "At night the sound of the waterfall is magical and peaceful as we sit by the fireside with the candles lit," says Louise. The swing seat is on the downstairs deck off the main living area. The walls are made of earth and the ceilings and floors are concrete, with internal pillars spanning two storeys. Louise and Michael.





THIS PAGE The dining room table is from Apartmento in Auckland; the end chair belonged to Michael's English forebears who emigrated to Port Waikato in the 19th century.

THIS PAGE (from top) William, left, at play with his chums Lucas and Tomas Ofman; the play area is flanked by the 10m tall pillars, each housing an open fireplace. The kitchen, from where many a vegetarian feast is served.

LOUISE THOMAS SUSPECTS that a climbing wall would have been just the ticket in her family's stunning Waiheke Island home. After all, it would solve the small dilemma of how to change the light bulbs high on concrete pillars stretching 10m from the living room floor.

The children would have loved it, she's sure... just as they love being able to ride their bikes and scooters inside the house. They have the perfect track – 18 metres from one end of the house to the other, and it's all concrete.

The biking journey would have included water-crossing if Louise and her husband Michael Holden had persisted with their original plan to include an internal stream dissecting their main living area. The stream was to have connected the waterfall inside with the swimming pool outside.

Though the stream didn't eventuate, the infinity pool did and so too did the waterfall within, positioned where the atrium entranceway meets the main living area.

The home Louise and Michael share with their three children – Phoebe, 14, Alice, eight, and William, five – spans 850sqm and is made of rammed earth, poured earth and concrete.

It took six men three years to build. When Michael's schedule as an Air New Zealand pilot allowed, he took up his tools and helped the builders with tasks such as constructing the rammed earth pillars.

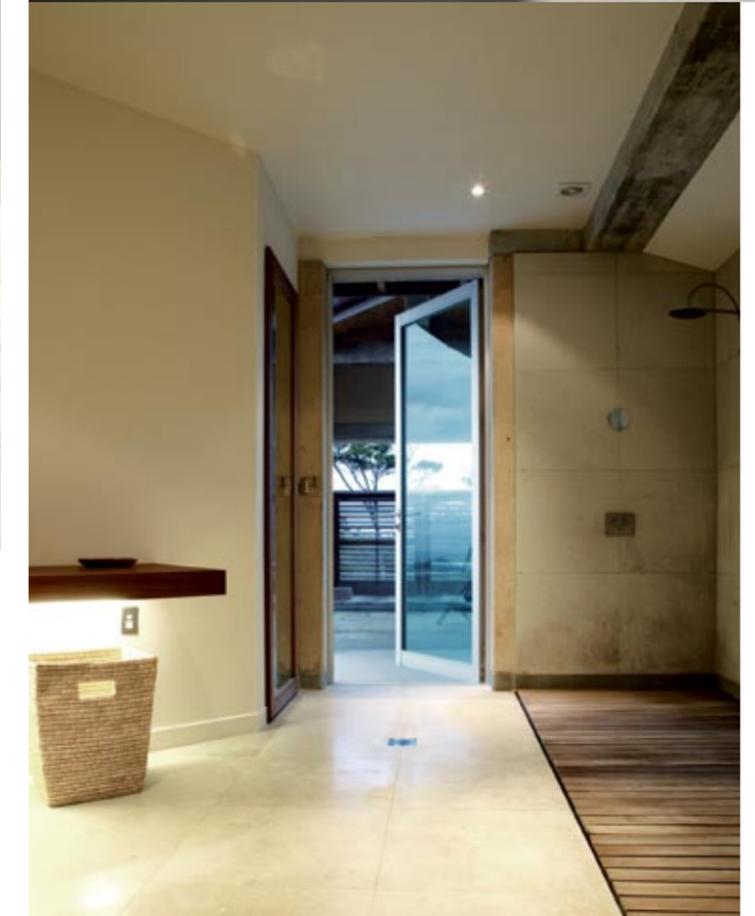
"We built the house into the side of a hilltop. We dug a slice out and then used that earth mixed with fine metal and a small percentage of cement to form rammed earth. That then was forced into place with a jackhammer-like rammer. It was definitely labour-intensive and time-consuming," says Michael.

The home's planning stage wasn't any speedier. Their initial resource consent had lapsed long before Louise and Michael presented their architect, Harry Kleyn, with some original ideas and scale drawings.

Louise recalls major thinktank sessions over the years as their ideas were refined. >



THIS PAGE (from top) The outdoor fireplace is a great vantage point from which to view Pakatoa and Rotoroa islands, with the Coromandel Range in the distance. Long interior stretches of concrete make for good biking; the bookcase is between entranceways to the guest and media rooms.



“In the beginning, we put forward any ideas we had and everything we wanted in a house, to create a melting pot of ideas. This was important as hopefully it’s the last house we will ever build,” says Louise.

The house plans became more minimal and less “over the top” over time, she says. Ideas such as the little stream were shelved, as was the bridge to the double, copper front doors.

But some of Louise’s ideas were never going to be abandoned. Earth as a building material was a must, as were Japanese-style bathrooms and a sparsely decorated house dressed in natural colours.

“I have liked earth buildings forever. Because they are porous, they breathe and have such lovely energy,” says Louise. “Michael had never seen one. I dragged him to a weekend workshop on earth houses and he was sold.”

Both now enthuse about their home’s elemental aspect. With fireplaces, a waterfall and swimming pool and an earth building that breathes, they have the earth, fire, water and air bases covered. >

THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) Phoebe and Alice soak in their mum’s Japanese bath on the upstairs deck; the children’s wing also has a deep bath in Japanese style. The master bedroom has a panoramic view; the bedrooms are one of the few places where paint was used. The master en suite has two showers positioned over the wooden slats; the door leads to the Japanese bath outside. Phoebe enjoys the sauna adjoining her mum and dad’s en suite.



As for the minimalist decor, once again Michael needed coaxing. It wasn't how he initially envisaged his house would be and Louise confesses to resorting to some "pretty fast and convincing talk".

Furniture is minimal, knick-knacks have no place and surfaces are usually home to nothing more than books or eco-friendly candles. The large expanses of earth walls are naked.

"It's not that I don't like art," says Louise. "I love art. It's because there it is, outside the windows, and you just can't compete with that."

The view from the Holden-Thomas home is hugely blue, uninterrupted and literally stunning.

"First-time visitors sometimes come in the back door, which is an understated entrance. When they see this view, their jaws drop and there is often silence," says Michael.

His favourite chair is positioned to maximise the outlook, facing out over the 20m-long swimming pool to the Hauraki Gulf. It's a particularly magical place to be, he says, at the equinox when the sun rises dead centre beyond the pool.

Louise finds magic in her Japanese-inspired bathrooms with their extra-deep bathtubs. She has a degree in Japanese and worked as a teacher in Japan and as an Air New Zealand flight attendant and interpreter. Her three years in Japan left her with a love of the Japanese bathing aesthetic – "the loveliness of a long shower and then a deep soak".

The couple are also working towards self-sufficiency and sustainability. Their house sits on 4.6ha of mostly regenerating native bush although areas have been dedicated to producing vegetables,



fruit and grapes – they have planted a vineyard that produces a high-end boutique syrah.

Being connected to, but not reliant on, the national grid is their goal and that will involve more solar panelling and a windmill, says Michael. Already the concrete floors on both levels are heated by a wetback boiler plus water pumped from solar tubes and the pool's warmth comes from solar panels.

Their site includes other buildings that are in line with their earthy ethos, including a two-storeyed rammed earth building with accommodation upstairs. It works well when Michael's older children, Nicola, Samuel and Tori, come to visit. The couple's main builder, Steve Kruff, also lived there for years. Downstairs is a man cave complete with drums, electric guitars and pool table.

Alongside is a mudbrick structure that was to have been a stable and instead became home while their new house took shape – it was supposed to be for a year but their stay ended up stretching beyond six years. But this family are in no doubt that some great things are definitely worth the wait.

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THIS PAGE The east-facing house is curved to suit the site; it is based around two D-shaped semi-circles with the upper one smaller than the lower to allow for an upstairs verandah.

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left) William at play; the wall behind him is made of earth. Phoebe doesn't share her mum's preference for unadorned walls. Alice with pet rabbit Bugsy. The house has an outside fire, two open fires in the main living area, one in the master bedroom and this one in Phoebe's room.

At the moment we are enjoying drinking: Our own wine... and eating fruit and vegetables from our own gardens.

Our happiest day in this house was: The day William was born in the outdoor Japanese bath.

My favourite kitchen appliance is: The E61 Rocket espresso machine. (Michael)

The best money we ever spent was: Solar heating for the pool. (Louise)

The best time of the week is: Waking up on the weekend and enjoying a cup of tea in bed watching the sun rise over the Coromandel Range. (Michael)

My favourite time of the day is: Sitting in the Eames chair in the late afternoon, looking over the pool. (Michael)

Michael Holden and Louise Thomas