

# INSIDES

INSPIRING HOMES WITH HEART

## ROOM TO *IMPROVE*

A granny flat, a duplex and a light-filled basement transformation

## BEDROOM RULES

GREAT  
SPACES FOR  
TEENS AND  
IN BETWEENS

## EMBRACING CONSCIOUS DESIGN

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# AGAINST THE ODDS

A remarkable new passive house in Melbourne is proof that you should never give up on your dreams


WORDS JACKIE BRYGEL PHOTOGRAPHY MARNIE HAWSON STYLING BELLE HEMMING

## cheat sheet

**Who lives here** Felicity and Marc Bernstein, interior designer and architect at Melbourne Design Studios, with their children — Anna-Lena, 16, Leon, 12, and Joshua, 10 — plus goodles Charlie and Sox.

**Style of home** A Passive House Premium property over two-and-a-half levels.

**Location** Inner north Melbourne, on land traditionally owned by the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

 The new build took three years from design through to completion.



**OUTDOOR AREA** Felicity and Marc with (from left) Joshua, Leon and Anna-Lena in their super versatile garden. Its tiny, angular footprint accommodates entertaining and relaxing areas. Table, Early Settler. Chairs, Facebook Marketplace. **STRUCTURE** (opposite) In line with their sustainable philosophy, the couple specified a mix of recycled and PGH 'Tribeca' bricks. Prefinished Vestis Nebula aluminium cladding by Architectural Metals Australia.





**W**hen Felicity and Marc Bernstein bought a small wedge-shaped plot of land adjacent to a train line in Melbourne's inner north, they were under no illusions. The interior designer and her architect husband realised that their plan for a sustainable 8.4-star, all-electric home on the unlikely site would require equal parts skill and stamina from everyone involved.

But the couple, who jointly own and run Melbourne Design Studios, could not have foreseen the hurdles that lay ahead. In particular, a setback of the most shocking kind that presented just weeks before the move-in date, when everything the couple had worked towards over the previous three years was literally in danger of going up in smoke.

"The home was at a point where it was liveable," says Marc, who was staying in a motor home with the family to save money throughout the design and build. "Then the freak accident happened. The most plausible theory is that, as we were working with a flame torch in the rear garden, a leaf must have caught fire and blown into the open cavity of the wall. A while later, we saw smoke coming out of the wall cavity at the other end of the house – the fire had taken over without anyone noticing. It was unbelievable – we were all in tears."

Remarkably, however, the house weathered the blaze, largely because of the fact that its walls and roof had been built of an ingenious material: prefabricated, carbon-storing cross-laminated timber (CLT). And so the project was not entirely derailed.

"Felicity was also very strong," says Marc. "She's a real powerhouse. And we didn't have much of a choice but to somehow soldier on."

The pair, who originally hail from Germany and moved to Australia in 2007, have always shared a passion for eco-friendly design. "Sustainable architecture was not really a thing when we first came to Melbourne," says Marc. "But even at that time, we thought we would love to one day push the barrel as much as we possibly could for our own family home."

That opportunity finally came in August 2017 when they heard about a block via an email from a real-estate agent. Just 250 square metres, the site on the bluestone lane wasn't exactly in demand. "Actually, no-one wanted it," recalls a smiling Marc. "But that was a great opportunity for us, as it meant it was within our budget, even though lots of people tried to talk us out of it! We had the advantage of being an architect and interior designer, so we could see the possibilities. It was a long battle with council, and there were compromises that had to be made, but I was fairly confident we'd get a permit in the end."

Their persistence was rewarded, with works commencing on site in late 2019. "Marc and I always shared the same vision – to create a sustainable house on a small footprint," says Felicity. "We wanted communal areas, as well as spaces for 'me time'." After all, says Felicity with a laugh, the family had already come to appreciate the true meaning of togetherness. "We will always have fond memories of our time in the motor home, but it wasn't easy, especially as we were living in it during lockdown in Melbourne, when we were home-schooling as well."



**DINING AREA** *Namatjira And Beyond*, a striking artwork by Richard Dunn, draws the eye across the space. Custom bench seat by Woodcraft Mobiliar. Ethnicraft 'Mikado' table, Trit House. Chairs, Facebook Marketplace. Pendant lights, David Trubridge. **SUNKEN LIVING** (opposite) An Ethnicraft 'N701' sofa from Trit House maximises the seating opportunities. Its inclusion was a suggestion from the project's construction facilitator, Home By Hutt. The custom plywood shelving by MDS was made by Vizbuilt. Nesting tables, also Trit House. Artworks by Richard Dunn. Standing sculpture by Ilona Herreiner.



“We wanted a house that was thermally comfortable as well as comfortable from a psychological and an emotional perspective”

FELICITY BERNSTEIN, OWNER/DESIGNER

**KITCHEN** (this page and opposite top) Marc and Felicity continued the Havwoods Abrego oiled flooring on the island's MDF joinery, ensuring a seamless visual connection. Benchtop and splashback, Sensa 'Taj Mahal' quartzite by Cosentino. Appliances, V-ZUG. Solid Pendant oak light, Artefact Industries. Curtain by Solis in Warwick fabric. Stools, Bar Stool Home.

**ENTRY** (opposite bottom) The facade is Ignite black embossed thermo spruce timber cladding from Bayswood Timber. Custom American-oak seat, DPR Joinery and Jensen & Row. Oak wall hooks, Amazon.



### good news

Sustainable and environmentally friendly materials top the bill here, including low-carbon concrete, wood-fibre insulation, cross-laminated timber, recycled bricks, triple-glazed windows and natural limewash paint.

Little wonder, then, that the family delight in their new home. An exercise in meticulous design and construction, the forward-thinking house on a 78-square-metre footprint attests to the importance of quality over quantity. As does the CLT structure, wood-fibre insulation and noise-reducing triple-glazed windows, all of which work efficiently to regulate the home at optimal temperatures all year round. The house also uses low-carbon concrete, as well as a heat-recovery ventilation system that delivers fresh, filtered air. “We really took a holistic approach with the materials, looking at what would be the best for both the environment and the building,” says Marc.

On the ground level, a beautiful kitchen and dining domain and serene sunken lounge provide a warm welcome to all. The second level houses the bedrooms, with each of the three double-height children's rooms offering an additional play and sleeping zone in the mezzanine roof space.

Seamlessly linked to the home, the verdant garden includes a fishpond and vertical edible garden, a large wood-fired barbecue fireplace by Jetmaster and an outdoor dining area. Meanwhile, a rain garden on the southern side of the home collects water that drips off a green roof. There's also a lush vertical garden in one of the bathrooms and a 'planter bedhead' in the main bedroom. “We definitely wanted to bring nature into the home,” says Marc. “That was super important to us.” Felicity adds: “Indoor plants also clean the air – we are meant to be in nature.”

Best of all, the sheer joyfulness of the design is evident, the result speaking for itself. “It's interesting how the building of the house has changed people's perception of this unusual little block of land,” says Marc. “The house has won everyone over.” **10**  
Melbourne Design Studios (MDS) is at [melbournedesigstudios.com.au](http://melbournedesigstudios.com.au)





lessons learnt

"DO REACH OUT FOR HELP"  
 FELICITY BERNSTEIN,  
 OWNER/INTERIOR DESIGNER

"When the house almost burnt down, we shared our emotional state with other people and there was an outpouring of help, from neighbours coming in with food to tradespeople making their time available to us. Without their help, we wouldn't have been able to do it. They were all very much part of our happy ending."

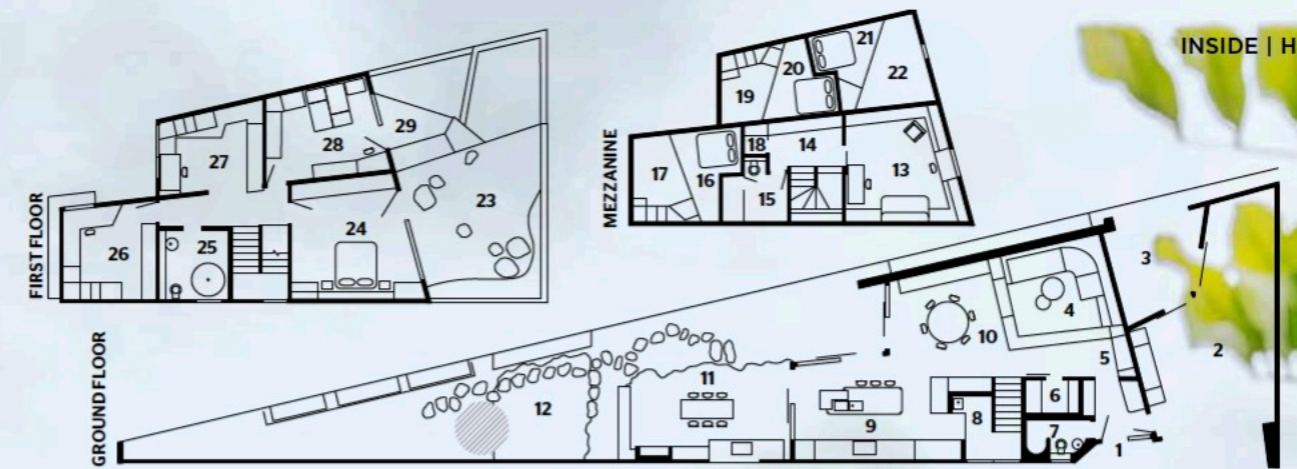


**STUDY NOOK** (above left) Just off the living area, American-oak surfaces are illuminated by recessed Lightcore LEDs.  
**MAIN BEDROOM** (above) Having snake plants behind the bed brings a retreat vibe to the space. Dekton panels by Cosentino face the cabinetry by Nuevo Kitchens. **ANNA-LENA'S ROOM** (left) All the kids' rooms have custom joinery made by Jensen & Row/Woodcraft Mobiliar and hammocks by OZ Hammocks. The netting, which can be played on, is by Bespoke Wire & Rope.  
**JOSHUA'S ROOM** (opposite) In the 'day zone' of the space is another hammock over a rug by Armadillo. **POWDER ROOM** (below) The wall, ceiling and floor tiles are Gelsomino Shading Blend mosaics by Bisazza. Falper washbasin, Rogerseller.



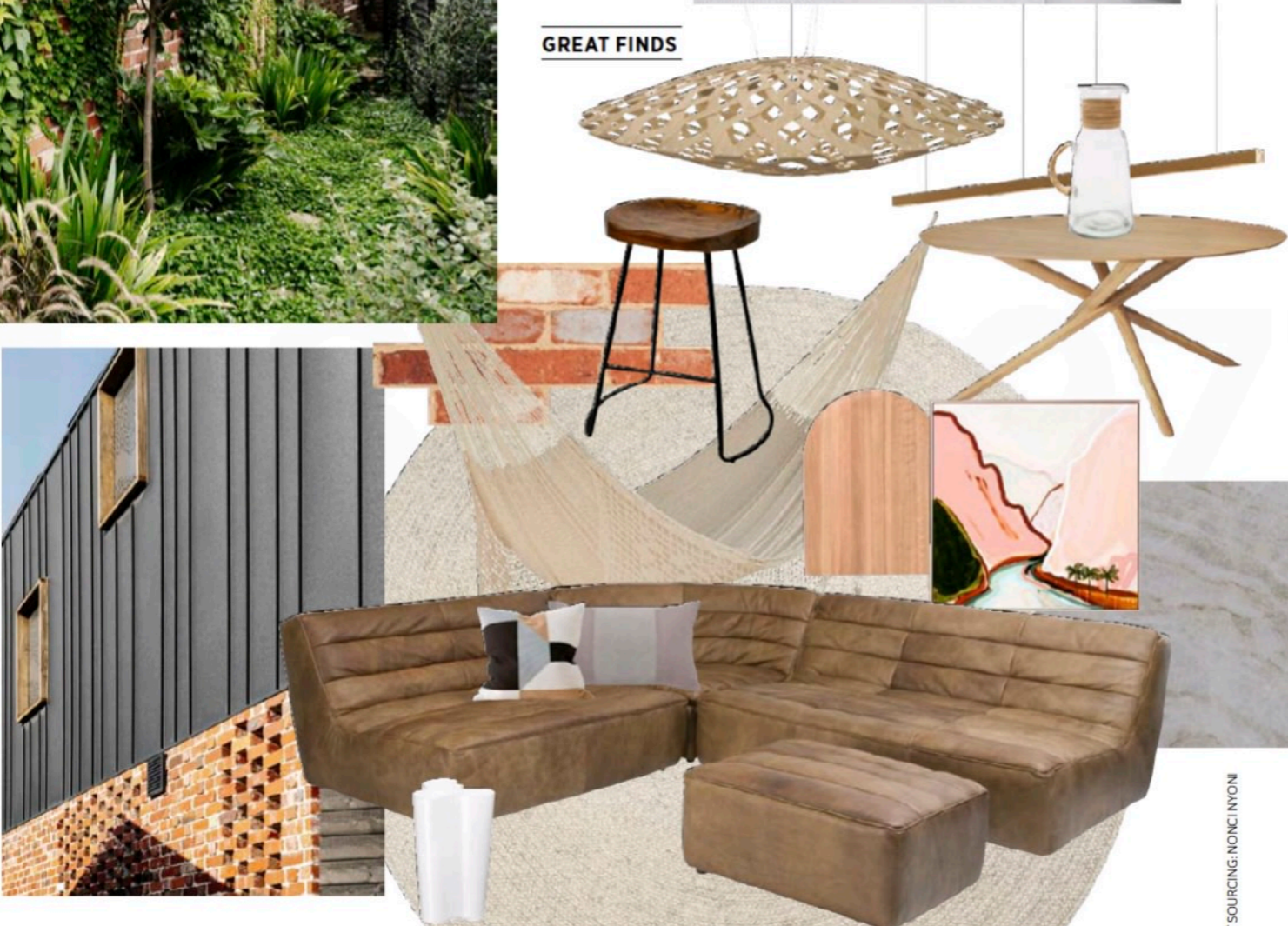


**GARDEN** (below and opposite) Eckersley Garden Architecture designed the outdoor space, constructed by the owners in conjunction with Ross Goodman Design. Key features are the vertical garden (filled with berries and herbs) by Aqua Gardening and Aquaponics pond by Aquaspaces. Crazy paving, Yarrabee Stone. Groundcover, dichondra and more. **BEDROOM** (right) Each of the kids' rooms has a light-filled work space and a sleep platform on the mezzanine above. Cross-laminated-timber ceiling by KLH, through Sustainable Building Supplies. Whitewash, Osmo. **EXTERIOR** (bottom) More standing-seam aluminium cladding from Architectural Metals Australia.



- INSIDE | HOME**
- 1 Entry
  - 2 Garage
  - 3 Rainwater garden
  - 4 Sunken living
  - 5 Study
  - 6 Laundry
  - 7 Bathroom
  - 8 Pantry
  - 9 Kitchen
  - 10 Dining area
  - 11 Terrace
  - 12 Pond
  - 13 Rumpus
  - 14 Landing
  - 15 Bathroom
  - 16 Bedroom
  - 17 Net
  - 18 Reading nook
  - 19 Net
  - 20 Bedroom
  - 21 Bedroom
  - 22 Net
  - 23 Roof garden
  - 24 Main bedroom
  - 25 Bathroom
  - 26 Bedroom
  - 27 Bedroom
  - 28 Bedroom
  - 29 Net

**GREAT FINDS**



**CLOCKWISE** (from top) Flax 800mm pendant light in White by David Trubridge, \$2060, Lighting Collective. Strix III LED pendant light in Teak, \$495, Beacon Lighting. Alejo Jug, \$65, Living Styles. Mikado oak dining table, \$3600, Ethnicraft. *Between Two Times* art print (110cm x 110cm), \$965, Jen Sievers Art. Taj Mahal granite, POA, Euro Marble. Timothy Oulton 'Shabby' sectional sofa in Safari Nutmeg, from \$1270, Coco Republic. Matheson cushion in Lauren, \$99.95, Weave Home. Alec mini cushion in Fossil, \$108, L&M Home. Braid wool and viscose rug in Chalk (182cm), from \$1000, Armadillo. Aalto vase in Opal White (25cm), \$359, Iittala. Manhattan 'TribeCa' bricks, POA, PGH Bricks & Pavers. Leyla & Sol cotton hammock with fringe in Cream, \$229, Temple & Webster. Artiss elm backless bar stool in Black and Dark Natural, \$245 for two, Theponcer. Città Design 'Sampa Arch' American-oak board, \$119 for large, RJ Living.

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