

# FRAME OF REFERENCE

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Taking its cues from the surroundings, this rural retreat sits comfortably in its environment



*The narrow floorplan and the careful siting of this shed-cum-shack allows intimate bushland glimpses to one side and ocean views across rolling hills on the other.*

**A** LEISURELY DRIVE AROUND THE southern Fleurieu Peninsula will find you passing through rolling pastoral landscapes interspersed with remnant bushland of gum trees and native grasses. Occasionally you'll be treated to glimpses of the Southern Ocean. Here the buildings tend to be classic stone farmhouses and galvanised iron shearing sheds, but a new home that combines the two recently joined the landscape.

Having purchased 40 hectares near Waitpinga, Gray and Barb Murray wanted a sustainable, off-grid home that sat easily in its environment. With views into the bush and down to the sea, the design needed to take advantage of the position and provide a connection between indoors and out. "We particularly wanted corrugated iron as one of the building elements and a

shack feel," says Barb. "We also wanted a house which had a flexible design to comfortably suit just the two of us ... or accommodating our large extended family."

The couple engaged Mountford Williamson Architecture to design a simple home of robust materials such as galvanised steel, fibre cement and sustainable hardwood. Central to the design is a breezeway connecting the main living areas – kitchen, living and master bedroom – with a guest bedroom and bathroom underneath a "bunk room" to cope with the overflow.

"The house needed to take its cues from the surrounding farm sheds rather than the typical suburban house, which would have been inappropriate given the location," says architect Martin Williamson.

"I felt the house needed an intermediate or transitional living space between inside and out to promote relaxed living. Rather than the traditional 'tack on' verandah around the house, it was cut through the





house. By keeping it under the main skillion roof the simple building form was maintained."

The breezeway's bi-fold doors and louvre windows provide ventilation in the summer heat, and a cosy sunroom on cooler days. Windows opening above the kitchen bench create a breakfast bar to easily cater for guests. Timber decking runs from front to back, meaning the space is never quite sealed off from the elements. "The breezeway is the most amazing recreational space, bringing the two sides of the home together, but also bringing the outside in," says Barb.

Gray has a particular affinity with the timber used so extensively in the design, having finished all the interior and exterior timbers himself ... with a little help from family and friends. He can now admit this may well have slowed the process for local builder Catalyst Homes, and will require on-going maintenance, but there's a sense he'd not have it any other way.

While the home is raised off the ground, leaving the natural topography intact, central to the living space is a wall of charcoal grey concrete that houses a minimalist slow combustion heater, using firewood gathered from the property to heat the home via a series of ceiling vents. The floating plinth on which the fire rests provided some

*Above:* The vast windows are designed to frame the views in different ways. The use of blackbutt on the floors, window frames and trims meets the owner's requirement to use sustainable materials. *Below:* Treading lightly on the site, the home appears to float above the landscape.



*Above and below:* The home comfortably houses the owners at one end with guest accommodation – connected by the breezeway – at the other, and all under one skillion roof. *Right:* The kitchen cabinetry, constructed from painted plywood, is topped with concrete poured on site. Bi-fold windows above the sink create a breakfast bar in the breezeway.



nail-biting moments when the concrete was poured on site and in position. Fortunately, all went to plan. They were not so lucky with the island benchtop, which had to be re-poured in the shed after unexpected hot weather caused the first attempt to fail.

The simplicity of the home's design belies its functionality and sustainability. Rainwater is collected and stored – essential in a high fire risk area – and wastewater is treated on site for use on the garden. Solar panels on an outlying shed produce electricity, stored in battery packs. The couple have had to adapt to live within the means of the home – dishes are hand-washed after everyone's showered, and the electric kettle had to go.

Such sacrifices are minimal compared to the pleasure the home has brought this family. "The house has so many unique and interesting design elements that no matter where your eye alights, there is something to look at and enjoy," says Barb. "The house brings us joy."

This home is an entrant in the 2016 Australian Institute of Architects (SA) Awards, to be announced on July 2.