

FARMHOUSE OF THE FUTURE

A blended family takes on farmhouse living that's less rustic and far more slick

■ WORDS / Danielle Townsend ■ PHOTOGRAPHY / Toby Scott

When Milly Davenport and her sons Tarquin and Felix met Andrew Wilson, they had been living in an old weatherboard cottage for six years. Over time, residing comfortably in the small, poorly designed house — which was falling apart — proved difficult for this family. They had outgrown the space and wanted to build on the site of the cottage located in Brookfield, Brisbane. Renowned for acreage, the location allows them to breed cattle, which was one of the main reasons they wanted to stay put in the area.

Their plan was for a modern farmhouse that kept the essence of their old home. “We wanted something a bit different,” says Milly. “We didn’t want a regular house.”

Working with the beautiful trees was a defining element of the home’s design. “What was really important to us was to capture that view [and] the views over the valley,” says Milly. “There’s a beautiful morning view and a beautiful afternoon view.”

“We liked a lot of concrete, a lot of glass, a lot of wood, a lot of stone,” says Andrew of their inspiration. And Milly has always loved concrete floors.

“You’ve got this beautiful land around,” says Milly. “So I think something that is modern, but almost has that ‘70s feel — really simple — will settle into the land a lot better than trying to reproduce a Queenslander again or brick and tile, which I don’t think is suited out here anyway. So when we say modern, we wanted something modern, but not something that would date.”

Andrew, a plumber/earthmover, built the home and worked with carpenter Hamish Goetz to do as much as he could to keep costs down. Hamish had built many houses, but never an architect-designed one. “It’s extremely challenging, I won’t deny that,” says Hamish of the build.

Andrew went outside his skill set to do as much as he could himself, using his own machines for heavy excavation of the block. “Doing the earthworks ourselves was to save money and at the end of the day, I had control over what was going on,” says Andrew.

As project manager, Andrew had a lot of responsibility and he found the challenge extremely rewarding and stressful. “I really jumped in the deep end here with this place. It’s one hell of an experience,” says Andrew.



“The original concept was to have timber on top and stone on the bottom of the garage end. We made the decision to wipe the stone, going for old-fashioned sand cement render instead”
— Andrew Wilson, owner

Design tip

The couple saved a considerable amount of money by abandoning their vision of stone and opting for cement render. This meant money could be spent elsewhere



■ **HOUSE** Brookfield Spotted Gum
■ **LOCATION** Brisbane, Qld
■ **COST** \$1.2 million
■ **DATE COMPLETED** 2014
■ **SERIES** 5 EPISODE 8

“To think this is something that two tradesmen can get together and build and not have issues — it’s just astronomically challenging,” says Hamish.

With the mathematically complicated design on the side of a hill next to the old cottage, even marking out where the house would sit was an obstacle. The irregular design defies the contours of the land by rising up as the hill falls. Even architect Shane Thompson, who designed it, questioned how it would be built. “We talked a lot about where the house would be positioned, it doesn’t really hit home until you actually have to put that blade into the ground,” says Shane.

The couple gave themselves one year to build and lived on top of the building site. At the end, they were to be married in the garden — no pressure!

Two weeks of rain made the site inaccessible, but gave Andrew time to slow down and consider his approach. The couple had a budget of less than \$1 million, however the excavation and concrete put them over budget.

With a lot of concrete and a lovely mix of materials, the finishing took time and

therefore cost money. The bottom of the house was going to be all stone, but to save money, Andrew and Milly made a huge compromise — one they said they’d never make. “The original concept was to have timber on top and stone on the bottom of the garage end,” says Andrew. “We made the decision to wipe the stone, going for old-fashioned sand cement render instead.” This meant they didn’t have to teach themselves stonemasonry, and they saved \$100,000 to spend elsewhere.

Rock would have had a real connection to the house — its colouration and richness would sit beautifully as its base. But they selected rough cast instead of a natural, connected material. This was a big change, especially because the whole premise was about context, connecting to the surrounding environment.

“We wanted a house that would sit in the setting,” says Milly. “It’s 10 times bigger than we ever envisaged it to be. In the end, when we realised it was going to be more difficult and more expensive, we came up with the concrete, but it’s still the colours of what you can see around here [that] match the wood beautifully.”



The kitchen opens up on sides thanks to bi-fold

The open-plan kitchen lets in streams of light, meshing the indoors with the outdoors



We love

That the kids have one end of the house and the parents have the other, with everyone meeting in the middle

"We wanted something a bit different. We didn't want a regular house"
— Milly Davenport, owner



At the northern terrace, the building bends to greet the view. But preparation for the steel frame proved problematic. "The hardest thing is it's not just a square box, there's so many angles, there's no two rooms that are parallel," says Andrew. Ten-metre steel beams weighing 700kg had to be lifted up and put on posts at nearly 3m high, with not one right angle. Once angles were calculated and recalculated, the steel arrived — the big-ticket item. However, the beams were 20mm out, and took a few weeks to align.

Spotted gum cladding was milled to Andrew and Milly's specifications — they used 3km on the exterior worth \$33,000. "We think it's a really good choice," says Andrew of the long boards. The timber, the biggest expression in the design, echoes the surrounding forest.

When the timber was ready for delivery, the frame to attach to it wasn't finished, with the lack of right angles still causing havoc. Beams were out of alignment and already in place, and fixing one angle had a knock-on effect on every other piece.

It was a battle to recreate the home exactly as it appeared on the plans. It was a very simple building on a slab, with stick frame walls and fairly modest in scale — 4-5m across the end of the house. But it's a building in two parts. As the house moves down the site, the difficulty and cost grew. At the end, the whole house is up out of the ground.

Catering to every family member's needs led to the complex design. The top end of the house

is embedded into the hill, but as the house moves further down, it grows in size rather than following the contours. The home projects out of the hill, its spotted gum frame shooting 40m out over the slope, extending from one level to three.

The long, skinny shape provides all family members with their own space. One end is for the teenage boys and includes their own living area. It connects to the pivot point of the house, a generous living/kitchen space that opens up on both sides via bi-fold doors and shutters — an area the family shares, with its decadent, laidback sunken lounge and enormous fireplace, which is the hub of the home. While the couple enjoy their own personal retreat, which has exclusive access to an enormous 5m-high floor-to-ceiling window.

The nose of the home rises 9m off the ground — a real statement in scale as the house gets higher and higher — and the way it sits on the hill is as if it's meant to be. "It actually looks right, it's meant to be here, cut into the side of the hill," says Milly.

The building is at one with the earth it sits on, a crafted object with a minimal palette of timber, concrete, copper and rough-cast render, and the timber upper-partition of the beautifully articulated building appears to float out of the hillside. "I love the look of it, I love the idea that the house has a real solidness to it and sits almost into the earth," says Milly.

There's an odd sense of scale in the design.

At a glance

Milly Davenport and Andrew Wilson's futuristic take on a farmhouse combines glass, timber and concrete. Built on acreage in Brookfield, it offers separate spaces for the couple and Milly's two sons, giving them independence and catering to each family member's needs

Ed's fave

The 3km of spotted gum timber cladding to the home's exterior echoes the surrounding forest



The couple's home is at one with the earth it sits in, with timber, concrete and copper featuring heavily in the house

"The rooms aren't big," says Milly. The house is only 6m wide, but a turn of the head offers views of the entire 40m length of the house, while the floor plan pivots just 5 degrees.

It's not a quiet house, so sections can be closed off and a long hallway runs down one side of the home.

The house is surrounded by nature and invites the wildlife in. "I love the light on the trees and how it changes throughout the day," says Milly. "The morning is just spectacular, unbelievable, majestic. It's like a picture — you couldn't paint it any better."

Creating something the family can call theirs is what the 15-month build was all about. The home feels clean and organised and there's a space for everything. It's a far cry from Milly's old rambling cottage, with the family squashed into what held her previous life. "It was a beautiful little home that served its purpose for a long time," says Milly.

While the cottage was Milly's, this new home is now both hers and Andrew's. "It feels like home, that's the most wonderful thing," says Milly. "It feels totally natural to be in the house. We're not missing the old house. It just feels like we're meant to be here."

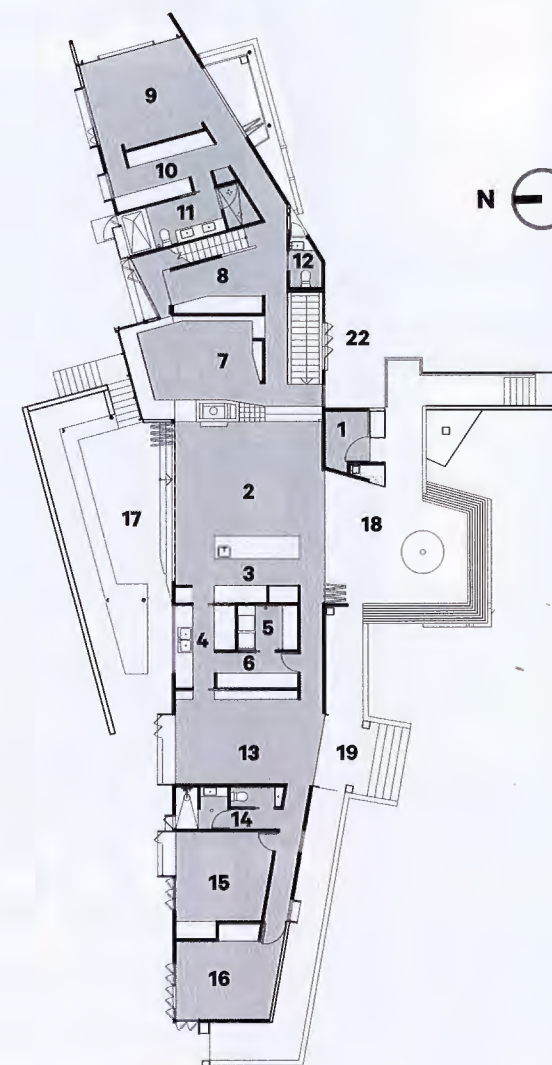
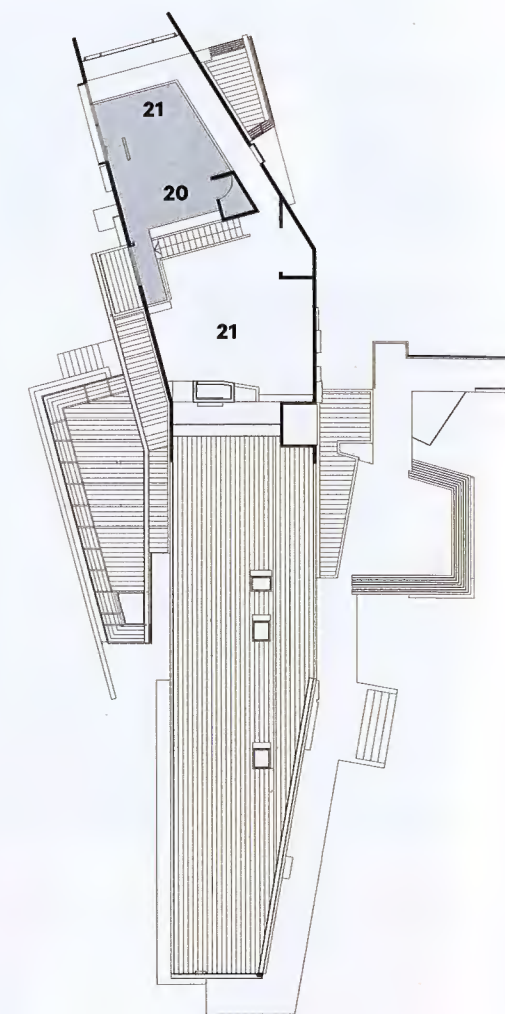
The total spend of \$1.2 million is \$400,000 more than the original budget, and the level of finish crippled the finances. But the quality of design and materials deliver a lifestyle unique to the family.

"[The building process] was definitely a bonding experience, we could have run away from each other a few times," says Milly. "Anyone is lying to say they don't feel stressed when building a house. It's not an easy process at all."

"Now we have to finish the garden, get married, close the doors and sit for a while — have a holiday in the house." And marry they did! ♡

LEGEND

- 1 Entry
- 2 Dining room
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Butler's pantry
- 5 Laundry
- 6 Store
- 7 Peace pipe pit
- 8 Office
- 9 Bedroom 1
- 10 Walk-in robe
- 11 Ensuite
- 12 WC
- 13 Family room
- 14 Bathroom
- 15 Bedroom 2
- 16 Bedroom 3
- 17 North terrace
- 18 South terrace
- 19 Family room terrace
- 20 Reading room
- 21 Void
- 22 Stairs down to garage, cellar and bedroom 4

**GROUND FLOOR PLAN****LOFT FLOOR PLAN****PROJECT TEAM**

■ **ARCHITECT** Shane Thompson Architects (shanethompson.com.au; 07 3252 1113)

■ **BUILDER** HHH Constructions (hhhconstructions.com.au; 0423 937 491)

FIXTURES AND FITTINGS

Appliances Newtons Home Appliances (newtonshomeappliances.com.au; 07 3394 4844) **Bathroom tiles** Ace Stone & Tiles (acestone.com.au; 07 5493 3344) **Cabinetry** Projects Queensland Interiors (projectsqld.com; 07 5564 9977) **Ceiling** Sharp Plywood (sharpplywood.com.au; 07 3718 6400) **Concrete benchtops/concrete bath** Pop Concrete (popconcrete.com.au) **Concrete floor polishing** My Floor (myfloor.net.au; 1300 693 566)

FURNITURE AND FURNISHINGS

Dining room light Christopher Boots (christopherboots.com) **Dining table** Christian Cole (christiancolefurniture.com.au) **Leather lounge/office daybed/master bed** Upholstery Worx by Jason (upholsteryworxbyjason.com.au; 07 3342 2786)

■ **SERVICES** Electrician Daniel Schmolli Electrical (0431 540 430) **Earthmoving** Homestead Earthmoving (0412 736 400) **Exterior cladding/timber** A Wood Shed (awoodshed.com.au; 07 3375 1726) **Exterior rendering/chimney rendering** Alan Pemble (0418 884 113) **Glazier** Harvey Glass (harveyglass.com; 07 3392 8697) **Joinery** Darra Joinery (darrajoinery.com; 07 3279 2477) **Painter** Mills Painting & Decorating (0414 733 431) **Plastering** Galligans Plastering (0406 771 378) **Plumbing/drainage/roofing** Homestead Plumbing & Roofing (0412 736 400) **Steel work/railings** Michael Chadwick (07 3374 2694) **Taps/basins/bathroomware** Reece Plumbing & Bathrooms (reece.com.au); Express Plumbing Supplies (07 3856 1100) **Tiling** DQ Tiling (07 3352 7043)