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Bill Musgrove and Christina Mackay in their Apple Bay bach. The wooden slats in the mezzanine library slide to the left to create a stage for performances.

Setting the stage



Bill Musgrove and Christina Mackay's Marlborough Sounds bach was designed for relaxation punctuated by the occasional bit of theatre. **Text Matt Philp Photography Paul McCredie**

It begins with the architect climbing a tree. Bill Musgrove and Christina Mackay had engaged Wellington architect Gerald Parsonson to visit their enviable building site, a hillside section of Musgrove family land at Apple Bay in the Queen Charlotte Sound. Enveloped by thick regenerating bush, Parsonson shimmied up a remnant pine to take the lay of the land. A pause, then his clients below received word that they were standing smack at the centre of their future bach.

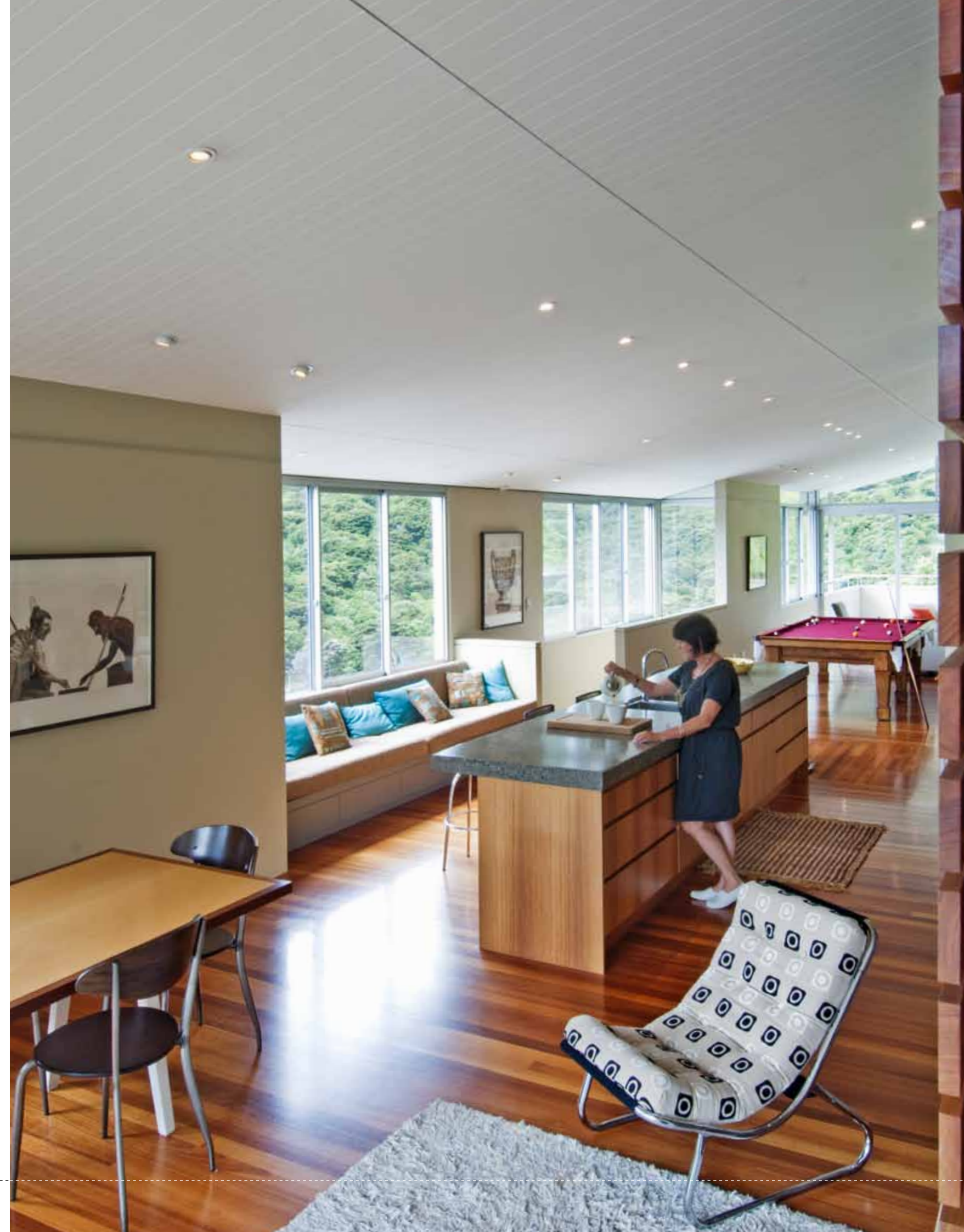
That sense of serendipity – you might say inevitability – at the project's beginning has carried through into the house, a recent winner of a NZ Institute of Architects' regional award. Stepped down the slope in the form of two offset pavilions – upstairs for living, downstairs for sleeping, connected by a linkway – it recedes among the pungas and five-finger as if it belongs there. Inside the house, you feel you could be on a platform in the bush. "We wanted to do something gentle," explains Gerald. "Rather than a house that sat there like a big lump, we wanted a finer, much more delicate thing." Christina adds that she and Bill also wanted a family house that "brought the outside inside". In fact, it was Gerald's reputation for designing houses that blur that boundary, confirmed by a visit to a house he'd done in Blenheim, that convinced them he was the perfect architect for their project.

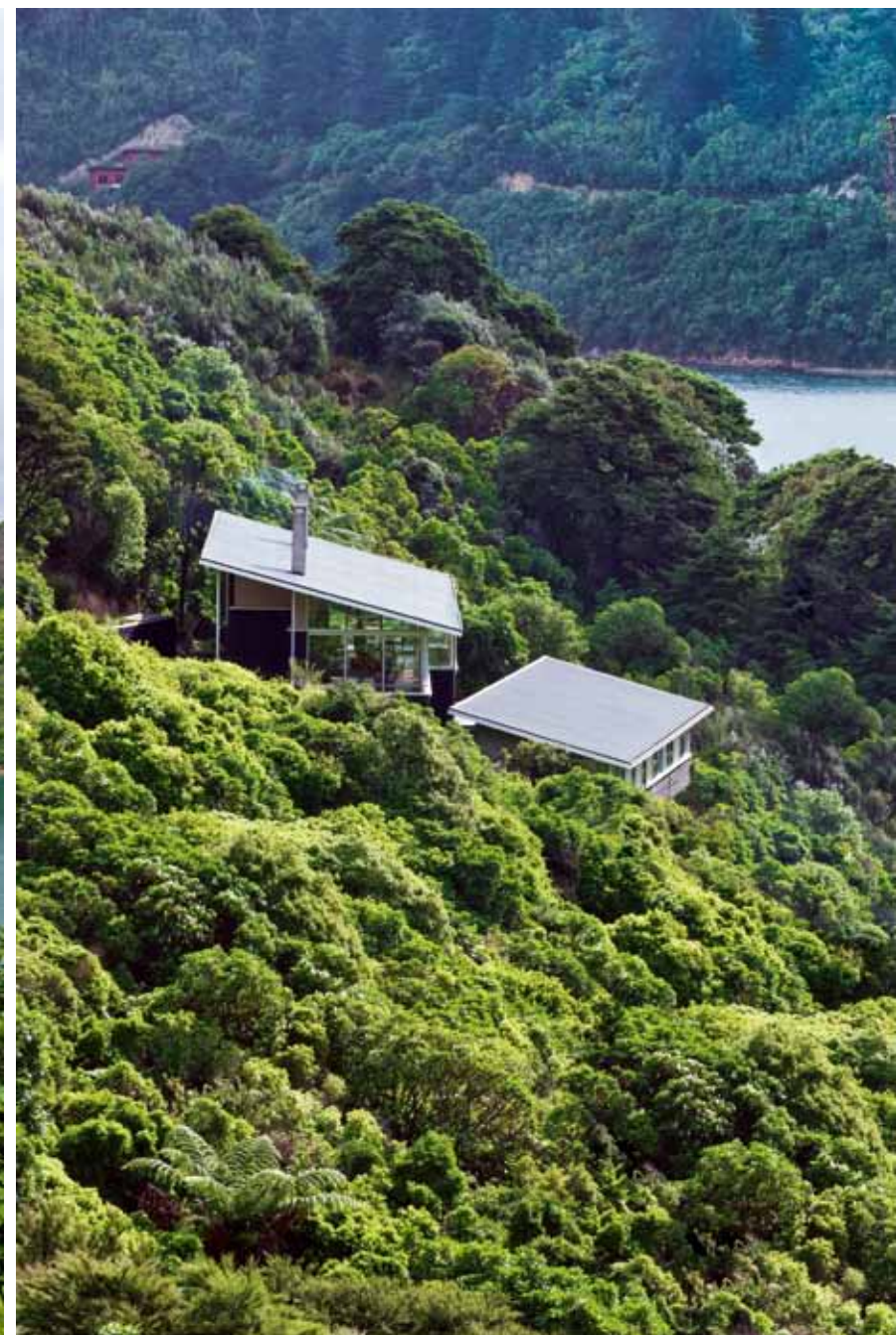
There was a third, more challenging requirement, the importance of which quickly becomes evident during our drive into the property, as Bill points out all the hard work that's been done to tackle wilding pines, replant natives and otherwise "encourage" the regenerating forest on land that has been in his family's hands since the 1930s. The bach had to minimise excavation and disturb as few of the site's trees as possible, he says. "We wanted to be 'put into' the bush, to work with the landscape rather than against it."

The combination of all those dictates drove the design in the direction of a pair of long, thin platforms, arrayed along the contours of the hillside and clad in dark-stained timber to recede into the shadows. Conventionally the house would be saddled with a



LEFT The pool table "took a bit of finding," says Bill. "We wanted something with a bit of history, that had survived a few contests, and eventually found it in a shed in Motueka. It's an oldie but a goodie." **RIGHT** The framed prints are from Canterbury artist Marian Macguire's series 'The Odyssey of Captain Cook'. Bill made the dining table.





ABOVE LEFT The 'breakfast deck' looks over the bay. **ABOVE RIGHT** The bach takes the form of two long, thin platforms placed delicately into the landscape so as to create minimal upset to the environment. Much work has been done to encourage the regenerating forest.

ABOVE LEFT The flooring throughout the bach is eucalyptus saligna. A living space beyond the pool table opens out onto another deck. **ABOVE RIGHT** A view of the library/performance area on the mezzanine floor. In the foreground is the trapdoor under which props are stored.



LEFT Bill enjoying a coffee on the 'afternoon deck'. The ceiling pitches steeply to follow the line of the land, reaching four metres at its highest point. **RIGHT** The bar stools are "collector's items", says Bill: some ready-made, some custom-made.

big wrap-around deck from which to luxuriate in the view. Instead there are decks at either end, allowing you to follow the sun through the day, breakfasting at one end and barbecuing at the other. Meanwhile, the fine roofline has been pitched steeply to follow the line of the land, resulting in a ceiling that at its highest point is a lofty four metres, while clerestory windows pull in the light and surrounding bush.

According to Gerald, one of the trickiest aspects of the project was finding a way to take the windows all the way up into the roof, but the result is stunning, playing up the sense of the roofline extending into the landscape. And from down on the beach you can see right through the house to the bush behind, "like it's floating," says Christina. From inside, Apple Bay is revealed in "vignettes as you move along," says Christina. The theatrical reference is apposite: Christina used to work as a speech and drama teacher; (these days she and Bill own the coffee-roasting business CPR in Blenheim), while their son Dan is a professional actor and playwright and daughter Sophie works in TV and film production. To cater for the family penchant for performance, a wall in the mezzanine library slides back to create a proscenium arch, with a trapdoor in the stage floor for storing props and costumes. "Sometimes it's just charades [but] when we have families here the young kids have a ball. Suddenly it's 'everybody inside! We've got a show to present!'"

The idea of a performance space was a carry-over from their former bach, a 1960s split-level house at nearby Whatamango Bay, where the shows were staged on a curtained landing. And the new house is indebted to the best of the old in several other respects, from its open-plan design, to the inclusion of spaces to which individuals can retire while still being on the edge of the communal activity. Most importantly, the earthy, unpretentious spirit of the old bach abides in the new. Furnishings are simple, fixtures solid and hardwearing and the inbuilt bunks and cabinetry were all designed by Gerald with the practical needs of holidaying in mind. "We get a lot of spontaneous visits," says Christina, "Lots of people arrive by boat, they bring food and we're lucky to have the space to accommodate them. It's all about relaxing and enjoying yourself." •

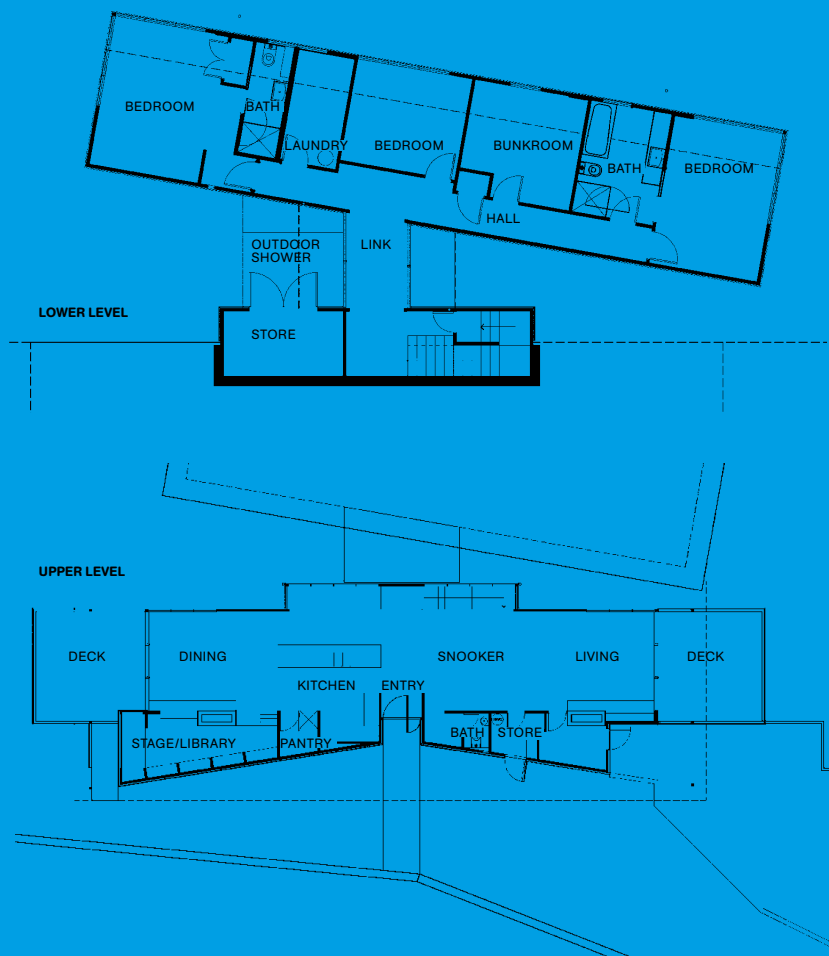


Design Notebook

BILL MUSGROVE AND CHRISTINA MACKAY WANTED THEIR BACH TO SIT AS LIGHTLY ON THEIR LAND AS POSSIBLE – AFTER ALL, THE PROPERTY HAS BEEN IN BILL'S FAMILY SINCE THE 1930s.



When commissioning an architect to create a bach on their family land at Apple Bay in the Queen Charlotte Sound, foremost among Bill Musgrove and Christina Mackay's requirements was to create a building that slotted almost imperceptibly into the lush surrounding forest, blurring the boundaries between inside and out (left). Architect Gerald Parsonson designed a structure that steps down the slope of the hill in the form of two offset pavilions, with the downstairs area for sleeping (top right) and upstairs for living. The two wings are connected by a linkway (bottom right). •



ABOUT THE ARCHITECT
Palmerston North-born Gerald Parsonson (below), director of Parsonson Architects, has long combined his love of architecture with an appreciation of the natural world – at one point even considering a career as a marine biologist. Bill and Christina chose Gerald on the basis of his ability to integrate the house into its environment, having seen evidence of this at a house he'd designed in Blenheim. Here, Gerald has been equally successful, creating a structure that, when viewed from the beach, appears to float amid the trees.

