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Few people would spend their life savings on a plot of land they'd never seen. Two exceptions are Adrienne Webb and Stefan Dunlop, who, while living in a loft in London, snapped up an acre of land in northeastern Australia, 10,000 miles away. "In some ways, we're a bit impulsive," says Dunlop, a New Zealand-born painter, in what is clearly an understatement. They were also homesick: After six years in "gray, grimy" London, they longed for the idyllic weather and breathtaking natural beauty of Australia, where they'd lived previously and where Webb, an investment planner, grew up. Ready to have children of their own, they wanted to be closer to their families.

Dunlop's parents, who lived in Brisbane, took up the case and found the couple some land atop a wooded ridge above Noosa, a stylish beach town on Australia's northeastern coast. "It was obviously a cracking site," Dunlop says now, gesturing off his deck to a rolling sea of bright green eucalyptus, sloping for miles down to an ocean dotted with yachts and freighters. Despite the giant leap of faith required, it was something of a risk-free investment: Dunlop's parents were so enamored of the property that they vowed to buy it if the couple balked.

A few months later, when Dunlop was in Sydney for an exhibition of his paintings, he hopped a plane to Noosa to check out their purchase. He was thrilled. When he wandered next door to introduce himself to his future neighbors, he was pleased to



Site Unseen

Story by Jaime Gross
Photos by Richard Powers

An unvisited ocean-facing plot of land, a couple of architect neighbors, and one giant leap of faith have netted a pair of erstwhile Londoners a dream home of their own in northeast Australia.

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Project: Tinbeerwah House
Architect: Bark Design Architects
Location: Noosa, Australia

The Tinbeerwah house and studio (opposite) keep a low profile among the site's eucalyptus trees. Stefan Dunlop and Adrienne Webb repose on their front entrance

stairs with their sons Keanu and Kobe (opposite, bottom right). A large deck off the living room overlooks the hills of Noosa and the Pacific Ocean.



DWELLINGS

The open-plan living room was inspired by the couple's previous residence, a London loft. The paintings are by Dunlop while the chandelier and most of the furniture are from London flea markets and eBay. The louvered floor-to-ceiling windows, ceiling fan, and sliding deck doors usher in sea breezes and encourage good air circulation.

discover two of the eight-person firm Bark Design Architects. When the principals Lindy Atkin and Stephen Guthrie learned who he was, they were keen to design his future house. Atkin's and Guthrie's enthusiasm was somewhat self-serving—"We were terrified of having to look out on a big-block mansion or a Tuscan bunker," Guthrie admits—but also big-hearted. Unlike many of their neighbors, who'd erected tall fences at the edges of their property, the architects were determined to preserve the scenic views from the road, a popular route for cyclists and drivers. "We wanted our architecture to 'give back' to the street," as Guthrie puts it. Dunlop liked them immediately, and a collaboration was born.

The architects' brief was to create a warm and airy three-bedroom house for a growing family and to preserve some of the elements the couple loved about warehouse living, including an open plan and soaring 16-foot ceilings. Dunlop also wanted a painting studio with natural lighting, raw plywood walls, and an extra-tall roof to accommodate his larger works. To help steer the design, the couple put together a scrapbook of images that inspired them and sent it to the architects: tear sheets from design magazines of houses they loved, Polaroids of mid-century-modern furniture, fixtures they'd purchased at London flea markets (along with measurements, so the architects could design the rooms to fit), and photographs of Dunlop's paintings, "to show that the artwork came first, and furnishings



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Stephen Guthrie

In his detached painting studio (below), Dunlop considers a work in progress. The building is oriented east-west to avoid direct sunlight, and the long, narrow shape enables the artist to get some distance from his paintings as he works. An oversize front door and angled ceiling accommodate extra-large canvases; the plywood walls and floor can ably endure a beating, or, as is more likely, stray splashes of paint. The studio (opposite, top right) is clad in corrugated tin, echoing the adjacent water-storage tanks, which collect and filter rainwater off the roof. Batten screens of spotted gum wood sheath the house (opposite, bottom right) and allow ventilation into the outdoor storage area (opposite, bottom left), a nod to traditional Queensland architecture.

second, and that the paintings weren't necessarily going to match the couch," says Webb. "When all that '50s and '60s California-style stuff came over, we were like, 'Yes!'" Atkins recalls, clapping her hands in delight. "We love that aesthetic, too. That's when we knew this was going to work out beautifully."

After an intensive eight-month design process, however, the project hit a snag: Construction costs had skyrocketed in the intervening months, and the bids coming back from the builders were beyond the couple's budget. Rather than ask the architects to downscale and redraw the plans, Webb and Dunlop got creative with their approach. "Once you've been shown the best, it's hard to scale your expectations back," he explains. "At that point, we'd bend over backward to make it happen." What they did do—become their own lead contractor—was no less gymnastic. Webb, eight months pregnant, sat through the required owner-builder exams and handled all the subcontracting. Meanwhile Dunlop, along with his father, chipped in with labor, prepping the foundation and laying slate tiles by day and then, pressed by a deadline for an upcoming exhibition, painting in a ramshackle milking shed on a nearby dairy farm late into the night.

Because they were first-time builders and their architects' office was only 25 feet away, the couple stopped in daily, peppering the duo with questions. "The engineering side was really tough to get our heads around," explains Dunlop. "We probably

drained them more than the average client." (The architects concur.) "It was fully stressful," Dunlop says. "Adrienne and I were both running on empty by the end of it. We got to a point where we just said to the tradesmen, 'Okay, that's it—no more money, no more work.' We moved in with a lot still left to complete and spent the past few years tinkering away on weekends."

The final product—essentially a steel-framed glass box clad in strips of spotted gum timber and sheets of fiber cement—is a modern take on traditional Queensland architecture, raised off the ground to allow for plenty of storage beneath (the family uses the space to dry laundry, store firewood, and park their classic red Mercedes).

It's also built to be as sustainable as possible. Their tap water comes from rainwater collected off the roof and is stored in corrugated iron tanks, and septic waste is processed onsite and used to irrigate their garden. In keeping with passive solar principles, the layout encourages natural ventilation, and an overhanging roof allows direct sunlight to penetrate the house in the winter but keeps things cool in the summer. A square plunge pool, inspired by the concrete São Paulo houses the couple included in their "brainstorm book," throws shimmering light patterns on the living-room ceiling and cools northeast breezes on their way from the ocean to the house—it can also be used as a firefighting water source in a region prone to bush fires. ▶

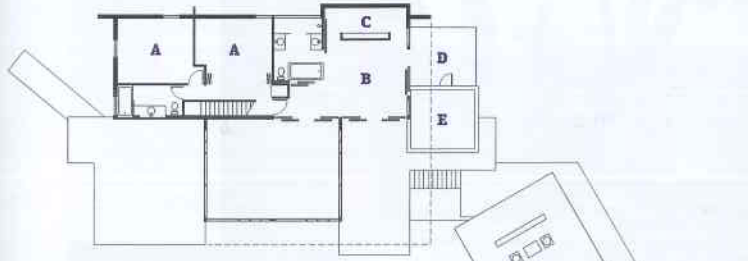


TINBEERWAH HOUSE

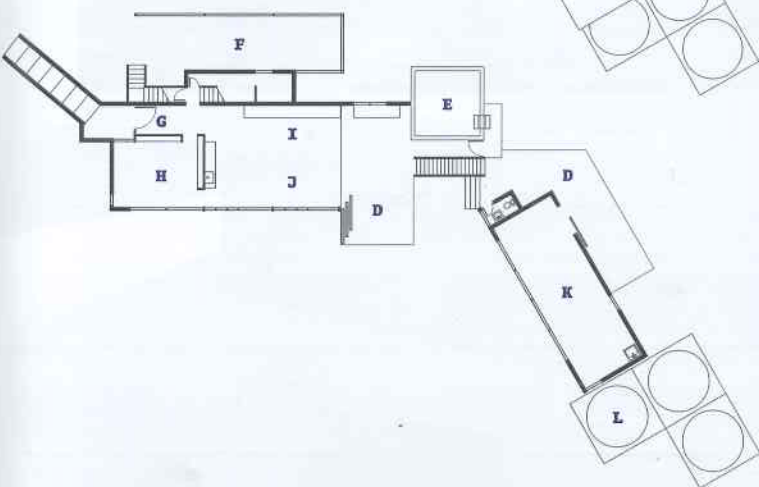
FLOOR PLANS

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| A Bedroom | G Entry |
| B Master Bedroom | H Library |
| C Walk-In Closet | I Kitchen |
| D Deck | J Living/Dining Area |
| E Pool | K Studio |
| F Carpark | L Water Tanks |

UPPER FLOOR

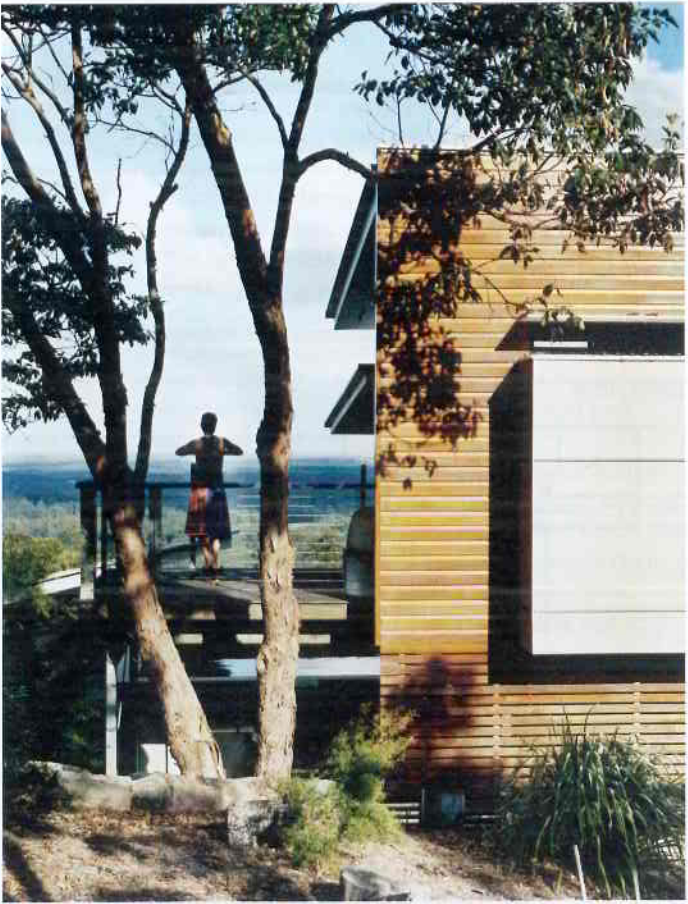


LOWER FLOOR



The house strikes an elegant balance between transparency and privacy. The loftlike great room—combining kitchen, dining room, and living room—opens onto an intimate, enclosed study. In the master bedroom a custom cedar-and-tatami sliding screen of Webb's design covers an opening in the bedroom wall; when pulled aside, it reveals a bird's-eye view of the living room and kitchen below. Gigantic, thoughtfully placed windows frame views of the vast surrounding landscape—yet provide privacy from the architects' adjacent studio—while generous stretches of gallery-white walls offer plenty of display space for Dunlop's art. A sense of interconnectedness reigns: The master bathroom flows seamlessly into the bedroom, and the concrete pool on the living room deck is also accessible, if you're brave, by a leap from one on the second floor.

Despite the agonies of the building process, Webb, as much as she loves the finished product, swears she wouldn't do it again. From their glass-walled studio next door, the architects frequently spy drivers stopping to take pictures of the home and the view beyond. Dunlop says their friends love the way the house showcases the eclectic furniture and "bits and bobs" they've picked up over the years. They may only be recovering from their exhaustion now, one house, another baby, and one hyperactive puppy later, but in Dunlop's eyes, it was all worth it: "When you're designing your own home, you've really got to go for it—there's no other time." ■■



The serene all-white bathroom (opposite, bottom) can be sealed off from the master bedroom by two sliding doors, or left open for a loftlike feel. Webb surveys the view from the "lookout deck" off the bedroom (opposite top), and Dunlop demonstrates the deck's secondary use: as a launching pad into the concrete plunge pool on the first floor. ❶

