

# Amongst friends



Few people can count their builder and architect as some of their closest friends, but Sonja and Arjen gained more than just a beautiful home when they undertook this project.

STORY BY SUNNY DE BRUYN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONY POTTER  
STYLING BY JO FORREST





The imposing wine rack feature wall demarcates the kitchen area from the rest of the living space.

Finding a fabulous home is one thing, but to meet great people along the way, and even better to form good friendships – with the previous owners, builder, architect, joiner and neighbours – is something else entirely. And that's just what happened to this couple when they bought this two-storey duplex in the Sydney beach suburb of Coogee.

Sonja and Arjen absolutely loved the home's location – set on a beautiful street filled with lovely old fig trees and only 10 minutes walk to both Coogee and Clovelly beaches – and recognised the potential as soon as they walked in the door. But it was the vista from the back of the house with glimpses over Coogee Valley, which looks simply magical at night, when the lights are twinkling, that truly sold the couple.

After that first viewing, Sonja and Arjen spent the whole afternoon talking and having coffee with the owners, Radu and Margaret, with whom they hit it off straightaway. "We decided to come back the week after with our friend and builder Chris Parish, and Radu and Margaret brought their architect neighbour Joanna Lukaszewicz over," says Sonja. Well, Sonja's mind was made up that very day, once she saw how beautiful Jo's place next door was. "After that we knew we wanted the house, and Jo as our architect," she says.

[ABOVE] The kitchen is one of Sonja's favourite parts of the house and she especially loves the unusual window, which was Chris's idea.



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## STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Once the sale was complete, the couple began working on the plans with Joanna. "Demolition was next, and all that really remains of the existing house is the front wall!" laughs Sonja. "In hindsight it would have been easier and cheaper to knock the whole house down and start building from scratch." The couple transformed what was a two-and-a-half storey, old-style duplex with two bedrooms and one bathroom on each level, into a modern two-level duplex.

From the start, Sonja and Arjen knew exactly what they wanted. "We worked closely together with Joanna, who is not only our architect, but also our neighbour and friend. We wanted a modern



house with lots of open space, and a huge living/dining area for entertaining," says Sonja. And, as Sonja works from home, she also needed a practical office space for her marketing consultancy and project-management business, TwinLife. Also of great importance was enhancing inside/outside living to make the most of the beautiful Sydney climate, which is a far cry from the weather in their native Holland. Sonja and Arjen wanted a beach-house feel with plenty of natural materials, whilst keeping the design simple and clean. "Joanna was very good at listening to what we wanted and translating our ideas into practical solutions. She did an amazing job," says Sonja.

### ALL IN THE ARCHITECTURE

Jo certainly stuck to the brief beautifully, creating a home that truly makes the most of inside/outside living. The use of windows and lighting to give the home a sense of space and light was an integral part of the design. "We wanted to bring the outside world into our inside living environment, especially as the weather in Sydney is so beautiful", Sonja explains. "Jo has a wonderful understanding of the sun's movement, and knows how important it is to have the correct window orientation and shading, so she was brave with window heights and the amount of glazing." Lighting was also significant in creating the right feel, and Jo designed it so the lighting fills the spaces with beautiful indirect light, and interest was added with special accent lights.

*[BELOW] The bi-fold doors that open to the large terrace fill the house with a wonderful amount of light and create a sense of space.*

*[RIGHT] After two years of hard work, Sonja and Arjen say it gives them a great feeling of satisfaction knowing they were involved in the design and creation of their beautiful home.*



### PAINT PALETTE

**[INSIDE]** General wall colour Dulux Stowe White; feature wall colour Dulux Noble Brown

**[OUTSIDE]** General wall colour Dulux Pistachio Tang; columns and features Dulux Namadji

Stowe White

Noble Brown

Pistachio Tang

Namadji





## ENTERTAINING AT HOME

The kitchen is a joy to cook in and ideally designed for a family who love to entertain so much. Plus, having it as part of the larger living area means that Sonja is able to keep an eye on the kids. "With twin boys, it's a perfect solution; we can easily keep them out of the kitchen with a simple gate and still see them in the living area," she adds. First and foremost, however, the kitchen needed to be practical and have enough space for her and Arjen to cook together without getting in each other's way. Storage was also of vital

importance, and Joanna came up with the clever idea of utilising the area under the stairs for a pantry. More storage on the living-room side of the island bench – in the form of glass-fronted cupboards – created a space for all their glasses. The kitchen design and finishes were the result of a combined effort between Joanna, the joiner, Walter Leon Abt, Sonja and Arjen. "I adore the chocolate-brown benchtop Joanna selected for us, combined with the birch-toned wood that Walter came up with – it looks fantastic!" Sonja relates.





### SONJA'S TOP TIPS FOR RENOVATING:

- Utilise professionals in the design process. Don't think you can make great architecture happen without the expertise – it's the subtle and specialised knowledge that brings all the pieces together to create the whole look. It is also ideal to have an architect and builder working together as a team, coming up with practical solutions together.
- Adjust your style to suit the surrounds. We renovated a cheese warehouse from the 1600s in the Netherlands years ago and it had antique farmer furniture, heavy curtains and a completely different atmosphere, which suited that environment perfectly.
- Combine a few good designer furniture pieces, like couches and sofas, with cheaper pieces, such as dining-room chairs.

*[ABOVE LEFT] Having twin boys requires twice as much space, but the clever design ideas incorporated by their architect mean that there's plenty of it.*

*[ABOVE RIGHT] The wide entrance hall is beautifully lit with contemporary lighting, which accentuates the warm tones in the timber flooring.*



Deciding on the interior style for their home was easy for Sonja. It had to have a beachy feel with natural colours and a modern look, while still retaining some of the older elements like the door, window frames and high skirting boards. "We wanted stylish simplicity and to create attention with a few showpieces, such as the orange adjustable sofas," says Sonja. "We don't like clutter and prefer having a few beautiful items that really draw the eye." And one article in particular that's impossible to miss is the bronze statue of a woman in the living area. "It's a beautiful piece of art that Arjen got from his parents when he finished his MBA in the Netherlands. It has travelled around the world with us and fits beautifully in our living room."

The imposing wine rack is a feature in itself and is one of their favourite objects in the house. It was built more as a design element than for collecting wine, though Sonja and Arjen do love matching a nice drop with a scrumptious dinner; and the tool for reaching a bottle from the top row provides a neat dinner trick when guests are over. The unit was designed

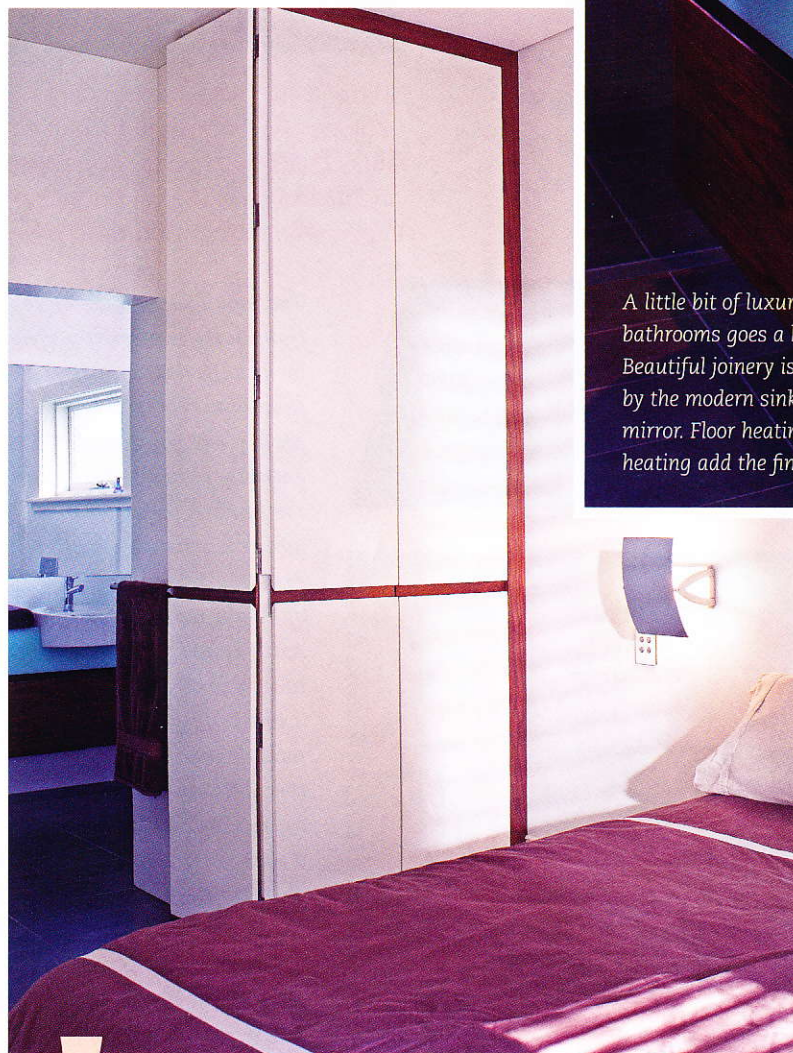


by their joiner, Walter. "When Jo presented Walter with sketches for the wine rack he scratched his head, but after a few drinks at the Hilton Hotel Glass Bar, he got his inspiration – nothing's impossible for this German master craftsman!" Sonja laughs. "We now have this amazing centrepiece in the hub of the house."

## HOME AT LAST

The entire process took two years, and Sonja says it was one continuous, steep, learning curve for them. "It was very adventurous and exciting in the beginning, but after a while it got very draining and exhausting. Everyone had told us beforehand the process would take longer and be more expensive than planned – and it was true," she says.

Their twins were born just a month after the interior was finished and soon after that the exterior and downstairs unit were completed. "We sold the downstairs apartment a month later and have been enjoying our home since then," she explains. And the finished product is certainly easy to enjoy – a spacious, open-plan home with a welcoming air that's filled with light. The one storey is actually split level with the bedrooms and bathrooms on the upper level and the living area below. The style is



*A little bit of luxury in the bathrooms goes a long way! Beautiful joinery is complemented by the modern sinks and fabulous mirror. Floor heating and mirror heating add the final touch.*



*[LEFT] The neutral colours of the main living area extend to the upper level of the home, giving it uniformity and flow.*



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clean, minimalist and modern, but still warm and homely. "The quality of the work performed by Chris and his team of tradesmen is top notch. They made sure that everything was done to perfection and Chris was always on hand to come up with practical solutions," Sonja recalls.

And of all the beautiful things in this home and the elements that Sonja and Arjen adore, it's their neighbours that are the favourite thing about their house. "Honestly, we have the nicest people living in our street and that's something you can't influence or replicate somewhere else. We're just very lucky!" she insists.

## RESOURCES

Architect – Joanna Lukaszewicz (02) 9315 7152  
Cabinetry – Walter Leon Abt 0401 227 551  
Builder – Chris Parish 0419 262 249