



PHOTOS Bob Weeks

DOWN TO EARTH

FISHER HOUSE – FERNMOUNT

With the right choice of materials, contemporary homes can look as comfortable and natural in a rural setting as they do by the sea, witnessed at this stunning property.

Designed and built by owner and architect, Christian Fisher, the 'Fisher House' is a contemporary pressed earth brick home located on four hectares at Fernmount, a rural residential area between Bellingen and Urunga.

The main three bedroom house was completed in 2004, with a separate design studio, 13 metre lap pool and landscaping added this year.

Home to architect Christian and graphic designer Anna, along with their two children Mia and Sam, the couple spent two years searching for the "right block" before finding land with views over a dairy farm, bush and the Dorrigo mountain range in the distance.

With the couple both working from home, the birth of Sam this year necessitated the construction of the separate design studio, with pressed earth brick and eco-ply ensuring the studio complements the structure and materials of the house.

Christian has used a simple linear composition to create the modern design, with the house sited naturally along the crest of a hill.

With a strong focus on the northerly aspect,

solar access and natural ventilation have been achieved, as well as rural and mountain views from each room.

Timber decks stretch the full length of the house and provide ample entertaining space, while summer meals are often eaten at the outdoor dining area, complete with barbecue and bench seating built into the mud brick walls.

Also popular in summer is the private courtyard bathroom, which is accessed from inside the house.

The interior of the home has soaring ceilings, with glass sliding doors connecting the decks to the open plan kitchen, living and dining spaces.

A sandstone fireplace and split level design gives the living room a sense of separation as well as offering a cosy winter area. The ambience is offset by rugs Christian hand-picked in India and a 70s velvet gold lounge – the ultimate retro family hand-me-down.

Contemporary works by Sydney artists and an in-built shelf featuring a collection of travel photographs also add heart to the home.

Christian's choice of natural materials such as the pressed earth bricks, hardwood timbers, sandstone and slate, has yielded a solid and strong home which maintains a contemporary feel.

The bricks were made locally by Bellingen's Pressed Earth Bricks, while the hardwood

timbers and sandstone came from various suppliers on the Mid North Coast.

Stainless steel kitchen benchtops were sourced from a commercial kitchen manufacturer in Port Macquarie and a paint palette of neutral greys (Namadji, String and Jasper) are all from Dulux, as is the earthy red (Mars Red).

One interior feature wall has been retained as face brick, while the rest have been lightly bagged and painted with Dulux White Swan.

The couple rolled up their sleeves during the construction process which helped to lower costs – but the end result also demonstrates design expertise can create a great result within a budget.

While their home is stunning, the couple are obviously as enamoured with the local area after leaving Sydney for life on the property.

Anna said: "We've always loved the Bellingen area, it's such a beautiful place to live and bring up kids.

"We're really lucky that we can both work from home, because we see so much more of the kids than if we were still in Sydney. Having the studio next to the house allows us to enjoy the rural lifestyle, while maintaining a busy design practice. It really is the best of both worlds."

