

THESE PAGES High enough to take in panoramic views but close enough to hear the sea, Regan Johnston and Melanie Lynn's Sumner house in Christchurch makes the most of its location; the outdoor loggia with its nor'west aspect, glass balustrade and deep eaves is a sunny and sheltered spot in any season.

OF HIS OWN MAKING

A tricky site didn't deter this Christchurch architect from designing his own family home

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Photographs ANNA McLEOD

THIS PAGE Melanie played a big part in choosing the interior features including the leather-finish marble benchtop; when it finally arrived from Turkey three slabs were broken, causing a further six-month delay; the rock-faced retaining wall outside and stained American oak flooring add to the natural look; a gelatin silver photograph, *Down by the River* by Kate van der Drift, hangs on the right rear wall. **OPPOSITE** The kitchen and main living area steps down to a more intimate sunken lounge, allowing views from the kitchen across the bush-clad valley and out to the sea at the right; the steel wall around the fireplace screens the lounge from neighbouring houses.





It's always interesting to see the sort of houses architects design for themselves, but Regan Johnston modestly diverts the credit for his own abode. Houses design themselves, he says.

If so, his family home nestled into the hill above Sumner Beach in Christchurch is indeed a clever house. It has picked up a fistful of awards and catered masterfully to the needs of its inhabitants: Regan and his wife, Melanie Lynn, their 15-month-old daughter, Harper, and Apple, an elderly beagle.

Location, location, location. The familiar chant of real estate is also at the heart of house design, says Regan. "Buildings have to respond to their

setting. It's all about the basics: good orientation, larger windows to the north and west, cut down on hallways and so on. It costs the same amount to build a poorly planned home as it does to build a well-designed one."

The setting for this house is spectacular. Its elevation and north-west orientation means all-day sun coupled with dramatic views across Pegasus Bay to the Kaikōura Ranges and more intimate ones to the beach below. "Because we are on the lower slopes, we have that connection with the sea. We can see the waves and hear the ocean," says Melanie.

The couple have an affinity for slopes. They met on a chillier one, more specifically in a bar on the



THESE PAGES (clockwise from above) "The home functions as one large living environment," says Regan; the dining area, with its American white oak Tommy table from Belle Interiors, opens to the outdoor loggia with the media room and master bedroom around the corner to the right; cavity doors between rooms give flexibility. Artwork by Cruz Jimenez fills a corner beside the door to the loggia. Melanie, Harper and Regan spend as much time as possible in the loggia, with its comfortable Basket sofa and Harp chairs, both by Roda: "It's a fantastic spot to unwind after a long day and enjoy the sounds of the ocean and view across the coastline," says Regan.

‘It costs the same amount to build a poorly planned home as it does to build a well-designed one’



ski slopes of Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Melanie was living in New York City; Regan happily ensconced in a bach at Taieri Mouth near Dunedin. (His own award-winning design which featured on the cover of Catherine Foster's *Small House Living* book.)

The couple settled on Christchurch as the city that ticked all their boxes: big enough for Melanie to pursue her work in the global software industry and, with the post-quake rebuild in full swing, plenty of work for an architect. Besides, for Melanie who was born and bred in Christchurch's sister city of Seattle, it almost felt like home with the sea and mountains on the doorstep.

The 800sqm section they bought in 2013, some 12,000km across the ocean from Seattle, came with the remnants of an existing house and had been

on the market for a while. Melanie and Regan's enthusiasm for the location wasn't then shared by quake-wary Cantabrians who looked to the hills and shuddered.

"The land was good value, but it came with its challenges," says Regan. Site stability and vehicle access were two. Patience proved to be another. Regan designed the house and put it out for tender in 2014, but it came in way over budget due to the earthquake rebuild environment. "We tried to cut costs but it meant compromising the whole design. This house is built around vehicle access. You've got to get that right or the house is impractical."

It was two years before they were able to negotiate a favourable build price, and the construction took a further two-and-a-half. Building the extensive



LEFT The master bedroom is restful in muted monochromatic tones with Resene Half Truffle painted walls, Vida bedlinen from Seneca and a Galileo lamp by Carpyen. **RIGHT** An ambient light box artwork by Karyn Taylor adds a shaft of colour to the natural rays from the glazed entry roof.

THIS PAGE Sun streams into the lower lounge where a deep Finewood modular sofa is designed for flexibility; the palette of warm natural tones is enhanced by a wool and bamboo rug from SF Design and artwork by Cruz Jimenez.

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left) The fireplace bench seat, custom-made by Finewood, has a handy side tray. Regan reads in the media room where a tall Dyson CSYS floor lamp from ECC joins a Baba side table and Ipanema chair, both by Poliform from Studio Italia. Luna Grey marble is used in the downstairs bathroom where the custom-designed American white oak vanity has an Absolute Black granite top. A sansevieria plant beside a photograph of Sumner Beach.



6m-high retaining walls alone took a year. Packed with concrete, steel and vast buttresses, they have it on good authority that it is stronger than the wall protecting the town water supply. "A healthy chunk of budget and time simply ended up in the ground and covered over," says Regan. But it did have the dual function of providing the house with its rear walls. The front is essentially glass, with eaves of varying depths to give shade in summer while letting in the winter sun.

The garage, buried into the hill with the 356sqm house suspended over its forecourt, is the only room without a view. The rest of the home is one-room deep with a "service spine" and stairs along the south wall. On the upper level, an open-plan kitchen/living area, media room and master bedroom suite have easy access to a covered loggia. Below, is Harper's bedroom, a guest room, bathroom and laundry.

Melanie worked closely with Bespoke Interior



THIS PAGE (from top) The loggia has views around Pegasus Bay from the estuary and Brighton Pier to the Kaikōura Ranges in the distance. The house, with its deep eaves and glass walls to the north and west, is suspended over the vehicle forecourt with steps leading to the front door: “We kept as many trees as possible to buffer the surrounding houses,” says Regan.

OPPOSITE A console table from Bespoke Interior Design adds to the geometric simplicity of the naturally lit entry gallery; the stairs lead to the lower floor and garage.

Design on the finishes, opting for clean lines, neutral colours and timber accents.

The house has all the bells and whistles of modern eco-living: high-performance glazing with automated blinds and louvre windows, LED lighting, serious insulation coupled with a gas fire, under-tile heating and ducted air-conditioning. Cavity doors can morph into walls, creating a flexible living space with a view to the future. The media room, for example, might one day find itself a child’s playroom, home office or fourth bedroom. The house has been future-proofed with three-phase power for electric vehicle charging.

The mainly native garden includes a small flat lawn, but the family’s playground is all around, and their bikes and paddleboards are at the ready in the garage. It’s a six-minute walk to the beach and for Regan, whose architectural office is in Sumner village, a 45-second drive to work.

“We are lucky to be able to build in locations like this,” says Melanie. Lucky, too, to have clever houses that do justice to their dream locations. ■

Q&A

One clever idea for other homeowners: The sunken living area allows views from the more elevated kitchen. (Regan)

Best decorating tip: Engage with an interior design consultant early to ensure an uncompromised outcome. Interior designers are up with the play with the latest information and pay for themselves twice over. (Melanie)

Best thing about the build: The loggia with its integrated DCS barbecue. Having the outdoor room under cover means we use it year-round. We cook often on the barbecue. (Regan)

We love this part of New Zealand because: Of its access to outdoor amenities and we have the daily benefits of living in a small community with the added bonus of a large city on our doorstep. (Melanie)

Regan Johnston and Melanie Lynn

