

THE SIMPLE LIFE

It's a bach with just one pared-down room – which is exactly what the owners of this Northland getaway were after

TEXT by Johanna Thornton PHOTOGRAPHY by Matthew Williams

ABOVE The bach on Northland's Mahinepua Bay has three walls that open completely to the views, while the rear wall contains kitchen and bathroom facilities accessible from the exterior for all the friends who come and camp on the site during the summer holidays.



The brief was straightforward: all the owners wanted of this beautifully simple bach in Mahinepua Bay, a three-and-a-half-hour drive north of Auckland, was a dwelling that preserved the rituals of camping and caravanning. Maureen-Ann and Kelly Farrimond had been staying in their caravan on the 14-acre site for three years before they decided to build. Camping instilled in them an uncomplicated ideal of holidaying and made them determined that any new building on the site would carry on this tradition.

Their designer – and sometime camping companion – Richard Mora honoured this brief by creating a one-room bach, purposely foregoing the expansive trimmings that are de rigueur in so many holiday homes. Mora says the design focuses on utility, allowing the owners to continue the camping lifestyle in a modern structure. His insider knowledge on the workings of the site, the visitor numbers in summer and the interests of his clients certainly helped in the design process. “Richard knew that we had 20 to 30 people coming up here during holidays and that we love cooking and entertaining, but that we’re also very relaxed, because he’s spent some time up here with us. It made it easy to come up with a bach to suit us,” says Maureen-Ann Farrimond.

To kick-start the design process, the Farrimonds presented Mora with clippings of two houses – Mies Van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House and Philip Johnson’s Glass House. The modernist principles of both houses appealed to the owners, who envisioned their bach with the same openness and sophistication. They wanted their beach refuge to be the very antithesis of their villa in Auckland’s Birkenhead Point. “We absolutely did not want another house,” says Kelly Farrimond. “We wanted something easy and uncomplicated, with that bach feeling, but just a new ‘old’ bach.” Accordingly, the bach is roughly four meters by 10 meters, with the roof and floor dimensions similar to that of the Glass House. Three walls are fully glazed with the fourth in cedar, allowing 180-degree views of the startling coastline, surrounding cliffs and farmland.

The Farrimonds gave Mora some specific requirements too, one of which was a facilities wall that could service the campers on the site, “something that friends and family can use when they come up and stay in a tent, and more importantly that they can feel comfortable using without invading our privacy,” says Kelly Farrimond. Hidden behind sliding cedar screens are ingenious in-built kitchen and toilet facilities. The 1.4-meter-wide rear wall unit also houses an ensuite accessible from inside the bach.

OPPOSITE Outside on a good day. The owners deliberately sought a bach that would be the antithesis of their more complicated lives back in the city.

ABOVE LEFT The home’s 40 square-metre interior was kept simple to avoid clutter. The kitchen table and chairs are ‘Series 7’ by Arne Jacobsen for Fritz Hansen from Bromhead Design.

ABOVE RIGHT The rear entrance to the home with a view through to the sea. The cedar screens on either side conceal the small kitchen and bathroom facilities for guests staying on the property.

THIS PHOTO When the owners are in residence, the cedar screens and glass sliders disappear into hidden cavities in the pavilion's small fixed walls, opening the home entirely to the view. The outdoor beanbags are by Coast.





“Everyone is happy when they come here, and that’s because this place inspires a sense of calm”

With everything tucked away into this space, including cabinetry and laundry facilities, the main living space is uncomplicated and, just as importantly, unhampered by stuff. It also means campers have similar facilities to those of a camping ground and don’t have to overrun the bach.

Structural features of the bach include a flat roof, sliding glass doors, expansive decking and security features such as cedar shutters and sliding doors that close the bach up when the owners are away. When they’re in residence, these features slide away so just a single exterior wall extends from each corner of the bach. These walls double as cavities for the large sliding glass doors, allowing them to open completely without overlapping. Says Mora: “We’ve created a series of spaces that buffer the wind and provide shelter from the exposure of the cliff. You have the opportunity to retreat behind these walls or retire to the back deck.” When it is too windy to have the three doors completely open, the Farrimonds simply close off whichever side is exposed to the prevailing wind or take their afternoon drink to one of the four outdoor decking areas. They describe the bach as “absolutely stunning” with all three glass doors open. “It’s quite dramatic with the place totally open to the sea view. It’s definitely a favorite feature,” says Maureen-Ann Farrimond.

Like the Glass House, the Farrimond bach uses furniture rather than walls to divide space. The tall headboard of the bed (which doubles as a wardrobe) compartmentalizes the room, hinting at a separate bedroom. Mora also designed the bed on wheels, “so you can orient it toward the view, or to the west to create a mini-dressing room between wardrobe and ensuite. Best of all, you can roll it out on to the deck,” he says. The couch and coffee table are similarly set on wheels to increase flexibility in the limited space.

Furnishings are kept to a minimum. The Tasmanian Oak floors and white walls and cabinetry inspire a certain minimalism anyway. “When I asked the Farrimonds what we were going to do about window coverings, they said they definitely didn’t want anything of the sort,” Mora says. “They like to be woken up by the daylight.”

The site may be stunning, but the success of this bach is due to its difference to city living. “A true holiday is about contrast to everyday life and getting back to the basic essential items like food and shelter. The real brief for this bach was embodying these principles within a design that is beautiful,” says Mora. The Farrimonds say their visitors have to be dragged to their cars at the end of their stay. “Everyone is happy when they come here,” says Maureen-Ann, “and that’s because the place inspires a sense of calm.” **HE**

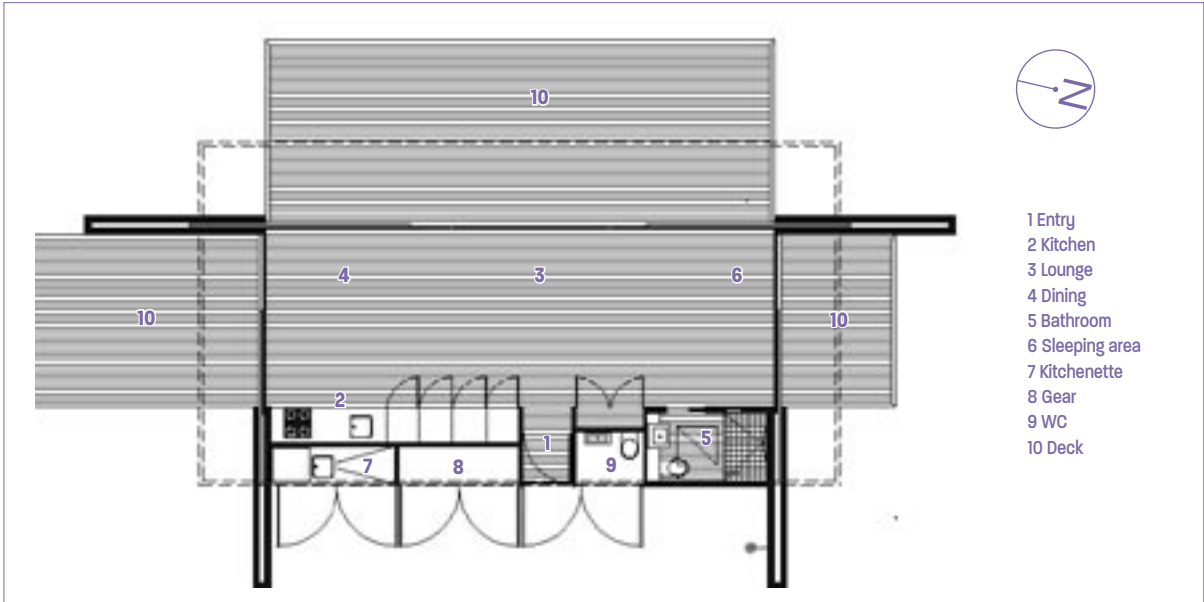


ABOVE The sleeping area in the bach is loosely demarcated by a low wall of cabinetry. The lamp is a “VIP” lamp by Jorgen Gammelgaard for Pandul from Bromhead Design, and the bed and cabinetry were designed by Richard Mora and made by Interworks.

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The bach’s kitchen is a simple lineup of white cabinetry on the dwelling’s rear wall (the table lamp is by Erik Magnussen for Stelton from Galtons of Parnell, and the blue vase is by Peter Collis); a simple stool in front of one of the bach’s cedar screens; ornaments in the cabinetry unit above the bed; the outdoor kitchen at the rear of the bach was designed for visiting guests (who often stay in tents) to use without having to disturb the owners.



LEFT The Farrimond family at their laid-back getaway: Maureen-Ann (left), Kelly (right) and daughter Joanna (centre).



ABOVE LEFT The bed on wheels can be moved out to the front deck so the owners can sleep in the open when the weather permits.
ABOVE Kayaking down in the bay. The owners had a shipping container buried in a hill on the property for safe storage of these items when they aren't there.