

### cheat sheet

**Who lives here:** Greer Lonergan, a theatre nurse; her husband James, who owns his own business; and their children, Jude, 8, Sailor, 5, and baby Dusty, 9 months.

**Style of home:** A four-bedroom, space-smart home built around a central pool and courtyard, steps from the beach in Casuarina, northern NSW.

**🕒** After 18 months searching for a block, Greer and James had plans drawn up within a month. The build itself took seven months.

**💰** The total cost was around \$500k, not including the price of land.

# CALIFORNIA *dreaming*

A budget-savvy couple channel Palm Springs vibes and build a home by the sea in northern NSW

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PHOTOGRAPHY ANDY MACPHERSON

**EXTERIOR** A concrete pool is at the heart of Greer and James' home. Oversized concrete stepping stones, laid alongside Zoysia grass, are a practical, stylish surround, and a 'The Cane Lounger' from Worn with Pop & Scott cushion are a comfy way to relax. In the background, the photo is Hugh Holland's 1975 print *Down On The Corner, Danny Kwock, Balboa Beach (No.68)*.





**G**reer Lonergan is a mother, a nurse and, as it turns out, a skilled juggler. When she and her husband, James, decided to pack up their life on the Gold Coast and move about 15 kilometres south of the border to the seaside enclave of Casuarina, the quiet life wasn't exactly waiting for her. Juggling two young children, a career and the hunt for an elusive place to call home taught the young mum a thing or two about keeping multiple balls in the air.

"I had always dreamt of building our own home," says Greer. She had a long and detailed wishlist – and a diminishing supply of patience as they searched for the perfect block on which to build. Almost 18 months into their search, a beachside lot in a developing estate came up for resale, and she and James pounced.

"As this was our first build and first proper family home, we had a pretty strict budget to keep to," says Greer, who called on those juggling skills yet again as the couple plotted out their plans with Scott Carpenter of Create Architecture. "I wanted to make sure features such as high ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows and sliding doors were included, as these kinds of features would be difficult, impossible or expensive to change in the future. It led me to be creative and spend time searching for products and finishes that would create the look but within our budget."

Their brief to Scott was for a design that evoked a breezy Palm Springs vibe combined with a laid-back Aussie coastal aesthetic. "I had very set ideas on the design and style of the home," says Greer. "We wanted a single level, central pool courtyard, open-plan living, great use of light and clever airflow, and a practical layout for a busy young family."

Ticking off all those boxes was tricky, but Greer was determined to get it right. In particular, the couple's vision for a pool and courtyard at the heart of the home turned out to be a masterstroke. "This was so important in the design for us," says Greer. "When we were dreaming of a great entertaining space, we also wanted to be able to easily keep a close eye on the kids. The layout is perfect for that. We can watch them if they are in the pool or the backyard from the kitchen and main living areas."

The courtyard beckons light into almost every nook of the home, dappled under the shade of a mature palm tree that was craned in as a poolside must-have. "That was fun to watch," says Greer. "We had planned to do the landscaping last, but the concreters who poured the slab and pool needed to know within a day where we wanted the palm and how large the hole for it should be. We had hoped for a different species, but settled on the [*Wodyetia bifurcata*] foxtail as the root ball was smaller and would fit into the hole we'd left at the beginning of the build." It was a rushed decision that ended up being one of their best.

\*MARINA BAR STOOLS (OPPOSITE); LIFE INTERIORS, LIFEINTERIORS.COM.AU; PLANTER BOXES, KIMART, KIMART.COM.AU; OVEN AND COOKTOP, BEKO; BEKOCOM.AU; KITCHEN MIXER, SUSSEX, SUSSEXKITCHENS.COM.AU; PLANTS AND BRONZE PLANTER (ON ISLAND), THE BORROWED NURSEY, THEBORROWEDNURSEY.COM; BOWL (ON ISLAND SHELF) BY EMMA GALE, NIKAU, NIKAUSTORE.COM



**KITCHEN** "My husband James is in charge of keeping all these plants alive!" says Greer (pictured, with daughter Sailor). The greenery pops against cabinetry in 'Evenex' veneer in Black Caviar from Elton Group, and a benchtop in Caesarstone Sleek Concrete.

**EXTERIOR (opposite)** The facade is a homage to classic Palm Springs style with a modern Australian edge, thanks to spotted gum cladding on one side and a Rockcote 'Marrakesh' finish on the other.

**star performer**  
Burnished concrete floors have been a big winner. Greer and James saved about \$10k by having the slab finished this way. "We love it," says Greer. "It's easy to clean, is cool in summer and retains the heat of the morning sun in winter."





## how sustainable is concrete?

Architect and sustainability expert Caroline Pidcock weighs in on the environmental profile of a frequently-used material

**+ The basics** Concrete has been used since the Romans invented it 2000 years ago. It's made from cement, aggregate, sand and water.

**+ Environmental impact** As with most materials, there is an energy impact from extracting and transporting the raw materials. To minimise this, choose locally sourced concrete and recycled aggregate.

**+ Benefits** These include concrete's thermal mass (ability to absorb and store heat), its versatility, strength and durability, as well as fire resistance. To maximise the thermal mass benefits, think about situating concrete to maximise sun exposure and insulate it against heat loss.

"We're so happy with the foxtail palm," says Greer. "Relaxing on the daybed watching the leaves sway in the breeze and listening to the sound of the ocean in the background is probably my favourite thing to do... when I actually get a moment to myself!"

Inside, the home is layered with earthy textures and lots of greenery. "I tried to keep it all consistent throughout the home and hopefully create a timeless look that won't date quickly," says Greer. "I live by the [19th-century British designer] William Morris quote, 'Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful!'"

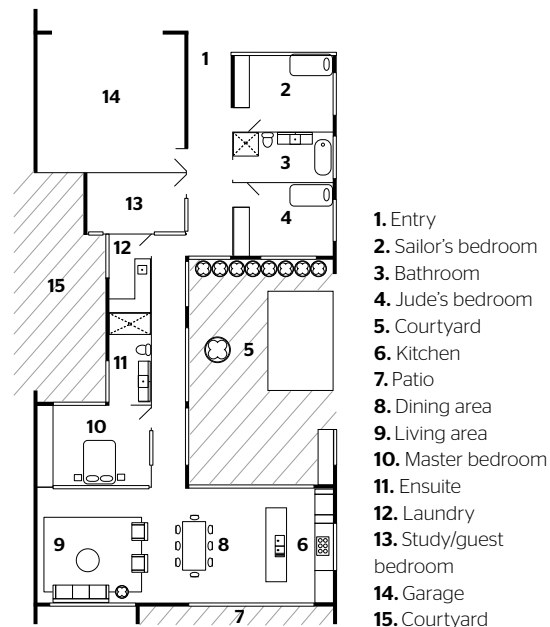
James pitched in and acted as chief landscaper on this project. He did most of the work himself with some help from a family member who is a landscaper. "We wanted a low-maintenance garden that reflected a Palm Springs cactus garden, mixed with modern Australian natives," says James, who is also responsible for the abundance of indoor plants in the family's home.

"He's developed a serious obsession," teases Greer.

Together, they've proven that big ideas and a small budget can be a winning formula, as long as you add a bit of creativity into the mix. "I loved the challenge of building and am so proud of what we have achieved within our budget," says Greer. **10**

See more *Create Architecture* projects at [createarchitecture.com.au](http://createarchitecture.com.au).

The builders were *Sanctuary 28*, visit [s28.com.au](http://s28.com.au).



**DINING AREA** Son Jude and husband James sit at a table setting from The Borrowed Nursery, in front of Brooklyn Whelan's dramatic *Holding Pattern* artwork. **LIVING AREA (opposite)** Greer has chosen pieces that are hardy enough to withstand the rigours of family life. "It's nice not to rush in and buy new things right away," she says. "It's important to live in the space first." The 'Bronte' linen sofa is from Urban Couture.



"As this was the young family's first home, the design needed to be cost-efficient and space-efficient. Quality was prioritised over quantity to achieve a light and airy space"

SCOTT CARPENTER, ARCHITECT

THE SLING CHAIRS (BOTH PAGES): WORN. WORNSTORE.COM.AU. RUG: ETSY. ETSY.COM.AU





**5 GREAT FINDS**

**DOWN TO EARTH** Warm, welcoming tones in all shapes, forms and textures help bring the outdoors in.



**1** 'Monte #29' cushion, \$195, Pampa, [pampa.com.au](http://pampa.com.au).



**2** 'The Cane Lounger', \$849, Worn, [wornstore.com.au](http://wornstore.com.au).



**4** 'Wexler' pot, \$145/ small, Pop & Scott, [popandscott.com](http://popandscott.com).



**3** HK Living 'Tree' table, \$299, Kira & Kira, [kiraandkira.bigcartel.com](http://kiraandkira.bigcartel.com).



**5** 'Felix' sling chair, \$799, Little Things Interiors, [littletthingsinteriors.com](http://littletthingsinteriors.com).

ADDITIONAL PRODUCT SOURCING: LUCY FRANCIS, CACTUS POT (OPPOSITE), POP & SCOTT, POPANDSCOTT.COM, STRIPED CUSHION, PAMPA, PAMPA.COM.AU, COFFEE MUG, NIKALU, NIKALUSTORE.COM, HAT, LACK OF COLOR, LACKOFCOLOR.COM.AU



**PATIO** Light filters through a painted bamboo roof in this charming nook off the kitchen. Timber coffee tables from Kira & Kira and spotted gum decking bounce off a built-in seat with custom cushions from 3Beaches. **JUDE'S BEDROOM (opposite, top)** Linen bedding from Dos Ombré and a rustic 'The Tribe' stool from Worn won't date as Jude grows. The bongo drum was a gift. **SAILOR'S BEDROOM (opposite, bottom)** Little Sailor's sanctuary is sweetly warmed up with a canopy by Nellie's Folk, more Dos Ombré bedding and a rattan moon from Dutch Warehouse.



**bright idea**

A smattering of breeze blocks from Austral Masonry atop a rendered wall creates a retro-chic nook. "I love breeze blocks and think they provide a fun design feature to our home," says Greer.



