

# family

Cute new home in the hills – check.  
Decorations up and kids excited – check.  
This is Christmas in Byron Bay



# tree

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## cheat sheet

**Who lives here** Megan Fishwick, a full-time mum; her husband Mike, a fashion-industry design manager; and their three daughters, Ivy, 10, Violet, 8, and Maple, 3.

**Style of home** A three-bedroom, Modernist-style house that borders a nature reserve near Cape Byron on the NSW far north coast.

**Timeline** The couple purchased the block of land in September 2017 and began the planning and design process almost immediately. Within a few weeks they had obtained a construction certificate and construction commenced in August 2018. The project was complete by July 2019.

**Cost** Total cost for the new build, including a pool, was about \$500,000.



**T**o say the least, this was an ambitious project – a couple with three young children deciding to tackle their vision of designing and building every corner of their home. And so it was that Megan and Mike Fishwick crafted their mid-century-inspired sanctuary on the fringe of Byron Bay.

The result? High among the gumtrees on a pristine plot of coastal bushland, this new home is testament to the pair's unwavering vision and tenacity. Soulful and serene yet family focused, the elevated house is defined by a sense of tranquillity and a seamless connection to nature.

Megan, a former model born and raised in California, and Mike, a design manager in the fashion industry, fell in love with this part of Australia long ago. "We've lived in the area for 12 years," she explains. "We renovated our last house ourselves and had all of our girls there. In 2017, just as we were outgrowing it, we found this block of land."

The somewhat secret and undeniably special pocket of land five kilometres south of Cape Byron was undoubtedly 'the one'. "There are native trees all around as it's hidden in a reserve," says Megan. "You're out of Byron with this beautiful feeling of nature, privacy and space yet it's only five minutes' drive from the town. There's also a wonderful little community here."

Embarking on their life-changing journey within the constraints of a relatively tight budget, the family of five – including three daughters now aged three to 10 – lived in a caravan off site for eight months. "Looking back, we wouldn't have had it any other way. It was fun," says Megan with a laugh. "There was less to clean and I cooked easy meals for us. We were all together and I'm very much a fan of the simple life."

Through it all, she and Mike never lost sight of their goal. "We have always wanted to design our own home and make it a creative space to live in. Doing so was a very collaborative process," says Megan. They also knew that their new home would pay loving respect to their shared appreciation of iconic Modernist architecture. "We love the fact that everything from the mid-century design era has a purpose," says Megan. "The simplicity of those houses speaks to us. For me, it's also an emotional directive as my family has lived in Southern Californian homes like this."

Within the walls, the instant impact of organic timber lends warmth and texture to the understated base palette. "I love the Australian blackwood we've used throughout," says Megan. "It's so moody, and the effect is almost like living in the bush." Other key features are the sandstone rock walls (one in the entry, another at the gate) and a roughly hewn seat in the living room. The family's stonemason friend Paul Squires has achieved a fantastic result.



"We have no one overlooking us. It's hard to imagine ever leaving this house"

MEGAN FISHWICK, OWNER

**DINING AREA (page 58)** Megan and daughter Maple in a cosy corner among the Christmas decorations. Those on the tree are mostly made by the family, with extra flourishes and wrap from Officeworks and The Party Parlour. Tree from Gold Coast Christmas Trees. Decorations, West Elm. Lights, Bunnings. Lopsided mugs, Made In Japan. Hasami teapot, Habitat Byron Bay. Glass tumbler, Tigmi Trading. Pan Pottery vase, Braer. Monte #1025 wool rug, Pampa. Artwork, vintage Picasso replica from the 1940s. Maple's dress, Daughter. **EXTERIOR (page 59)** The girls outside the Californian-style home built by Mike. Its Axon cladding by James Hardie is painted Dulux Lexicon Quarter. Fitting in perfectly with the VW bug in the drive is their 'desert garden', inspired by those in Palm Springs. Feature plants include Livistona palm, golden barrel cactus and a number of agaves. **BUILT-IN SEAT (above)** This gathering point looks out to the grassy slope at the back. The diner-style seating was designed by Mike, who also made the dining table. "I love built-in furniture and the old-school look and feel of a banquette," says Megan. Striped cushions and Lumira candle, The Flower Bar. She Lights 'Inga' pendant, Temple & Webster. Linen tablecloth, I Love Linen. Kraft paper stars made by Ivy and Violet. Dinner plates in Olive, recycled clay miso and pasta bowls, and Jahi brass candlesticks, all Shackpalace Rituals. Uscha circular ceramic vessel and brass tray, Newrybar Merchants. Glass cylinder vases with tealight holders and gold honeycomb garlands, The Party Parlour. Champagne glasses, Megan's own.

**LIVING ROOM** "We love the slower pace of life here," says Megan as her daughters work on the decorations. Fresh conifer garland, Braer. Velvet cushion, The Flower Bar. Woven cushion and Monte #0680 wool rug, Pampa. Spots gift wrap and gold ribbon, The Party Parlour. **KITCHEN (opposite)** Organic textures in the Australian blackwood joinery and Iri finger mosaic splashback combine in effortless style. The floor is compressed concrete cement sheeting. "It sits on top of the floor beams and we had it polished," says Megan. "So, in a way it is the structure of the house." Quantum Quartz benchtop in Alpine Matte. Splashback tiles, Surface Society. The white industrial stools were a budget-friendly find from Kmart. Twinkle garland, The Party Parlour. Studio Jumanji clay urn in Cream, Habitat Byron Bay. Melissa Lellouche vase with gold embellishment, Habitat Byron Bay. Recycled clay miso bowls, Shackpalace Rituals.

"I love earthy colours, especially the Australian blackwood with the concrete, and the terrazzo running from the hallway into the bathrooms"

MEGAN





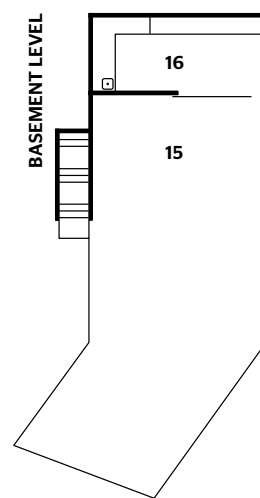
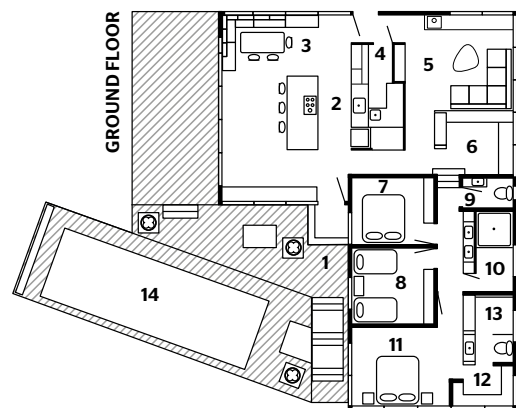
Though perhaps the home's greatest success lies in the fact that its considered design, by Mike and Megan, allows light to flood the rooms, with the house opening seamlessly to its natural surroundings. "We're so proud of how well Mike has done," says Megan. "He was on the tools the entire time, from sunrise to sunset. The only person he consulted with during the planning process was an engineer – and anything he didn't have to contract out, he did himself. Mike also read a lot of books on how these homes are built, and his father is a builder so he would give us his opinion, while I handled the financial side."

Not surprisingly, there were occasional and not insignificant bumps on the journey. "One corner of the swimming pool – which sits in front of the house, soaking up the slope – was slightly over the building envelope," says Megan. "Mike had to dump about \$6500 worth of concrete and redo the steelwork, which was upsetting. Then there was a huge storm one night and the ceiling started to warp and bow a little. That had to be fixed with 2000 screws and resealed. It has certainly been a process... but now we're beginning to make memories."

The home's bushland setting is certainly helping. Much to the family's delight, there's wildlife aplenty. "We'll be sitting at the breakfast table," explains Megan, "and one of the girls will say, 'A wallaby is in the backyard again!' It's just magic."

With the family excited about their first Christmas in the house, most of the trimmings are already in place. "I always decorate; we buy and put up a tree, and the girls like to make something special for their rooms," says Megan. "But Christmas for us is really just a day at the beach at Wategos with friends and family. We set up our spot on the sand and the kids open their presents, then we hang out there for hours, playing games and eating. It's low-key, relaxed and natural." <sup>10</sup>

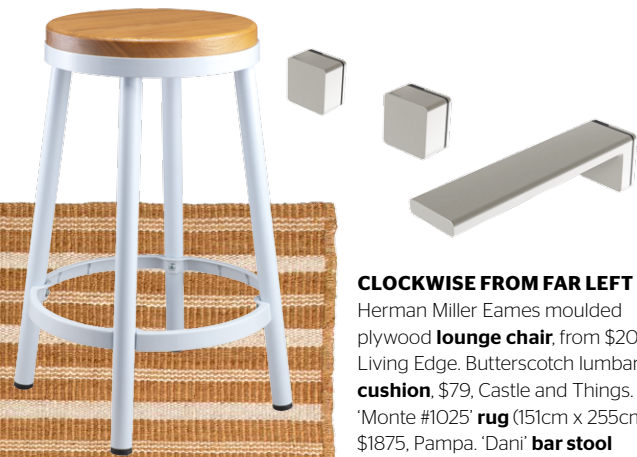
*Squires Stone Masonry can be found at [squiresstonemasonry.org](http://squiresstonemasonry.org)*



- 1 Entry
- 2 Kitchen
- 3 Dining
- 4 Laundry
- 5 Living
- 6 Playroom
- 7 Bedroom
- 8 Bedroom
- 9 Bathroom
- 10 Bathroom
- 11 Main bedroom
- 12 WIR
- 13 Ensuite
- 14 Pool
- 15 Garage
- 16 Workshop/store

**TABLE DETAIL** As the family hangs out at the beach for most of Christmas day, celebrations at home are elegant but simple. Ceramic plates in Olive, Osko aged-silver fork set, Jahi brass candlesticks and brass bowl, Shackpalace Rituals. White linen napkin, I Love Linen. White twine, Officeworks. Conifer sprig, Braer. Uscha circular vase and candles, Newrybar Merchants. Glass cylinder vase with tealight holder, The Party Parlour. **SITTING AREA (opposite)** Louvre windows ensure the flow of fresh air throughout the home. Green conifer wreath, Braer. Woven cushion, Pampa. Velvet cushion, The Flower Bar. Shoes, Megan's.





**CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT** Herman Miller Eames moulded plywood lounge chair, from \$2015, Living Edge. Butterscotch lumbar cushion, \$79, Castle and Things. 'Monte #1025' rug (151cm x 255cm), \$1875, Pampa. 'Dani' bar stool in Ash/White, \$148, Life Interiors. 'Alia' wall-top assemblies, \$420, and wall basin/bath outlet, \$327, all Phoenix Tapware. French linen queen quilt and pillowcases set in Sage, \$345, I Love Linen.

**GREAT FINDS**



**VIOLET & MAPLE'S ROOM** Above one bed in the girls' sunny space is a treasured artwork bought in Los Angeles during a recent holiday. "Everything we own, we cherish," says Megan. "Most of our pieces have a story behind them." All the furniture came from the family's previous home. Grey stripe linen flat sheet and pillowcase in Sage, I Love Linen. Monte 'Pom Pom #56' cushion in Burnt and Litoral woven bag (containing gifts), Pampa. Gold-flag garland, Spotlight. Gold and white paper, The Party Parlour. Gold washi tape, Officeworks. Maple (left) and Violet wear clothes from Daughter. **HALLWAY (above right)** This out-of-bathroom vanity was inspired by the Fishwicks' international travels. "It breaks up the usual hallway feel," says Megan. Custom concrete benchtop, Slabshapers. Taps and towel rail, Phoenix Tapware. **MAIN BEDROOM (opposite)** Megan's decorating style is fairly minimal, featuring pieces she's had for years. The small side table was a Gumtree discovery, while Megan painted the monochrome artwork above the bed after being inspired by something similar on Pinterest. The feature wall is Australian blackwood and the French linen quilt cover in Sage is from I Love Linen. Crystal quartz and gold ceramic disc, Shackpalace Rituals. Monte #0779 wool rug, Pampa.

ADDITIONAL PRODUCT SOURCING: NATALIE JOHNSON

lessons learnt  
 "Don't get ahead of yourself"

MEGAN FISHWICK, HOMEOWNER  
 Rome wasn't built in a day — and neither was this home. "It's important to take everything day by day," says Megan. "If you do that, it's easier to persevere and know that there will eventually be a solution to every problem. And you really can do anything if you put your mind to it."

