



# SAIL *away*

A commitment to eco-friendliness results in a stylish dwelling that sets a new benchmark in energy efficiency

STORY KERRY RAMSEY STYLING WENDY BANNISTER PHOTOGRAPHY CRAIG WALL

**EXTERIOR** Sue and Ian's country getaway in rural Birregurra, Victoria, blends into the sun-bleached landscape with its low, single-storey profile and Lysaght Spandek steel and silvertop ash timber wall cladding. It is built into the hill, which provides protection from the southerlies and "makes you feel like you are part of the landscape," Sue says, adding, "We also have fantastic

views of the township and rolling agricultural land." A smattering of native plants around the home marks the start of the couple's next project - developing garden beds throughout the 1.5-acre property. According to Ian, "That's the ideal size. You see a lot of people who buy a place with 100 acres, but for self-sufficiency, we reckon the neighbours can provide the cows and we'll grow the vegetables." >



*Not only* DID WE WANT IT TO BE AS ECOLOGICALLY ADVANCED AS POSSIBLE, IT HAD TO BE EASY TO LOOK AFTER."



**When Melbourne couple** Ian Court and Sue Walpole snapped up a one-and-a-half-acre property in rural Birregurra, a 90-minute drive from Melbourne, their aim was to build a sustainable yet sophisticated home – but the result of their efforts surpassed anything they had set out to achieve. With tenacity and foresight, the couple took the project to a new plateau, achieving an astounding eight-star energy-efficiency rating from Sustainability Victoria. “The rating has given us a real sense of achievement,” says Ian, “and hopefully it’s a good example of the future direction of housing design.”

Built over three levels excavated into a hillside overlooking the local township, the house ticks all the boxes on the energy and sustainability list: its ‘green’ features include a solar power and hot-water system, passive solar heating, rainwater harvesting, greywater recycling and low-energy lighting. Not only does the couple produce their own power, their solar panels are integrated with the electricity grid, so they can sell any excess to the power company. “I first became interested in global warming and renewable energy five years ago,” says Ian, who’s a non-executive director of Pacific Hydro, a renewable energy company focused on hydroelectric and wind farm-produced power. “When we started designing the house, we wanted environmental sustainability done in an attractive way,” he says.

A low-maintenance home was also high on their list of priorities, as the couple split their time equally between Birregurra and their Melbourne apartment. “We didn’t want the house to be too big – three bedrooms is fine,” says Sue, the former Sex Discrimination Commissioner and now a director on numerous boards. They turned to Andreas and Judy Sederof of Sunpower Design, whose environmentally aware ideas give the house its air of casual comfort. In the heart of the home is a spacious living and dining area, with double-glazed windows and doors that >

**DINING ROOM {opposite}** On one of her regular visits to Melbourne’s vintage stores, Sue came upon a collection of late-’60s Danish-style pieces. Bought from The Bitch is Back in St Kilda, the selection included the dining suite and cocktail cabinet with diamond inlay. “We hadn’t intended to buy the bar but it was too gorgeous not to,” she says.

**KITCHEN {top left}** A Smeg gas cooktop and electric oven, Fisher & Paykel five-star-rated fridge and a Franke ‘Sorter’ recycling system for compost and general garbage give the kitchen environmental cred. A Miele half-size dishwasher was selected for its water efficiency. Beside the kitchen island, which was custom-made using hoop pine for the drawers and bottom shelf and recycled kauri for the uprights, Ligne Roset ‘Pam’ stools by Archirivolto from Domo Collections provide a splash of colour. The bamboo bowl is from The Works.

**LIVING ROOM {top right}** Victoria’s combination of searing summer temperatures and biting winter cold offers a major challenge for eco homeowners. Ian and Sue tackled this with extensive insulation, double-glazed windows and a polished concrete floor which provides thermal mass; sunlight reaches across the house in winter, is absorbed into the concrete and released at night. When the mercury really drops, the couple fires up the slow-combustion wood heater and dig their toes happily into the bright rug from Designer Rugs. >





*"We wanted ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY DONE IN AN ATTRACTIVE WAY."*


< open out to a sumptuous deck. It's shaded in summer by sails that can be removed in winter, when the sun generates passive heating by warming the concrete slab on which the house is built.

Throughout the house, recycled kauri timbers are reworked into signature furnishings, while spotted gum hardwood, sourced from a Victorian plantation, lines the floors in the main bedroom and stairways. To complete the pared-back look, the couple scoured vintage stores until they spotted a collection of late-'60s Danish-style furniture pieces, all made of Queensland walnut timber.

Although Ian and Sue can now unwind in their welcoming home, they're not the types to rest on their laurels; their next big project is already underway. "We have a whole acre and a half of gardens to develop," says Sue, "so we've started building up the soil and putting in vegetable beds. In a few years, it will be transformed. In fact, if we get a goat, we'll be able to live here completely self-sufficiently!"

**MASTER BEDROOM {top left}** The couple couldn't resist splurging on luxurious (yet eco-friendly) bedlinen. In the main bedroom, the organic cotton and unbleached hemp sheet set from the Hemp Gallery brings elegance, while colour is added with a Bemboka striped cotton throw from Taste Lifestyle and, over a chair from Anibou, a printed Spacecraft throw. The artwork is by local artist Susan Horacek and depicts Lavers Hill in the Otway Ranges. The room has a sun-drenched north-westerly aspect, but a combination of Air Cell insulation and eco-friendly polyester batts in the walls and ceiling keeps the room cool, even during sweltering summer days.

**ENSUITE {top right}** With views out the generously sized windows, the curvaceous bath of reconstituted stone from Rock 'n Stone invites a languorous soak in the ensuite. The vanity's pale CaesarStone benchtop and Morgan & Finch bamboo and cotton bath towels in Granite from The Works repeat the house's tones of charcoal, white and cream.

 **SOLAR ENERGY {opposite}** Every part of this home works to keep Ian and Sue as self-sufficient as possible; even the roof hides solar panels, which keep the couple in power and hot water. Overall, the solar panels cost about \$25,000, but the couple receives cash back from selling renewable energy certificates, saves on power bills and expects to be in credit with the power company through the feed-in tariff paid for excess power produced by the system. "This means we will be able to recoup the cost of the system over time," says Ian. "I'm very proud that we haven't had to buy power yet." >



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To collect, store and distribute rainwater for use in their kitchen, laundry {right} and bathrooms, Ian installed two 19,000-litre galvanised tanks. "We are hoping the tanks will supply all our water requirements but if we have a really dry spell, we can automatically switch over to the mains," he says, adding, "We've never had to buy town water." Sue and Ian also installed a Biolytix wastewater treatment system; call 1300 881 472 or visit [www.biolytix.com](http://www.biolytix.com). The system converts raw sewage and wastewater into quality irrigation water using natural chemical processes and living organisms. This means that Sue and Ian can irrigate the garden even during water restriction periods.

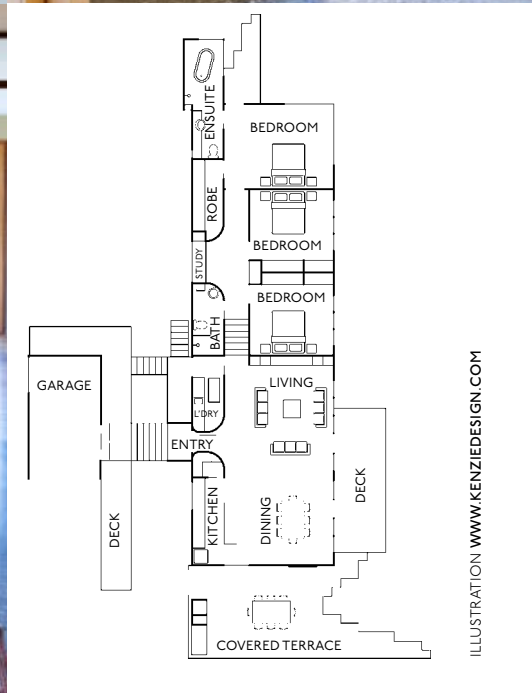


ILLUSTRATION [WWW.KENZIEDESIGN.COM](http://WWW.KENZIEDESIGN.COM)

## Inside story

**Who lives here?** Ian Court, 60, and Sue Walpole, 57, both non-executive directors of various firms; Ian's son Max, 16; and border terrier Yogi.

**What attracted you to this area?** Ian:

"Between us and the coast is the Otway National Park which offers great rainforest walks and waterfalls. There's also a nine-hole golf course and we're involved with a bicycle group. In the next couple of years, we'll probably end up living here full time."

**Any advice when choosing an architect?**

"We started with another architect but decided that wasn't working for us. It's no good going ahead if it doesn't feel right. After talking to Sunpower Design, we knew

we were going in the same direction."

**Any rethinks during the construction phase?** "The shed, which became a place to

spend the night during construction. We put in insulation, a heater, a sink and a bed, so now my son likes to stay there with friends."

**Most precious possessions?** Sue: "I have a large collection of Depression glass, while Ian's a 'stereophile' so we have a Sonos wireless controller with three music zones in the house and also a valve amplifier."

**Any favourite websites on sustainability?**

Ian: "I joined a not-for-profit organisation called the Alternative Technology Association [[visit www.ata.org.au](http://www.ata.org.au)], which encourages sustainability at the domestic level."

**GLASS {top left}** Sue's collection of green glass makes a striking display atop the '60s Danish-style cocktail cabinet.

**DECK {bottom left}** Relaxing on Ici et Là deckchairs from Taste Lifestyle, Sue and Ian love this sweeping deck. With the retractable awnings unfurled and cool refreshments in biodegradable plastic Morgan & Finch eco tumblers from The Works, this is a sanctuary on a hot day.

**HOME OFFICE {bottom right}** Curved walls in hoop-pine plywood cladding are both striking and functional, providing extra storage and room for a work station.

Contact Sunpower Design on (03) 9386 3700 or visit [www.sunpowerdesign.com.au](http://www.sunpowerdesign.com.au).