

# Height of luxury

Inspired by a country club enjoyed while living overseas, a Brisbane family is now living their dream. Story by **Elizabeth Mabin**

When the shrill tone of the alarm clock rings out on these chilly winter mornings there's little incentive to pry yourself out of bed, unless you're John and Anna Harrison. When they get up each morning the pair prepare for their day in what is quite possibly one of the largest and ensuite in all of Brisbane (pictured, top right). It is a standout feature in their new home in Yeronga and one they couldn't be happier with.

Ten metres long and five metres wide, the combined bathroom and wardrobe is the size of two bedrooms – an area so large the tiling company actually called to double check the dimensions of the room when they received the order for the floor tiles. Finished in a glossy, grey porcelain tile that looks a bit like polished stone, Anna's wardrobe hangs on one side of the room and John's on the other, with a hardwood bench in the middle, shower and bath at one end and a separate vanity, bidet, water closet, linen cupboard and laundry chute at the other end.

Anna said the ensuite was actually inspired by their time living in Las Vegas. "We were lucky enough to belong to the Las Vegas Country Club where they had these fabulous dressing rooms that I just thought were so nice. So our ensuite looks like the country club's interior and you never get tired of waking up to that luxury," Anna said.

It was this type of luxury that John and Anna wanted throughout the house, but with an equal focus on function and without being ostentatious. "We weren't looking for a museum and we didn't want everything gold-foiled, but we did want practical luxury. We wanted a house to accommodate a family, where everyone has their own space and there's a kitchen to cook for 40 people. We do have two kids that run through so there's really nothing in the house that is untouchable, but everything in the house is beautiful."

The quest to find someone who understood their idea of "practical luxury" led them to quite a few architects before they found the right one – Steve Milton of Tckon Consulting. John and Anna had originally wanted to renovate the existing Queensland on their block, but after an



initial feasibility study Steve presented them with plans for a new home instead and they were immediately convinced. Interestingly, it wasn't the task of blending the practical with the luxurious that Steve found most challenging; it was the steep topography of the site which slopes up away from the road. "The brief was to have a large open plan living area but initially it was difficult to see how we could do that on the steep site. I proposed a concept design which included three levels, so the house steps up from front to back and follows the contours of the site," Steve said.

The lowest level at the front of the house includes a giant office, guest bedroom with ensuite, laundry with outside drying area under the house and a large double-car garage. Above that is the main living level which stretches from the front to back of the house and includes the kitchen (complete with wall-to-ceiling pantry, scullery and study nook), dining and living area, an outdoor room, two children's bedrooms with a shared bathroom, a soundproof media room and a powder room for guests. Above the kitchen towards the back of the house there is a third level for the master bedroom and its giant ensuite.

Another challenge of the steep block was to build a home that was easy to get

around. "We used a few things, one was a laundry chute that connects all three levels of the house and we were also able to design stairwells that are easier to get up by making them longer and reducing the height between the stair treads," Steve said. The stepped house rises high on the block, giving the Harrisons leafy views and plenty of privacy.

The suspended timber floor of the house hovers above the terrain below it, so very little site work was required to alter the ground before construction, a good thing according to Steve as it

meant they were "touching the earth lightly". Sustainability was a priority and the finished house achieves it in more ways than one. The walls and ceiling are insulated, there are two water tanks with a total capacity of about 10,000 litres and, most importantly, the house maximises natural ventilation and solar orientation to make the most of the sun's heat in winter and limit its effect in summer.

John and Anna have been amazed at how well the design strategy has worked. "Steve's a genius. There are louvred windows and sliding doors front and back

and at the back of the house the roof is up really high and always seems to channel a breeze right through the house. In the middle of January when we moved in it was stinking hot, but we only turned on the air conditioner once and that was to test it," Anna said.

The home's outdoor room was also designed with Queensland's climate in mind and is another feature the Harrisons rave about. "The outdoor room is just fabulous. Again, because it's a steep block we didn't end up with a lot of yard space on the level of our main living area, so what Steve did

instead was cut in an enormous deck on the side of the house. It's about six by 11 metres, entirely fly-screened and, because it faces north, it's very cool in summer. In winter the sun drops a little bit lower and the whole deck is a very warm and pleasant place to be," Anna said. The house forms a "U" shape around the outdoor room which is separated from the main living area by cascading doors that can be opened to make the living room and deck one large space.

Another of Anna's favourite parts of the house is the kitchen, a room she spent four months personally designing, time well spent if you ask her about it. "I'm probably still on a high because I've been in the house for six months. I've had a good chance to use it and it is absolutely perfect. It is just a wonderful kitchen," she said. It's a sentiment echoed in the family's feelings about the entire house. "If there was anything that was going to irritate us it would have by now. If we had the chance to change anything, we would not change a thing."

