

You're looking for a site to build a house on. You have a blended family of six children, ranging in age from under five to 25, so you would, quite understandably, like a generous amount of space. With this requirement in mind, a steep hill may not be the first place you'd look. This potential inconvenience, however, didn't discourage David Goddard and Liesle Theron from eyeing a precipitous site in the Wellington suburb of Northland. That's because they figured their architects (Gerald Parsonson, Sam Donald and Craig Burt) would know exactly how to use it best. "Our only real requirement was space," Theron says. "That's why we met with Gerald on the section before we bought it. While not everyone was going to live in the house at the same time, we needed to know we could all fit."

Parsonson's experience with shoe-horning space onto vertiginous Wellington sites meant he didn't hesitate to design something to suit this situation. In fact, he completed the first sketch for the home in

about two hours. "While there were tweaks here and there, Liesle and David made no fundamental changes to that design," he says. "What you see now is basically that first drawing." The genius of the design is that this six-bedroom, three-level, 600-square-metre home (including indoor swimming pool) never feels flabby or cumbersome.

First things first: after Goddard and Theron bought the site, the decayed old villa on it – which was so derelict that a woman literally fell through some of the floorboards during an open home – was demolished, and the site was cleared of some of its overgrown, jungle-like vegetation. The couple's trust in Parsonson was reflected in their loose brief: they simply wanted something "modern and light, with a spacious feel that was in conversation with the outdoors," says Theron.

The site boasts incredible views, but they couldn't be enjoyed without careful architectural consideration. "It's typical north Wellington: view on one side, sun on the polar opposite," Parsonson says. The



balancing act

Wellington's Parsonson Architects come up with an ingenious design for one of the city's typically precipitous sites.

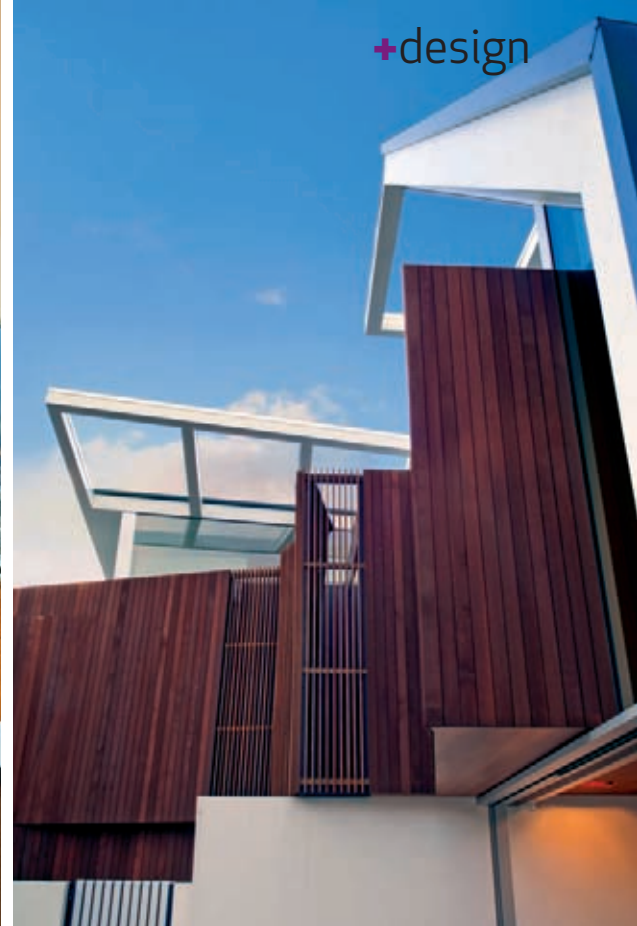


Clockwise from left: Making the most of limited space; moss-coloured carpet directs you through the home; a striking silhouette; the warm interior.



BIO

ARCHITECTS
Gerald Parsonson, Parsonson Architects
BEST BUILDINGS
Parsonson and his team at Wellington's Parsonson Architects – including Sam Donald and Craig Burt – have designed a number of award-winning homes and apartment buildings, and have distinguished themselves as specialists in getting the most out of difficult capital-city sites.



Left: The home's design serves to enhance a spectacular view. Right: Architect Gerald Parsonson wanted to offer "something unexpected".

HOME.

HOME New Zealand is the country's leading home design magazine. Every issue showcases amazing homes by New Zealand's best architects.

aim, he adds, was to create "a cross-flow of living spaces to enjoy all aspects of the day," a formula he had already perfected years earlier in a nearby Northland home, and on a similarly challenging site in the suburb of Kelburn.

This home forms a bridge between the sun and the views: Parsonson created a flat, north-facing backyard against the hill, which connects with the family living area in a way that allows views right through the house to the harbour. To stand at the kitchen island is to experience the best of both worlds – a spectacular vista on one side, and a sunny backyard on the other, while overhead, light slices downwards from windows in the faceted roof.

The home is composed of two main elements. There is an angled corrugated steel roof that, from one side, looks like the abstracted roof of a neighbouring bungalow tipped sideways, its jagged edges reaching for the light. "We like our angled roofs to be traditional in residential character," Parsonson says, "but then we like to dice the roofs, push them apart and offer something unexpected."

The home has a faceted cedar cladding that reveals itself inside and out, starting from the garage and wrapping the top-level bedrooms before pushing inside to hover spectacularly over the interior of the kitchen and living area. Parsonson says this timber form is a reference to the heavy vegetation that previously occupied the site. "We've got a relatively rational roof form which has a wonderful relationship with an organic

wooden form," Parsonson says. "If you do complex things simply, it's interesting." The timber continues through the house as American cherry-veneered plywood ceiling panels that fold back into light boxes, dropping to a lower level to create a sense of snugness in a beautifully proportioned living room, where a fireplace and hearth neatly morphs into a generous window seat.

Continuing the organic theme, moss-green carpet on the stairs leads down from the main bedroom and younger children's bedrooms (all of them kept "small, domestic and simple," Parsonson says) on the top floor, down through the house to the bottom floor. There, a lap pool opens onto a steep garden with a winding path (landscaping was designed by Megan Wraight of Wraight & Associates) that concludes at the edge of the street below the house. Throughout this journey, the house reaches constantly towards the light with ingenious window placements, a glass-panelled floor, and a morning balcony that stretches off the living room towards the harbour.

The result is a sculptural, endlessly intriguing house that makes no attempt to conform. "It's more interesting to pose a question than to give an answer," says Parsonson. "Good art does that – the questions are more resonant." Fortunately, he's built a lovely perch from which those questions can be happily contemplated.

STORY **LEE SUCKLING**

PHOTOGRAPHY **PAUL MCCREDIE**