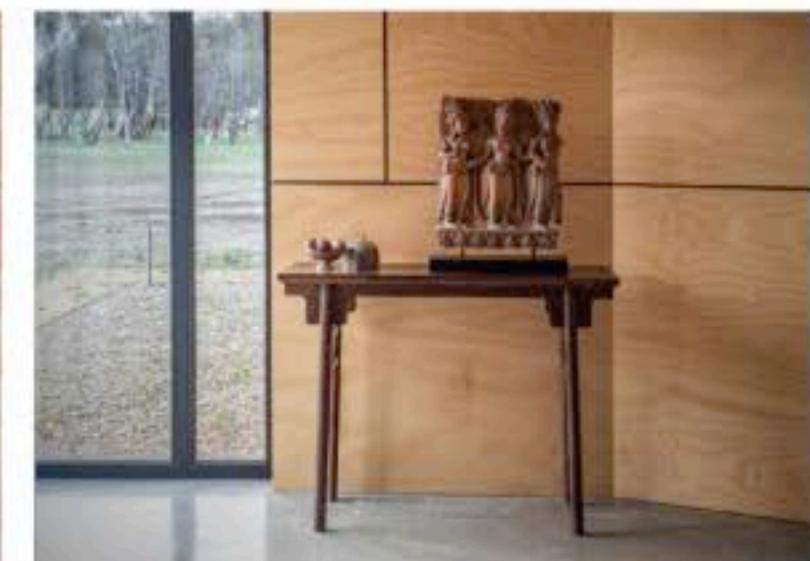




Healthy homes – it's no mirage

Story by **Emma Masters**. Photography by **Jason Porter**



Page left: The front entrance with beautifully crafted rammed earth walls by local company Stabilised Earth. Top and above left: The home is built with wide eaves and a flat roof housing a large solar array. All windows face north, maximising views to the wetland and harnessing winter sun. Above right: The couple's collections from their travels are carefully curated into the space.

When Stephen and Kaye Burton returned to Australia after spending much of their working lives in Asia and the UK, the stunning, southern Fleurieu Peninsula claimed top spot on their list of perfect places to retire. But it wasn't just the chance to live walking distance from a pristine stretch of beach, or the close proximity to Port Elliot's well-known charms that led them to build their dream home in the region.

Moving through two large, ancient Chinese wooden doors into a foyer that offers floor-to-ceiling views of a vast wetlands backyard, it's immediately obvious you're in a home whose owners have chosen a life that embraces the environment. And the couple have taken their love of nature a step further, building a sustainable, off the grid home. Stephen says his experience as a career engineer was an advantage

in developing its design. 'Like many, we're concerned about climate change and we wanted to reduce our carbon footprint, as well as set ourselves up for the future by incorporating features that keep our bills low,' he says.

'There's something wonderful about running off power that you've made and water that you've collected. I researched many technologies and overtime had a wishlist of features and we worked collaboratively with architects and builders to incorporate them into the house.'

Standing on the foyer's deck made of recycled hardwood from an abandoned bridge, another green architectural feature is revealed. The home is separated into two distinct living quarters or pods. One area features the main dining and living area, kitchen, a study, master bedroom, bathroom and walk-in robe. The other offers three more bedrooms, a bathroom, small kitchenette and garage.

'The house is zoned so you can concentrate heating and cooling in certain parts of the house,' Stephen explains. 'When we're by ourselves we can just live in one pod and not worry about servicing the other, but we can open it up when visitors stay.'



Above left: An old English barometer Kaye gave Stephen as a special gift, which was used under scientist and captain Vice-Admiral Robert FitzRoy. Right: The kitchen, dining and living areas also maximise views to the north.



But it's also what you don't see that really takes this four-bedroom Port Elliot home off the grid. Hidden under the burnished floors, inside the insulated ceilings and walls of its minimal, classy exterior lies a complex system of sustainable technologies that help the couple to take care of their own power, water and sewerage alongside cooling, heating and air filtration.

Stephen and Kaye called on Mirage Homes to construct the home on the Beyond estate between Port Elliot and Victor Harbor. Mirage is known as a specialist in sustainable homes, but its owner and director Michael Villis says the couple were a driving force behind the home's green credentials.

'They came to us with a design produced by another architect and they needed us to bring the home to budget while keeping in line with theirs and Beyond's requirements,' Michael says. 'We facilitated their desire for material choice and building heights while incorporating the roof area requirements to a design they were happy with.'

Stephen added the flat roof was specially designed to capture water and solar power, based on key predictions from the local council. 'Alexandrina Council has done a long-term master plan over the next fifty years of what's going to happen to rainfall, what's going to happen to temperatures and so those things we factored into the design of the house,' he says.

'We worked out that in twenty years' time with changes in rainfall patterns, I needed 540 square metres of roof to capture enough water to live in the house. I lost count of how many roof designs we went through, but the flat roof provides a real point of difference.'

The house also collects its greywater and reuses it on the garden, which includes newly planted fruit trees that the couple hope will feed and delight visiting family and friends in years to come. There are also plans to landscape the extensive area around the entire home with native plants and trees to match the surrounding bushland and minimise water consumption.

Mirage Homes' Michael Villis says in addition to the management of power and water, there were special considerations to regulate the home's temperature and manage its air quality and humidity. 'The client had an air tightness target to reach so their mechanical ventilation system would work at an optimum and the home would perform at their desired level,' he says.

'The opportunity to use new materials specified by the owner was a great experience for our team and delivering the final product to the level of finish we expect from ourselves was very rewarding.'

Meanwhile, it isn't just the extensive green features embedded in the architecture that set this coastal property apart from others. The interior of the house holds myriad antique furnishings and ornaments Stephen and Kaye collected during their time overseas, including beautiful silk rugs, a detailed Tibetan chest, 15th century Moorish tiles set into a pedestal table and a terracotta statue from China.

'We picked up lots of knick knacks as we were moving and travelling, and we have lots of historic pieces,' Stephen says. 'The terracotta statue is about thirty-odd years old. I was working in China when they first opened up and the only people making the casts was the Qin Terracotta Warrior Museum.'

There's also an old English barometer Kaye gave Stephen as a special gift, which was used under scientist and captain Vice-Admiral Robert FitzRoy. 'FitzRoy was appointed as the captain on the Beagle with Charles Darwin and when he returned to the UK he was put in charge of looking after the fleet in Portsmouth,' Stephen says.

'He was revolutionary at the time using barometers to measure pressure and he saved the British fleet in Portsmouth by predicting there was going to be severe storms around the late 1880s. Got himself a promotion too.'

As much as the interior gives a nod to their life abroad, the couple's love of Australia is celebrated through the home's design. Large double and triple-glazed picture windows invite the outside bushland into each room, and key feature rammed-earth walls are a wave of earthy colours.

'Its tones – it's sort of a bit of Australia,' Stephen says of the feature walls. 'You've got a beachy sand, you've got the clay soil and you've got the red centre. We plan to enjoy our home in this special part of the world for years to come.'

Michael says he hopes sustainable features incorporated in homes like Stephen and Kaye's will be adopted more readily into the future. 'We feel elements of sustainable homes should be the standard for all building projects and not just saved for the people who feel a responsibility to build a better home,' he says.

'Providing an avenue to a better, healthy home brings benefit to not only the owners but to the wider community. With considered design, quality building methods and materials, homes of character and performance can be produced. It is simply a shift in expectation of what a new home can be.'



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