

LIVING *the dream*

The plan was ambitious, but this couple's smart design decisions delivered a sustainable, energy-efficient and cost-effective family home.

STORY Elizabeth Wilson | STYLING Julia Green | PHOTOGRAPHY Armelle Habib



LIVING Owner Frances Cosway adores the resort feel of her new home. Armchair bought in the Netherlands. For similar hanging chair, try Bare Outdoors. **Smart buy:** City Chicago wool rug (2x3m), \$3845, Halcyon Lake Rugs and Carpets. **GARDEN** Margaux (left) and Lillian dip their toes in the billabong-inspired pool, designed by Natural Swimming Pools and landscaped by Sam Cox Landscape. The pool is chemical-free, with plant life and frogs living in and around it. Ligne Roset Grillage chair, Domo. *For Where to Buy, see page 232.*

Stylist's assistants Fiona Longmire & Sarah Elshaug.

This is the life

The triumph of this home is that it is "a large, modern home that is really energy efficient", says owner Neil Dicker. He and his partner, Frances Cosway, spent many years living in Europe, where they became accustomed to seeing eco-awareness pervade daily life. "We saw that people were very conscious about making a positive contribution to the environment," says Frances. "Building energy-efficient homes was a core value."



FEATURE PLANTS

- POOL AREA
- Ornamental grape
- Native hibiscus (*Athyogyne huegelii*)
- Billy buttons (*Craspedia*)
- Grevilleas
- Water reeds
- Kangaroo paw

The home built by Melbourne couple Frances Cosway and Neil Dicker embodies their values and dreams, big and small. “We wanted to build a sustainable, passive-solar house,” says Neil. “We’re concerned about climate change and believe that individuals can make a difference by making smart choices.”

Along with this overarching goal, they also wanted their home to reflect the ease and openness of resort-style living: “To create a home where we felt like we were on holidays”, says Frances. “We wanted the design to have a mid-century feel - the Kaufmann House [the 1946 residence by architect Richard Neutra in Palm Springs, USA] is our dream home.”

To bring this ideal home to life, site selection was crucial. Frances and Neil were already living in bayside Melbourne when they spied a property for sale nearby. The existing dwelling was in a dire state but the 776m² block afforded them the opportunity to build in a neighbourhood they loved, within walking distance

to local shops, the beach and school for their daughters Margaux, six, and Lillian, five. Best of all, it was oriented east-west, which suited their design aspirations to a tee.

Working with an architectural draftsman, the couple designed their 370m² two-storey home complete with modernist references and eco features throughout, including a natural pool at the rear. On the ground floor, there is plenty of communal space: a ‘winter room’ as well as a generous open-plan kitchen/dining/living area. The home’s four bedrooms are all on the first floor. “The challenge we set ourselves was to build an energy-efficient home with a budget equivalent to a standard construction of the same size, style and quality,” says Neil. “And we have achieved that.”

Their starting point was passive-solar principles, orienting the home to capture sun in winter and deflect it in summer. The house is built on a concrete slab, has large north-facing windows and timber-look tiled floors in the west-facing areas for additional thermal mass. All the windows are double-glazed and located ▶

Built to order

For Frances, designing her own home has underlined her whole approach to design. “I’ve designed it for us, for our tastes and our life journey,” she says. “It hasn’t been built with resale in mind.” Frances chose materials and fittings with little regard for fads or trends. “I chose things I was passionately in love with. That’s my whole philosophy of design – that a home is a story of you, how you live, your lifestyle and your journey.”

Paint colours are reproduced as accurately as printing processes allow.

THE PALETTE

Dulux Vivid White
interior, throughout

Try these accents

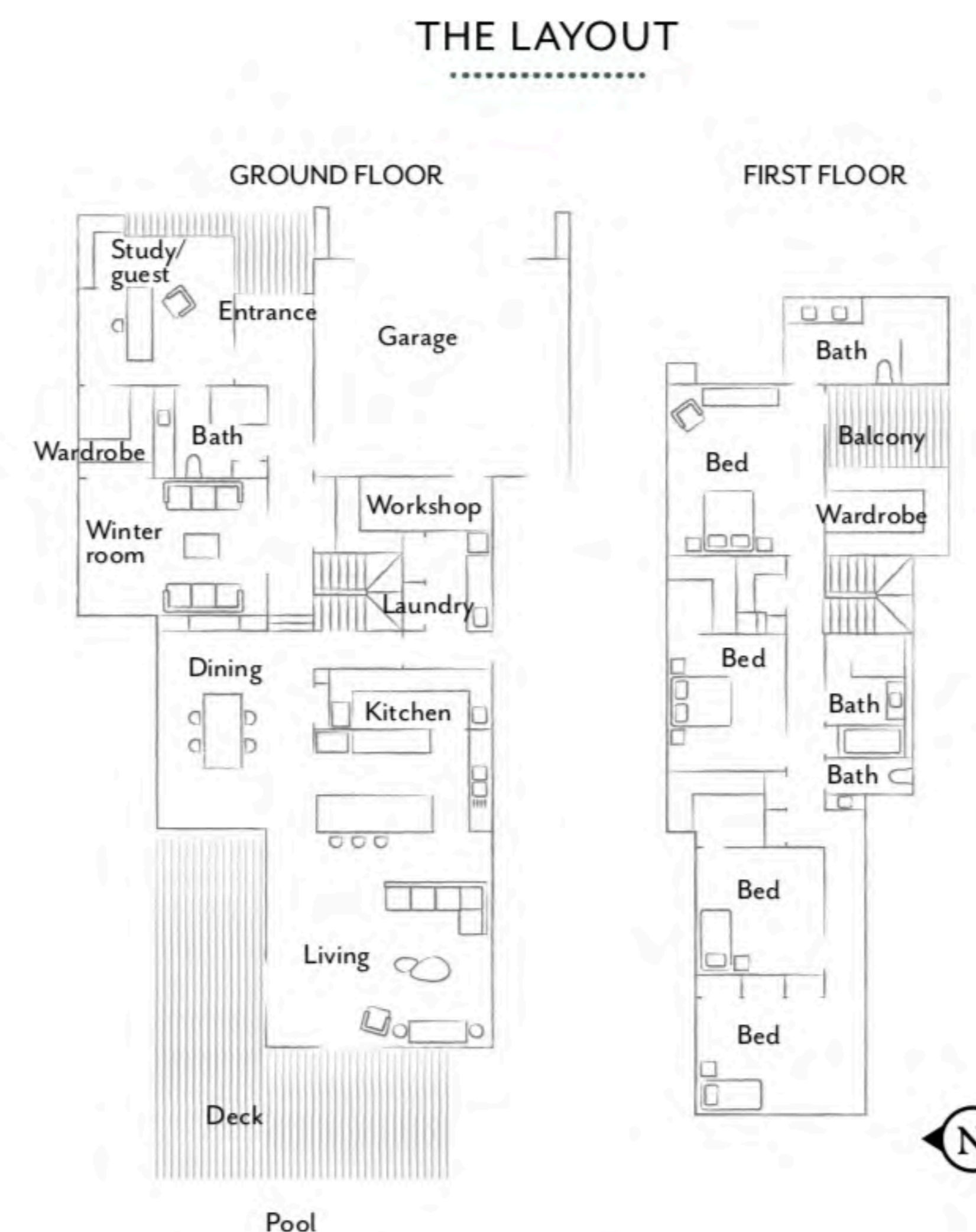
Taubmans Virginia Blue

Haymes Paint Egyptian Green

KITCHEN/DINING The splashback tiles, Azulej by Patricia Urquiola for Mutina from Urban Edge Ceramics, informed the whole kitchen scheme. Acrylic benchtops, Hi-macs. Vinyl-wrap cabinetry in White Satin, Albedor Industries. Stools, Relax House. Dining chairs, Domo. Janice Minor Solara pendant light (over dining table), Mondo Luce. Artwork, Society of Wanderers. Kitchen pendant lights, French Country Collections. **Smart buy:** Porcelanosa Montana Noce floor tiles, \$109/m², Earp Bros. For Where to Buy, see page 232.



✦ **VISIT THIS HOUSE!** This home will be open to the public for Sustainable House Day, September 11. For details, go to sustainablehouseday.com.



◀ on the north/south axis to ensure cross-flow of air. The addition of louvred awnings helps to leverage the sun.

“Passive-solar design is all about designing your house based on the orientation of the block,” says Neil. “Rain, wind and sun are free and it costs no more to design a building that takes advantage of these than it does to ignore them.”

Many of the home’s energy-efficiency credentials are behind the scenes. Seventeen solar panels on the roof power the house and the gas-boosted hot-water system, while a 20,000L rainwater tank resides under the veggie patch. There’s bulk insulation in the walls, ceiling and roof, and the whole envelope of the building is wrapped in a reflective air-cell product plus CSR Hebel panelling to make the building airtight, thus preventing energy leaks in winter. To ensure fresh air year-round, Neil and Frances installed a heat-recovery ventilator, a common fixture in European homes. When the building was completed, the home was awarded a NatHERS/AccuRate energy rating of 7.3 - the icing on the cake for the couple, who also brought the project in on budget.

Statistics aside, this is a beloved family home for all seasons: flooded with sunlight in winter, soothing in summer. “I really love the oasis we’ve created,” says Frances. “It has the feeling of a resort yet it’s low maintenance, true to the ethos of sustainable living.” **H&G**

White Pebble Interiors, Hampton, Victoria;
www.whitepebbleinteriors.com.au.

‘Eco-focused design and construction decisions not only improve quality of life, they save you money as well.’

Neil Dicker

STUDY/GUESTROOM The furniture in the study is from the 1950s. “Nothing is built in so it’s a flexible space,” says Frances. Carpet, Cavalier Carpets. Artwork by Ali McNabney-Stevens.

BATHROOM Three-dimensional wall tiles are an extra-special feature in the guest bathroom. Marcel Wanders Frozen Garden Collection wall tiles, Bisazza. The vanity face is Matrix, an eco-friendly engineered-wood surface, by Cleaf.

LIVING “I like to combine different fibres and textures to create interest in a room,” says Frances. “And lots of plants, of course!” Custom-made sofa with velvet upholstery. Coffee table, West Elm (discontinued). Fans, Big Ass Fans. Porcelanosa Montana Noce floor tiles, Earp Bros.

ENTRANCE The jewellery box-like console is a magnet for an inquisitive five year old. Vivid Turned glass pendant light, Globe West. **Designer buy:** Taj drawer chest, \$3915, Globe West. *For Where to Buy, see page 232.*

