



A new home by Paul Clarke at Pakiri brings its owner a surprising amount of happiness.

FROM EVERY ANGLE

BIO

ARCHITECT

Paul Clarke, Studio2 Architects

BACKGROUND Paul Clarke only recently established Studio2 Architects, but he has already designed a number of remarkable homes, including a finalist in *HOME* magazine's Home of the Year award. He is based in Auckland.



The big front window provides a view of what Scott Lawrie calls "the world's longest movie", the changing moods of the ocean as the weather rolls in.

YOU MOVE TO the country to get away from other people or bring other people to you: you build a fortress or a destination. Scott Lawrie, who lives alone with his dog Skip on the hills above Pakiri Beach, is firmly in the latter category. Lawrie, a Scotsman who lived in Sydney before moving to Auckland and building his new home, entertains regularly, inviting friends old and new.

When I arrive to see the house and have a chat, he cheerfully invites my wife and daughter in to have a look around. The home's architect, Paul Clarke of Studio2 Architects, soon arrives with his teenage son and his son's friend. Add a photographer and assistant, and it's a full house. Lawrie likes it that way, balancing the solitariness of living and working alone in the country with the social buzz of visitors. "I think houses need to have people in them," he says. "Houses have a soul. When a house has a good feeling, I always think that has to do with people, something to do with energy of people in the house, and history."

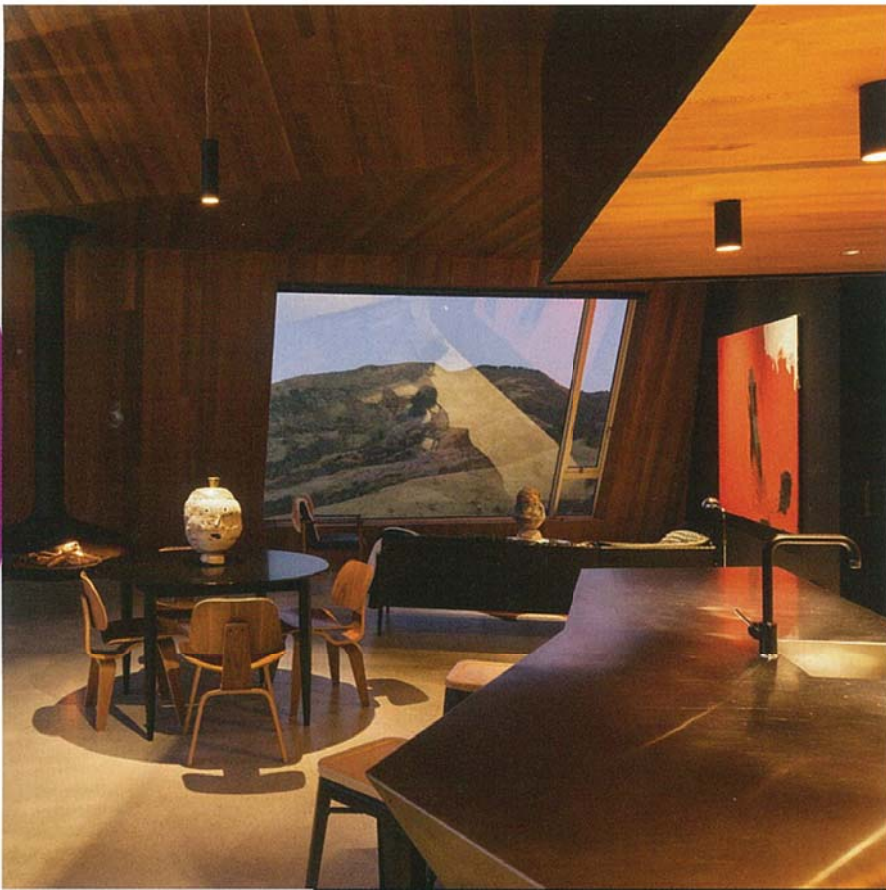
The house is named The Crossing, after the old cattle crossing track that sits behind the house (the track has been there since the 1890s). It occupies a modest site cut from the expansive farm that extends from the flats behind the beach and over the surrounding hills. There

are 16 subdivisions across 32ha; Lawrie's is one of six that look over Pakiri Beach, Little and Great Barrier Islands, and the Mokohinau Islands.

As we look out at the view, past the beach to the three islands off the coast, Lawrie tells me that the ever-changing weather provides him with all the entertainment he needs. "I don't have a TV here," he says. "And I thought it would be a bit hard, but I've never missed it. I sit and watch this. People always ask if I get bored, but there's noise from wildlife and you watch weather fronts come in, you watch weather change. The colour of the sea, the whole thing changes in front of your eyes. It's the world's longest movie."

To find the site, Lawrie, who travels frequently for work, drew a circle around Auckland Airport with a radius of an hour-and-a-half's drive. Pakiri just made it. After buying the lot, he engaged Clarke, and the two spent a year designing together.

Lawrie, who owns and operates a branding consultancy, briefed Clarke with a detailed PDF, adopting the processes he uses to enable companies to articulate their brand voices. "I ask: 'What are the values of this entity? What does it really believe in? What's the personality of this entity?'"



The home employs a simple palette of metal, timber and concrete.



HOME.

HOME magazine publishes New Zealand's best new homes. Its Home of the Year award is the country's richest architecture prize and is now in its 20th year.

The values Lawrie wanted for The Crossing were simplicity, integrity, quirkiness and "surprising but inevitable". The personality traits he identified were: "primordial", "invisibly brilliant" and "beautiful". The brief reads in bold red letters: "How do you design a contemporary New Zealand home with a sense of belonging, but give it an old soul?"

Lawrie told Clarke to take him to a place he's slightly uncomfortable with, to make him five percent nervous. He tells his clients that he should be making them nervous, because they're doing something new. "If they come back and say, 'That's really nice Scott,' then I'm not doing my job. It should be the same for Paul."

When you arrive, the 148-square-metre house appears black and impenetrable, with just a single thin window belying the generosity of its owner. Entering over a small concrete bridge and into a dark hallway with black walls and concrete floors, cut with slivers of LED lighting, you get a view to the ocean framed by the black walls and the angled ceiling.

While many modern houses emphasise openness and flow, the bedrooms at The Crossing are closed and dark. People must sleep well here. A staircase – cut down the middle and shifted half a step so the stairs dictate which foot goes on which stair – leads to the mezzanine office, the view perfect for procrastination.

Continuing down the hall, you meet the sitting room. A large window faces south and frames the neighbouring valley as if it were a classic painting. To the east is the grand view. Sliding doors open the kitchen and sitting area to the patio and the lawn, which declines towards

the hill, receding into a view of patchwork farmland, then the beach, the water and the islands.

The islands in the distance influenced the building form – an origami-like geometry, with no parallel lines, no shape repeating when viewed from another angle – which is mimicked in details throughout the house such as the handrails and the kitchen island.

The palette is a simple trio: "Metal, timber, concrete. Done," says Clarke. The coated copper exterior gives the wrapping roof a shed-like quality. From the lawn the house looks like an asymmetrical modernist church, minus the crucifix. The concrete pad anchors the house to the windy hill.

As we sit on the patio, looking out to the hills, the islands, and the ocean, Lawrie says that his fear was that his modern house in the country wouldn't integrate into the land, that it would be soulless. "A Maori friend said something really beautiful to me: 'Living here,' she said, 'you're looking at the sea, you're looking at the mountains, you're looking at the river and they've all been here before you. They've all been here for hundreds of thousands of years, and they'll be here for hundreds of thousands of years after you.' That's really nice, to connect back into that sense of history."

We both pause and take it all in. "It's the happiest I've ever been in my whole life," he says. "I've had a year of genuine happiness. I always thought I'd find it in another human being. And I didn't. I found it in a place. I found it in a house."

STORY HENRY OLIVER

PHOTOGRAPHY SIMON DEVITT