

# *A natural high*

Living the *simple life* high on a rural hilltop does not mean giving up on *comfort and style*

WORDS **BEA TAYLOR** / PHOTOGRAPHS **JANE USSHER**

**THIS PAGE** When Scott Lawrie was planning his Pakiri home, north of Auckland, he was initially nervous about having a wall made entirely of glass. "The problem is not being too cold, but being too hot – the glass heats up the house so quickly that the doors are open all the time, even in winter."





SCOTT LAWRIE HAS A SECRET. He's kept it close for some time. It's living simply: just him and his dog Skippy, on top of a hill with a view of Pakiri beach beneath.

"When you make the decision to live like this, it is a good secret to keep because otherwise everyone would do it," he says. "Although it would probably help lower blood pressure rates in New Zealand."

One night four years ago, Scott was sitting in his small Sydney backyard looking up at the stars. But alas, the high-rises on either side and a particularly large fence left only a small postage stamp of sky to gaze at.

"I thought, is this it? Everyone tells you to work hard and succeed and this is what you get? There's got to be more."

So, having always felt more at home in New Zealand than his home country of Scotland, he picked a spot on top of a hill in Pakiri, 85km north of Auckland, and built his dream house. >

**THIS PAGE** The Gyrofocus fireplace was imported from France – it's made from 120kg of steel and rotates 360 degrees; the black chairs were rescued from a skip in Sydney and reupholstered.

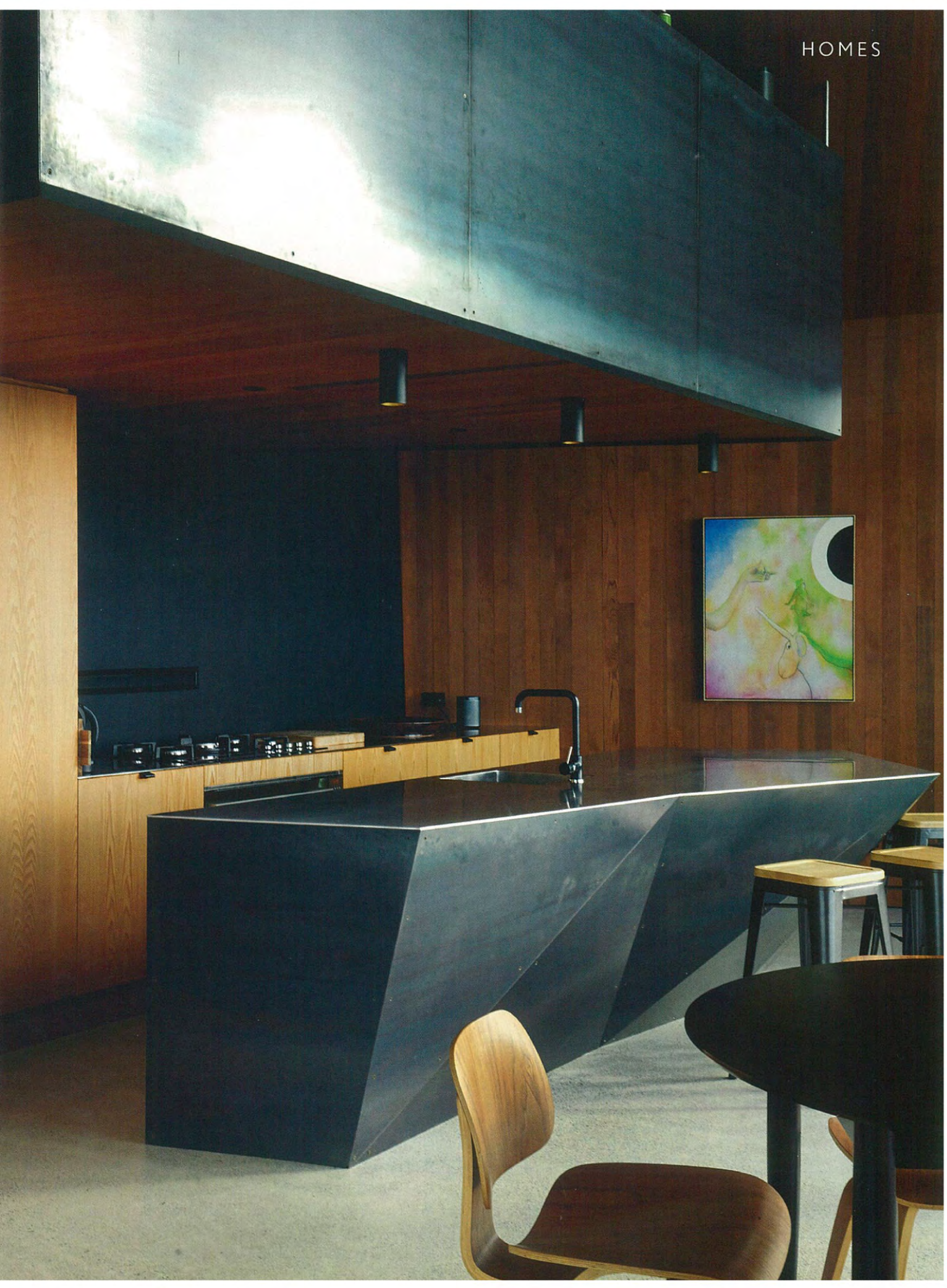
**OPPOSITE** (from top) Scott originally wanted leather handles for the kitchen island drawers, but couldn't find any he wanted; instead he took the concept and created steel ones: "I'm obsessed with them, I always say to guests, 'Touch my handles, they're amazing.'" Scott Lawrie admires the view.

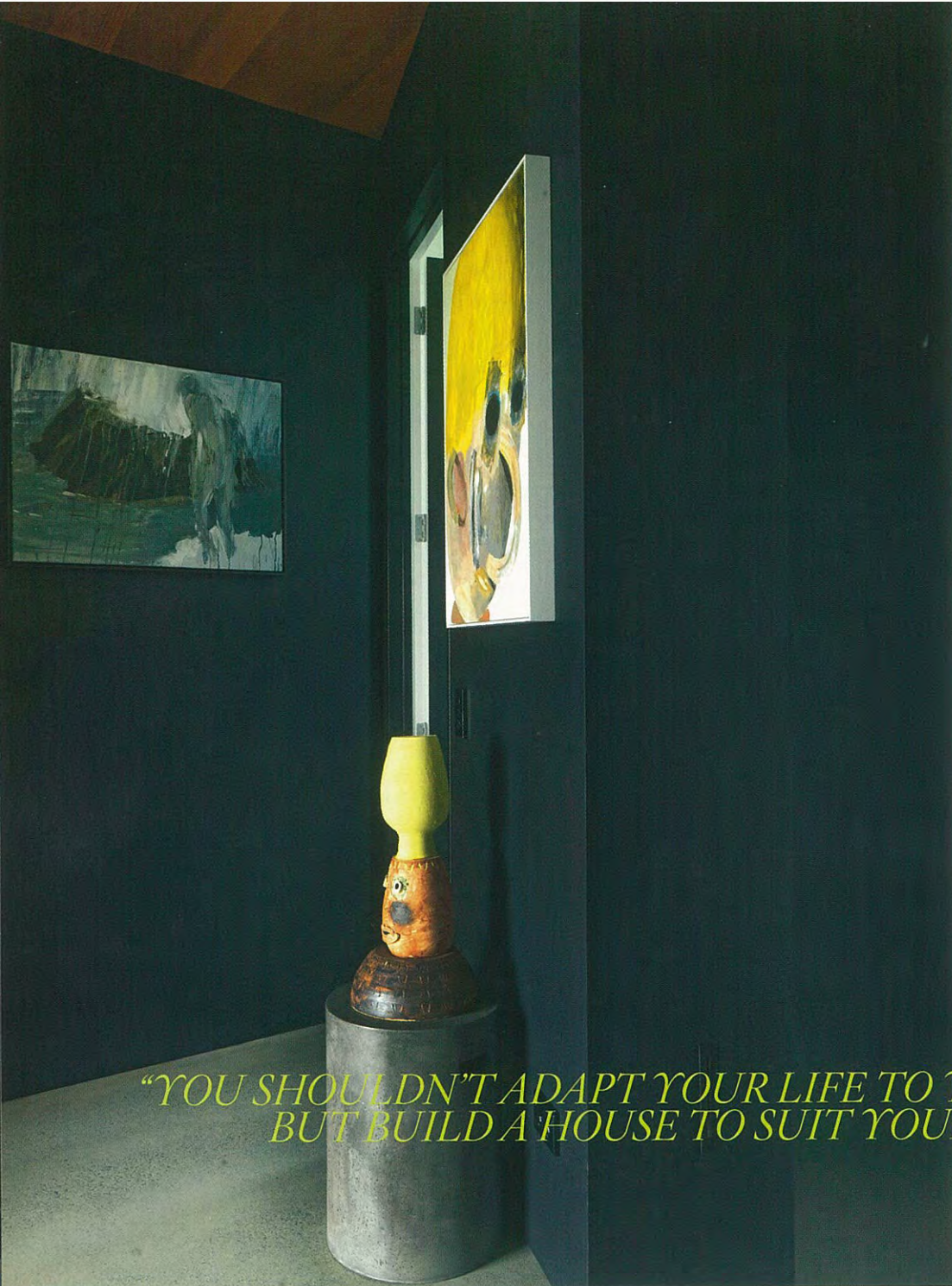


**E** The red Sally Gabori painting on the far wall is Scott's – he bought it in Sydney but never had space for it, so he made a room in this house; the ply chairs are Eames originals; the window was architect Paul Clarke's idea: "I thought it would be once again Paul was right."

**E** The angled stainless steel island bench was designed and built in Matakana; the painting is by Brent Harris, a New Zealander in Australia; Scott bought the stools from The Warehouse as a cheap measure but ended up keeping them because they were a good match: "I love the way you can match expensive items with cheap ones and no one can tell the difference." >







**THIS PAGE** The yellow painting and sculpture are both by Brendan Huntley; the grey painting is by New Zealand artist Euan MacLeod; Scott decided early on that black walls would be a feature in his house, mixed with wood, steel and concrete.

**OPPOSITE** The alternate tread staircase was another idea of Paul's; otherwise the stairs would have had to extend an extra 1.5m and blocked the hallway; the staircase leads up to Scott's writing studio, which hangs out over the kitchen: "It was a great space-saving way to add another room into the house."

*"YOU SHOULDN'T ADAPT YOUR LIFE TO YOUR HOUSE,  
BUT BUILD A HOUSE TO SUIT YOUR LIFE"*

"I wake up every morning and think I have died and gone to heaven," he says. "It is the happiest I have ever been. There isn't actually a lot you need to live comfortably. To be isolated and so close to nature is really nice."

Although he lives a simple life, his house is anything but. Designed by architect Paul Clarke ([s2a.co.nz](http://s2a.co.nz)), it's mostly constructed without any right angles. The apex of the house faces directly north, in line with the Hen and Chicken Islands, and Scott chose a site where the views can never be built out. With an outer shell of steel and lined inside with French cedar, it's a hard-wearing house that reflects the elements.

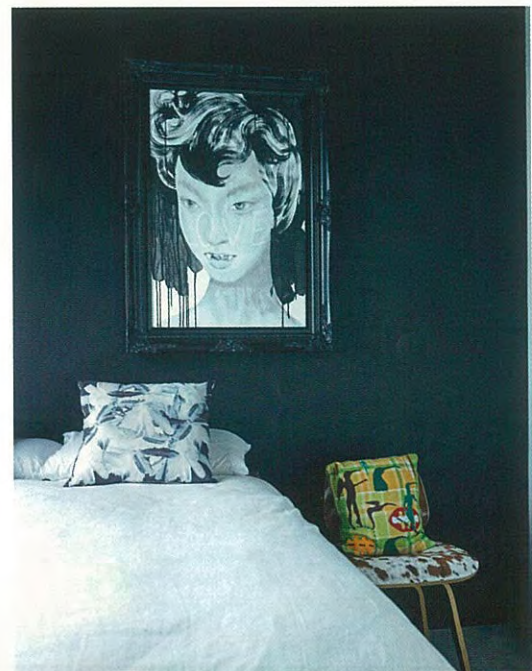
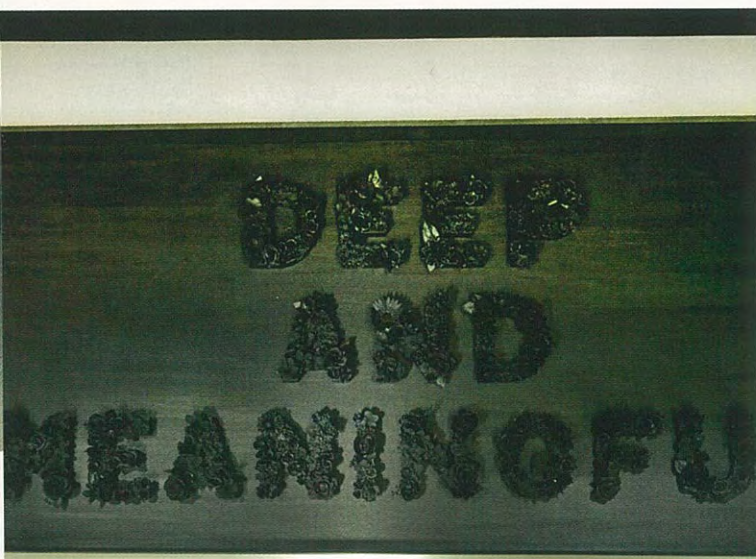
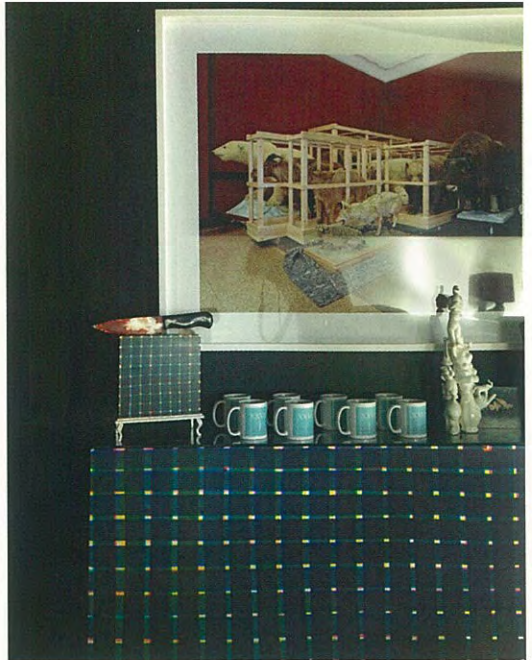
"A lot of people think the angles of the house are just a design quirk, but they are actually designed to mitigate the wind," says Scott.

Sitting 225m above sea level, the house can be subject to 100kmh winds. "My barbecue actually flew away during a storm; it was lucky the house didn't get damaged," he says.

The build stretched Scott's budget to the limit, leaving nothing for landscaping. But that turned out to be just fine, as Scott loves the unadulterated look. "I can step off my deck onto the mountain. There is nothing more beautiful than a paddock that feels untouched, the way the cows see it." >







**THIS PAGE** The far wall in Scott's bedroom has a three-degree inward lean; the large painting by young British artist James Collins hangs on the slanting wall; the cow hide is from Ikea.

**OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left) The black tiles in the en suite were sourced from France and the angled bench was made in Matakana. Scott found the knife in an Auckland craft gallery, it sits on a model of the large sculpted console beneath it; the art is a piece by Neil Pardington and the white ornament was created by local sculptor Dawn Clayden. A piece by Tom Christophersen called *Shields Green*; Scott says he has so many pieces of art he needs to change them around every so often. In the guest bedroom is a painting by Song Ling. The artwork on the white wall in Scott's bedroom is by Dan Moynihan; the two bedrooms and two bathrooms all have one white wall: "I wanted to make it all black, but Paul convinced me that we would need some reflective light - and it is also good for the art because not all art suits black walls."



The solitary life is not at all lonely for Scott, who is very self-sufficient. "I like the feeling of isolation but also knowing that I have neighbours around me in case I chop a finger off," he says.

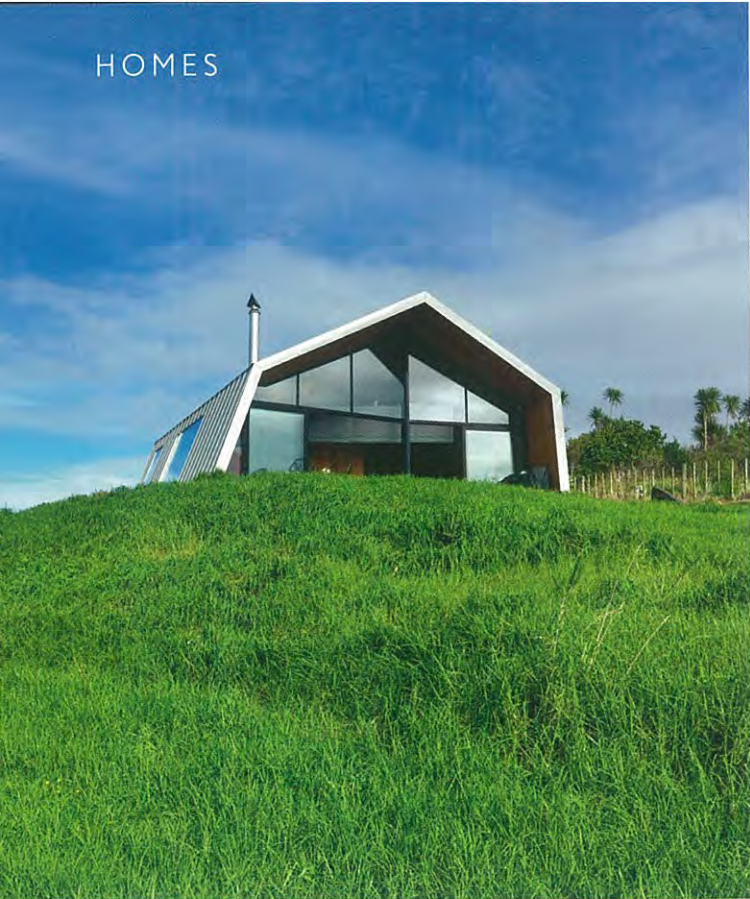
This is not to say he doesn't like having people visit; in fact he loves it, but the quiet retreat can sometimes be hard to leave. As a precautionary measure, Scott made sure the guest bedroom didn't have a wardrobe "to encourage people not to stay too long".

His house, named The Crossing because of its placement on the stretch of land where the cows used to cross, was designed purely for the way Scott lives. "You shouldn't adapt your life to your house, but build a house to suit your life," he says. During the design process, Paul would ask him questions such as,

"What side of the bed do you sleep on?" and "Do you get up to pee during the night?"

Scott runs his branding business from home, which meant he needed a writing studio. Working at home comes with perks, he says. He can sit in his undies and work, take a long break in the middle of the day to go to the beach, then continue his work at night - with a glass of wine, of course.

This routine meant it was important that the house was suitable for use at all times. "I have a day house and a night house. During the day it's open and airy, but at night it transforms into a more theatrical space," says Scott, a self-proclaimed "night thinker". >



**THIS PAGE** The house, which was filmed for *Grand Designs New Zealand*, is clad in steel: "It had to be hard-wearing because I travel a lot and didn't want to be cleaning it every time I came home," says Scott, who also finds the windows never get dirty because of the angles of the house: "The rain just washes it all off."

The carefully considered lighting and breathtaking views are not the only visual elements in this dramatic house: it is also filled with art. A collector for more than 10 years, Scott wanted the house to be designed around the artwork. "We knew exactly where each piece would go and therefore could design enough space for each item," says Scott. "Art is a serious passion of mine but a lot of my friends hate my art. They tell me, 'I could never live with what you live with.'"

But Scott's house is itself a work of art. There are sculptural elements in the structure of the house, such as the alternating tread staircase (a space-saving design) and the angled kitchen bench. "The chance of me ever having kids is really slim, so I wanted to make something that would outlive me. Thinking that I have achieved something that people will still look at well after I'm gone is really special." ■

A CLOSER LOOK



**SCULPTED HEADS** Scott has three of these Brendan Huntley heads: on the table, beside the couch and in the hall. He likes to swap them around depending on his mood and give each a turn on the dining table so "it makes eye contact and greets you as you come into the room".

**MUGS** There are eight mugs sitting on a console in Scott's bedroom. They were a leaving gift from his previous workplace. Each mug has the name of a colleague and a cheeky phrase about something he taught them.



**CEDAR CABINETRY** Scott is colour-blind and had to rely on architect Paul Clarke to choose the colour of the cabinets. They conceal a beer fridge, a gift from the builders to compensate for making him downgrade the size of his bigger fridge to fit the cabinetry.

Q&A

**ADVICE FOR OTHER HOMEOWNERS:** Get yourself the best architect and builder you can afford. When they work well as a team, amazing things happen.

**I ALWAYS WANTED BLACK WALLS BUT THE DOWNSIDE IS:** You can't really avoid scuffing them. I'm often seen scurrying around with a damp cloth and a small paintbrush.

**BEST BUDGET TIP:** Don't finish the build by using credit cards like I did. It's like a second mortgage.

**LEAST FAVOURITE HOUSEHOLD CHORE:** Oiling the steel. It takes time, patience and effort.

**FAVOURITE LOCAL SHOP:** Green With Envy is a fantastic little discovery ([greenwithenvy.co.nz](http://greenwithenvy.co.nz)). From linen bedding to beautiful objects, it's all here.

**BEST NEIGHBOURHOOD ATTRACTION:** If you have kids, don't miss Sheepworld - it's a fun, old-fashioned way to spend half a day. And Pakiri beach is an unspoilt treasure.

*Scott Lawrie*