

FAMILY AT PLAY

Intended as a modest holiday home for two, this Wanaka home has become a playground for the entire extended family

WORDS PETA CAREY / PHOTOGRAPHS JANE USSHER



THIS PAGE The small, central lounge of Max and Laraine Shepherd's Wanaka house is the couple's favourite room; large windows offer views that stretch from Cardrona Valley past Roy's Peak (pictured) and all the way around to Lake Wanaka and the Main Divide.

OPPOSITE Jarrah wood panelling has been used in the kitchen, dining room and adjacent lounge; Mania light fittings from Studio Italia hang above the kitchen bench, with artwork by Richard Adams on the kitchen walls and above the dining table.



THE FIRST SIGHT of Max and Laraine Shepherd's home, high on a ridge above Lake Wanaka, makes quite an impression. Its high gabled roof line, Oamaru stone and closed cedar shutters speak of restraint, even austerity. But open the door and you are immediately enveloped by a home of warmth and character designed for a large extended family.

Max and Laraine are also full of surprises. Max, a former professor of biochemistry at the University of Otago, has a love of abstract art – a big, beautiful, blue JS Parker canvas hangs in his office, as if the exacting nature of scientific research had found a welcome counterweight in the freedom of its brush strokes.

Laraine was brought up on the West Coast, where the pair met many moons ago. They raised four children, with Laraine fitting in the odd management stint at the family pharmacy in Dunedin. She's still busy, but now spends as much time as she can delighting in every wayward, rambling corner of their 4000sqm garden.

Paul Clarke, the house's architect and Max and Laraine's son-in-law, laughs when he describes his initial brief for the house, back in 1998. It was originally intended as a relatively modest holiday home for Max and Laraine, but it quickly became obvious that it would not only become their permanent residence but that its original three bedrooms would be inadequate. In winter and summer, the entire extended family all love to come to Wanaka – four adult children, their spouses and 10 grandchildren. >

THIS PAGE (clockwise from top left) A glass wall in the guest bathroom provides a magnificent view from the shower; a concealed, motorised blind offers privacy if necessary. *Langs Beach* by Northlander Janet Bothner-By hangs above the master bed. Cedar shutters are fitted to almost all the windows. The hatstand is a family heirloom passed down through three generations. Striking black and red carpets echo the axes of the house in the entranceway; the floating jarrah staircase leads to the second-floor master bedroom, dressing room and en suite.

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left) Laraine and Max with their Melbourne grandchildren, Hugo, three, Sophie, one, and Lily, five; they sit beneath a work from JS Parker's *Plain Song* series. In the lounge, pewter jugs bought in the UK beneath flowers from the garden. Guest bedrooms and bathrooms open off a long hallway (right) that can be closed off if Max and Laraine are home alone; the left hallway leads to the garage.

THIS PAGE A daily favourite for Laraine, and a huge drawcard for the children, the 12m covered lap pool is a constant 28.3 degrees, thanks to solar panels on the roof in summer and a hot water heat pump in winter.

OPPOSITE (from top) Lily arranges her grandmother's spring flowers, with Roy's Peak beyond. Hugo helps to tend the lavender bushes, Magnolia flowers above the Astroturf tennis court, much used by Max and Laraine.



On the day we visit, three of the grandchildren are in residence: Lily, aged five, Hugo, three, and little Sophie, just one. Laraine says these are the moments she most enjoys – time away from a hectic schedule that includes at least a week a month in Auckland working at BioCell Corporation, where Max is managing director and Laraine helps out with administration.

“Strangely,” she says, “we get to spend more time, not less, with the kids now.” There’s a son in Shanghai, a son and daughter in Auckland and their youngest daughter lives in Melbourne, but the Wanaka home seems to be the preferred holiday retreat for all.

So a summer wing was added, with another two bedrooms and en suites, a larger office and workspace for Max. The wing also includes a room that would be the envy of many in Wanaka: a gear locker. On one wall, skis hang from ordered racks; on the other, several mountain bikes. Below the house is a tennis court which Max and Laraine use almost daily. And after six years in the house, with more grandchildren arriving, they decided to cap off their playground with a 12m covered lap pool.

Laraine loves her evening swim, with Leonard Cohen playing and a glass of wine to follow. She leads the way to the rear of the cedar-clad pool to show off the salination unit. “This is when living with a chemist comes in handy,” she says. Salted rather than chlorinated, the water is maintained at a constant 28.3 degrees; in summer it’s heated by solar panels on the roof and during the rest of the year a heat pump supplements the system.

In the garden, irises, daphne and peonies are in bloom. Laraine has a simple garden design philosophy. “We’ve just planted things that we love. There’s no rhyme or reason to it.”

The lines of the house are equally simple – three wings designed to maximise views and minimise wind. Architect Paul managed to provide both windows for views and wall space for the Shepherds’ art, which includes a collection of JS Parker oils and work by Claire Beynon, Elizabeth Stevens and, hanging in the cool of the entranceway, Aboriginal artist Clifton Mack. For the entranceway and north wing living room, Paul also designed striking black and red carpets that echo the three axes of the house.

Upstairs, the cosy master bedroom has an almost chapel-like feel under the high, gabled roof line. The views extend from the Cardrona Valley around to Treble Cone, Black Peak and the Minaret Range. Lake Wanaka is less than a kilometre away, a nor’wester stirring white caps across the blue.

But it’s the simplest room that affords the greatest pleasure. Directly below the master bedroom is a relatively small lounge. With its low ceiling, fireplace and wide windows looking out to the western view, it’s a favourite space for both Max and Laraine. Conversation is easy here, surrounded by art and books.

It’s one of many beautiful spaces to relax in and enjoy in a home designed for a couple who’ve worked hard, but also know the value of creating a place for their family to gather and play. >



Q&A

The best piece of advice I ever received regarding the building of the house was: Trust your architect. We did and Paul has created a house and property which meet all our criteria for our living spaces and entertaining. *(Max)*

My best moments in the garden are: In the spring when we see our daffodils, peonies, roses and irises in flower. *(Laraine)*

The best money we ever spent was: The covered swimming pool. In addition to our daily swim, family and friends are getting a huge amount of pleasure from it. *(Max)*

To prepare for the NZ House & Garden photoshoot: I had to hurriedly hide clothes and toys in cupboards and drawers as we had three grandchildren (aged five, three and one) with us and there was something of a mess! *(Laraine)*

My favourite part of the house is: Our lounge, a beautifully proportioned room, which is our snug in the winter months and a pleasure to be in at any time. *(Max)*

I love this part of New Zealand because: Of the clear, crisp mountain air, the lake and mountains as our playground and being involved with a community who are passionate about the place they live in. *(Max)*

Max and Laraine Shepherd ■



THIS PAGE (from top) Peonies, azaleas and rhododendrons flower in the pockets of garden dotted around the perimeter of the Shepherds' 4000sqm property; the house sits squarely on the top of the rise, with 270-degree views of the mountain ranges surrounding Lake Wanaka. Cherry blossom is a favourite with the children, Lily and Hugo.