all at sea

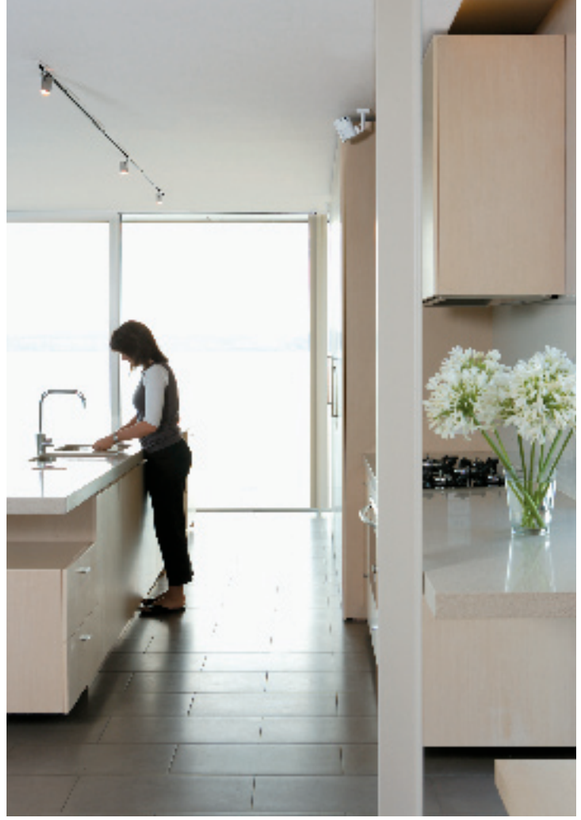
Awe-inspiring views, light, spacious and kid-friendly... Find out how this family scored a home with the lot

PHOTOGRAPHY **JASON BUSCH** STORY **GABI MOCATTA**



OPPOSITE Swept away: this seaside Hobart house features breathtaking views on three sides. **ABOVE** Owner Nick enjoys time out with one-year-old Samuel.





true confessions

Who lives here?
Natalia and Nick Nikitaras, both 35, with their sons Thomas, 3, and Samuel, 1.

What makes this home special?
Natalia: "Living right on the water, and the uninterrupted 180-degree views."

If you can see out, can people see in?
"When you're in the shower, if there's a boat in the right spot, they'd probably get a good view of you. You just have to hope they aren't using their binoculars!"

Any ups and downs?
"When we first moved in, walking up and down the stairs all day carrying a baby and a toddler was a great workout to lose the extra kilos."

And the designer cat?
"Tybalt is a brown Burmese and matches the decor perfectly. Everyone thinks we bought him to match the house but it's not true – he was part of the family well before the house was built."

Waterfront. It's every Australian homeowner's dream. When Nick and Natalia Nikitaras decided to return to Hobart after almost a decade in Melbourne, living by the water was high on their list of priorities. They looked at plenty of great houses, but nothing came close to their vision of a dream home. Then, in one of Hobart's seaside suburbs, they saw it. A sloping block with a high watermark title and wide-open sea views. Only problem – the land was already home to an old holiday shack.

"We fell in love with the location straight away," says Natalia. But the existing structure had to go. Desperate to salvage the 1950s beach house the couple tried everything. "We wanted to sell it or give it away, but it was too difficult to remove it in one piece," Natalia explains. "We had no choice but to knock it down." Left with a steeply sloping block on the water, they knew exactly what they wanted: "A house that would follow the natural lie of the land, take advantage of the amazing views, and be stylish and practical".

Enter local architect Maria Gigney. Nick and Natalia had admired another of her creations in the area and asked for the designer's details. They left clutching a slip of paper with Maria's name and a flush of excitement that their dream was about to become reality. "We'd built a townhouse in Melbourne previously," explains Natalia, "so when it came to the idea of starting from scratch again, we didn't find the thought too daunting. It was exciting, rather than scary."

To answer the Nikitaras' brief, Maria designed a spacious family home over three levels, >



ABOVE Sea through: walls of glass sliding doors flood the whole house with light and views. Dining table by Benton van Dorsselaer. Refin Avantgarde tiles in Coco, 300x600mm, from Rossetto Tiles.

MARIA GIGNEY ARCHITECTS. (03) 62341550. JACKMAN BUILDERS. (03) 6234 3576. KITCHEN JOINERY: CUSTOM CABINETS. (03) 6234 3395

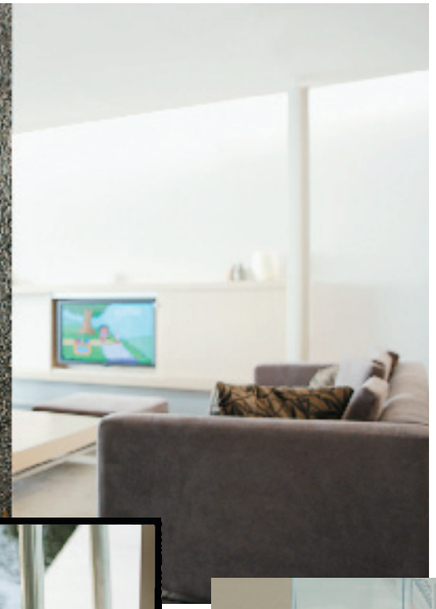


Make a meal of it: Natalia and Nick love to entertain in their spacious, open-plan kitchen. Artwork by Milan Milojevic. Paint is Solver Paints' Smoke Pearl in double strength.

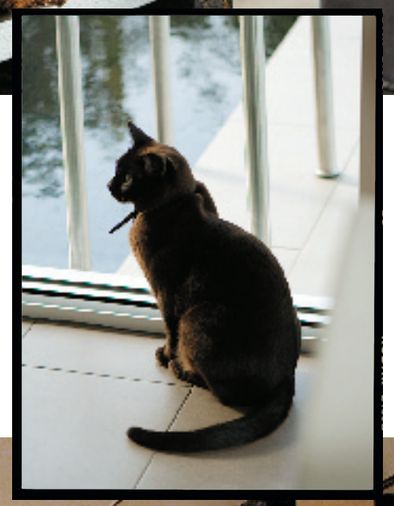














< closely hugging the natural slope to the water. But it didn't happen overnight. "Because we were so busy, the design process stretched out to about two years," says Natalia. "But that turned out to be a good thing, because we were able to fine-tune and tweak the design along the way. We were completely happy with the design before any work actually started." By the time the nine-month building process began, Nick and Natalia had two babies and two businesses, and needed to be completely hands off. "We just left it to the professionals," says Natalia.

The result is an understated but unique home, with the spectacular view its most dominant feature. "As Tasmanians in Melbourne, we missed the water," say Nick and Natalia. "Being close to the water is one of the things we promised ourselves when we moved back here. It really gives us a tranquil holiday feeling, even in the middle of our busy lives."

Letting the views in demanded extravagant use of glass in the construction. The entire front wall and part of the side wall on the middle level are made up of glass sliding doors. Upstairs, a continuous slot window connects all the bedrooms, and from the lower level the ocean feels so close you could almost touch it. "The views really make this house," says Natalia. "And there's always something passing by, from sea kayaks to cruise ships. We see dolphins, whales, rainbows, and it's different at every time of day."

With so much action going on outside, the couple needed to make sure their new home could withstand the punishment of two growing boys. The home's layout is deliberately flexible. >

Perfect match: oversized pieces by local furniture maker Benton van Dorsselaer are smart, functional and look just right in the vast, open-plan living and dining area.



we love...

the textured feature wall

How to cosy up a living area in a massive, open-plan space? Create a rough, tactile feature wall to add texture and lock in the warmth. Nick and Natalia chose panels of bluestone aggregate. "We loved its rugged texture, and its excellent thermal properties," Natalia explains. "It retains warmth from the sun and the fireplace and acts as a heat bank." Plus, the end of the wall serves as a handy nook for storing extra firewood.

< “We wanted a house that would grow with us,” says Natalia, “and work for small children as well as for teenagers. When the boys are older they’ll have their own play space and bedrooms downstairs.”

Inside, they opted for a single neutral colour to allow the ever-changing tones of nature to subtly influence the interior. Ceramic tiles in the palest café latte lend the main living level a European feel, while Feltex wool carpet in ‘Oyster’ keeps the bedrooms cosy.

The elegant kitchen, constructed of pale limed timber, is as much one of the design elements as a functional place to cook. All appliances are artfully hidden, with press-open cupboards rather than handles so there’s nothing to distract the eye. “We love to cook and entertain,” says Natalia. “The house is designed for that. A week after we moved in we had 100 guests for Samuel’s christening!”

After searching for furniture to complement their new home, Nick and Natalia opted to have most of it made by local furniture maker Benton van Dorsselaer. “There’s a syndrome in Tasmania that you have to go to the mainland to buy great furniture,” says Natalia, “but there’s a lot of talent here.” Benton built a beautifully proportioned dining table, coffee table, lounge, sofa and chairs.

Like any great creative work, the home is still incomplete. Nick and Natalia have plans to construct a deck with steps that will lead right down to the water. “We’ve bought the kayaks already,” says Natalia, “and we’ll be able to launch just a few metres from home.”

Above all, the couple loves their home for its simplicity. “Although it’s understated, it still has that ‘wow factor’, and a lot of that is due to nature and the view.” As well as, no doubt, ample portions of impeccable taste, and an architect who could make it all happen. ■

Soap star: the ensuite bathroom is a relaxation zone, thanks to a calming colour scheme and panoramic water views. In the main bedroom the bed was custom made by Benton van Dorsselaer.









BENTON VAN DORSSELAER. 0417 373 315. ILLUSTRATION BY KENZIE DESIGN

