

High exposure

The spectacular scenery of the Southern Alps has generated a distinctive, contemporary and uniquely New Zealand architectural response, as these projects illustrate





Escape to the hills

Designed in a cross shape, this Wanaka retreat features a central axis that ensures all the attention is focused on the mountain and lake views to the west

No matter how great the view in the distance, it can be compromised if the immediate outlook also encompasses the neighbouring houses.

To avoid such a scenario for this Wanaka property in a new subdivision, designer Marc Scaife planned the house so it turns its back to the street and opens up to the view in the opposite direction.

Designed in a cross shape,

Release Private Retreat has an east-west central axis to accommodate the open-plan living area. An intersecting north-south axis provides a master suite in the north wing, and two additional guest rooms on the south. A double garage is on the east side of the house, which faces the road.

"The main pavilion is effectively suspended beneath two huge steel beams," says Scaife.

"These structural elements extend across a small entry courtyard to connect the house to the garage. This means the entrance within the courtyard is screened from the road – when the front door is opened, you are looking at an enclosed landscaped area rather than a neighbouring property."

Scaife says he also limited the number and size of the windows on the east side.

"As the entry hall has a slightly lowered roof, we were able to provide a narrow ribbon of windows beneath the roof in the main pavilion. This allows morning sun into the living area, but doesn't compromise privacy."

At the opposite end, the house is cantilevered off the hill, so it projects out towards the mountains and the lake.

"The entire focus of the

Preceding pages: The front of this contemporary Wanaka holiday house gives little hint at what lies beyond. Release Private Retreat opens up at the rear to maximise views of the Southern Alps. The house was built by owners Nick Hay and Nick Frame.

These pages: Designed in a cross form, the rectilinear house features a long living pavilion that is cantilevered out from the hill. Large glass sliders open up to a north-facing terrace.



design is to draw attention to the spectacular outlook," says Scaife. "For this reason also, the architecture is not complex. The cross form does away with the need for lots of little elements. The beauty of the house lies in its simplicity. It didn't need anything more complicated or embellished."

To further emphasise the outlook, the interior of the rectangular living pavilion is

wrapped in wood and glass – a timber ceiling and floor help funnel the view. The ceiling features Tasmanian oak panels, while the flooring is spotted gum.

"The wood introduces a natural material to the interior," says Scaife. "Visually, it helps to warm the space – great expanses of glass can sometimes be rather sterile. The Tasmanian oak ceiling panels

also provide a clean, simple look that is in keeping with the architecture – a tongue-and-groove ceiling would have been too busy."

Glass sliders at the end of the living area open to a balcony, which functions as an outdoor room. The overhanging roof ensures the late summer sun is kept at bay.

In winter, however, the expansive glazing on the

north side allows the house to be passively heated by the sun. There is also a double-sided gas fire, set within a solidly framed wood cabinet that appears to float above the floor. The cabinet works as a visual divider, separating the living and dining areas, while still providing considerable transparency.

The kitchen echoes the design simplicity of the rest

of the house – it comprises a long island and a single wall of cabinetry.

"The kitchen island is another square-edged rectangular element, like the fireplace enclosure," says Scaife.

Low horizontal windows on the south wall frame views of the mountains from the dining area. The windows also highlight the branches of native kanuka trees on

the property. Similarly, full-height windows in the guest bedrooms capture the view through the framework of the kanuka trees.

"The trees are protected and could not be moved, but they provide welcome privacy for these rooms," says the designer.

To provide a degree of privacy for the master suite, this pavilion is bordered with

a garden. Expansive windows end at knee height, rather than floor level, for the same reason.

As sustainability was another key consideration for the owners, the house has a solar water heating system and an economical air-to-water heat pump. There is also a greywater recycling system, and rainwater for household use is collected and stored in a 30,000-litre tank.

Above left: The main living area features a Tasmanian oak veneer ceiling and hardwood floors that help to visually warm the interior.

Top: Designed to maximise the spectacular view, the master suite is accommodated in the north wing.

Above: A large tub in the master suite is positioned so guests can enjoy the view while bathing.



Design: Marc Scaife, Creative Architecture (Queenstown)
Interior designer: Sue Naumann
Builder: Nick Hay and Nick Frame
Kitchen manufacturer, interior doors, fireplace cabinet: Coronet Woodware
Landscape designer: Georgie Pinckney
Landscaping supplies: Botanica Landscaping
Cladding: Cedar from Cedar Corp; plaster by Plasterworks
Roofing: Nuralite Roofing; Calder Stewart Roofing
Exterior doors and window hardware: Aitken Joinery
Paints and varnishes: Resene
Ceiling in living area: Tasmanian oak
Flooring: Spotted gum; rugs from Carpets and Rugs of New Zealand (CRONZ)
Blinds: Window Treatments
Lighting: Aesthetics Lighting
Glass fixtures: Euroglass
Furniture: Cruickshank Furniture; Eon Design; Back Country Decor
Gas fire: Mantel Fires from Living Flame
Art work: Toi O Tahuna Gallery
Solar hot water system: Apricus
Heat pumps: Performance Plus
Bathroom floor tiles: spazioCasa
Bathroom fixtures: Plumbing World; Robertson Agencies

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These pages: Living and dining areas are divided by a central double-sided gas fireplace set within a large wood cabinet that appears to float above the floor. The galley-style kitchen features a long island that provides plenty of space for preparing and serving food, and is also a casual eating area.

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