



*TOP RIGHT: Joe and Diana Rutecki with Henry and Chester.
MAIN: Dining area to impress.
ABOVE: The home captures stunning sea views.
RIGHT: The relaxing bathtub.*



A family's stunning labour of love, design

Luxury abounds in this coastal home, which is an eclectic mix of natural elements, Asian themes and contemporary design, writes ELIZA SUM

BUILDING their dream house was an all-encompassing family project that has given Queenscliff retirees Joe and Diana Rutecki plenty of joy.

The couple designed their dynamic coastal home with their daughter, Brighton architect Alishia Minett, after falling in love with the sleepy coastal hamlet.

They moved from Melbourne to a rental home at Indented Head, keeping an eye on construction as their contemporary home was constructed.

"Ninety per cent of this house is love, there was so much joy having a family event we could work on together," Diana says.

"We're very proud of it and really took our time because everything just had to be perfect."

Alishia has worked on Melbourne landmarks such as AAMI Park and the MCG, but says working on her parent's house was an incredible experience.

"For me, it was a wonderful opportunity to work on an incredible site — we've always loved Queenscliff and I knew this block was perfect," she says.

"Mum and I have very similar taste and they were very receptive to my ideas, very trusting.

"When I showed them a 3D design of the house, they both started crying and saying how amazing it was."

An international influence is evident before you step into the home, which is entered from the side to take visitors over marble stepping stones and through a simple, Japanese-influenced garden vignette.

Water trickles down a bamboo pipe into a rough-hewn tsukubai, which is hundreds of years old.

These small basins are traditionally provided in Japanese teahouses for visitors to cleanse themselves before entering.

Instead of a welcome mat, a giant ancient millstone weighing hundreds of kilograms is set at the doorstep.

On stepping inside, direct views of the seascape and backyard can be taken in through big windows, while Henry the springer and Chester the golden retriever peer down from the upper deck.

Spotted gum features inside and outside, with concealed nails and screws for a streamlined look.

Turkish bluestone flooring and three specifically-selected shades of hand-cut sandstone from Mt Gambier complement the architecturally designed steel staircase in a stunning combination of natural elements.

On the same level, guest bedrooms look over a deck that extends into the Japanese gardens landscaped by Joe: A zen mix of pebbles, Japanese maples, cherry blossoms and sweet-scented jasmine.

Large windows perfectly frame the sunset every evening, as it casts a golden glow over great hunks of stone used to represent the mountains.

"Our house has quite a strong Asian feel to it, because it lends itself to the natural environment — Asians blend this so well for that calming feel," Diana says.

"It also lends itself to the natural Australian materials which we've used. We really wanted a home that felt like it belonged on the land."

Natural, pared-back basics create the perfect setting to display a lavish, eclectic mix of trinkets and treasures, which the globetrotting couple has collected from all over the world.

Styling touches throughout are a mishmash of Art Deco figurines juxtaposed next to Waterford crystal lamps, and Asian influences share space with vintage furniture from Joe's family home in Philadelphia.

Diana's own handiwork has also gone into the house, with dovetailed joinery in the linen press and butler's pantry storage areas crafted by her.

Rustic Adirondack chairs on the upper deck were another labour of love that spanned months.

"We picked a lot of art as we travelled, just collecting pieces for the house," Diana says.

"They were accumulated over time, so we could just move in and start decorating."

The couple's open-plan bedroom is grand, yet homely, combining Parisian marble benchtops with vintage doors originating from Japanese teahouses.

They've concealed the bathtub behind a curtain, which can be drawn back to enjoy the views.

"You think one sunset is the same every night, but they're all so different and unique," Joe says.

"It lights up in different colours, depending on the time of year — it's just beautiful."

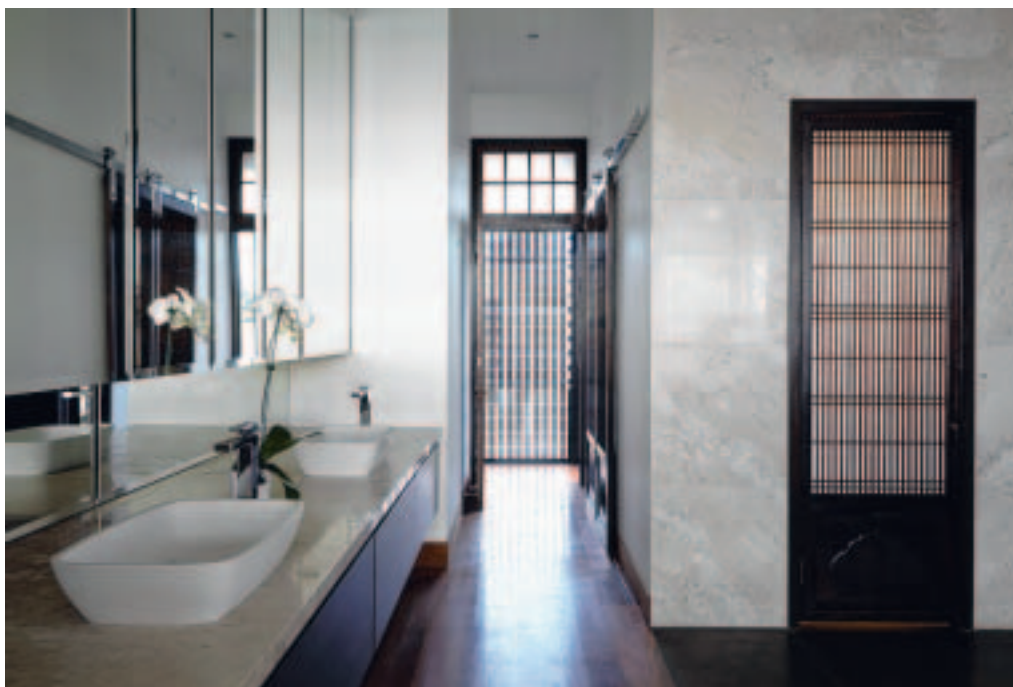
Looking out over the bay, the open-plan family zone is the jewel in the crown as exposed beams criss-cross beneath a timber-lined cathedral ceiling.

With homely touches including ornate carved chairs and hand-beaten Tom Dixon lights, a whopping mirrored range hood creates a startling illusion of depth and space without blocking out the gorgeous timber beams.

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The combination of natural elements and sleek fixtures is stunning and it's not surprising to see why the Ruteckis' kitchen was named 2013 Room of the Year by *Australian House and Garden* magazine, a testament to Alishia's design.

"We wanted a space that was utilised, not wasted — one which had views and could integrate everything while we entertained," Diana says.

"That's why the stove is in the breakfast bar. I wanted to be able to be involved while we had guests, instead of having my back to them as I was cooking.

"We wouldn't have done this block justice without having these views and open spaces."

Stepping out to the enormous balcony, railings have been thoughtfully designed so guests can set their glasses and plates on them while enjoying the view.

Stairs lead to an open-air cocktail deck on the top level, which has a solid brass table setting that looks like it was transported from the Italian countryside.

"When we invite friends on the weekend, we love sitting up here and watching the big ships and ferries come in the channel," Diana says.

"It looks like they're turning in straight towards us as they work their way around."

The opulent home also has great eco-credentials and was built to be as environmentally friendly as possible.

Alishia implemented cross-ventilation vents to capture the easterly breezes for cooling, while soaring posts recycled from the Sydney Harbour go

from the ground floor to the top of the upper level.

This feature was almost not meant to be, after the couple's initial \$80,000 timber order was swept away by the 2011 Brisbane floods. Luckily, one of Alishia's industry contacts was able to put them in touch with another supplier.

None of the precious wood went to waste, with some timber laid into the garden.

The remainder went into a vanity in the guest wet room.

Outside, Joe's rustic fishing boat has been turned into a vegetable patch in the garden, which uses an innovative watering system to ensure not a drop of rainwater goes to waste.

Now, the couple are preparing to sell their home and plan to move to Joe's hometown, Philadelphia.

They plan to buy a home in Melbourne's CBD and say they have no regrets.

"Because Alishia and I did this, I know we can do it again," Diana says.

"It's like bringing up children — I'm ready to let it go."

Alishia, on the other hand, says she is "a little bit devastated" about the sale.

"This home is so curated, like an art piece," she says. "Everything has been considered, pored over and lavished.

"I will be sad to see it go, but on the other hand, they have an amazing new chapter ahead of them and this is an incredible legacy to leave behind in Queenscliff."

For more information, phone Fletchers Queenscliff on 5258 2833.

TOP LEFT: The inspired design.

TOP: A seamless transition.

LEFT: Solid quartz basins add a touch of luxury in the Ruteckis' bedroom.

BOTTOM LEFT: Beautiful bathrooms.



ABOVE: The open lounge is the perfect entertainment space.
BELOW: The bedrooms have all the luxurious touches; and below right, the living areas are finished to the highest standard.

PHOTOGRAPHY:
Peter Ristevski and supplied

