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A beach somewhere

The 'back to basics' nature of a beach house is a large part of its charm – and this one shows just how stylish 'basic' can be.

STORY GABRIELLE BAXTER PHOTOGRAPHY TOM SALMON STYLING PETA BRYER



George El Khouri is a family man – and a happy one – so keeping his family happy too is a top priority, and what he has achieved in this idyllic coastal setting addresses every contingency. His wife, Cosette, loves to entertain friends and the many members of their extended families, while their children – aged 16, 14 and just two years old – have very different concepts of a fun time at the beach. So George found a place beside the sea south of Sydney and worked his architectural magic to customise it to suit them all – not least, himself.

A HOT PROSPECT

An architect and a builder with an additional degree in Environmental Design, George had been looking for a beach house 'somewhere down the south coast' for many years – and he found it four years ago. "This one was particularly good because it's not far from Sydney," he explains, "so when we come down in the school holidays, I can go up to town for work if I need to – and get back here the same night." He was looking for a property right on the ocean, but not high up on a cliff – as most of them are in the area – so that they're only looking at the view. "This couldn't be a better location," he beams, "because it's right down on the shore and there are a few coffee shops nearby too, so a one-minute walk one way, you're at a cafe and one minute the other – you're on the sand!"

PREVIOUS PAGE: The view at night, with the bi-fold balcony doors drawn back, is breathtaking and atmospheric – perhaps more so than during the day.

ABOVE: Frosted glass and 'blade' walls block the view of buildings to the south.

RIGHT: The view of the ocean from the lounge area makes it look like a spacecraft, with floor tiles in Italian porcelain and super-comfortable furnishings to relax on ... and gaze out.





The area is becoming more popular now but it's still largely unknown because when most people go to the south coast they take the F6 out of Sydney and pass it by. "All the coastal towns have nice little restaurants so there are plenty of places to go for a good meal – it's getting quite cosmopolitan," George grins. "But it's still got that old, well-established beachside character and there are a lot of long-time locals living here – and everyone talks to each other, which is so nice!"

WORK TO DO

Most beachfront properties are side-on to the ocean, but this home was unusual in that the length of it faces out to sea. "As a result," says George, "every room overlooks the water." However, the layout was very badly planned originally. Built in the early '90s, when the real-estate concept was that the more rooms a house had, the more it was worth, the interior was a maze of poky little spaces which didn't make the most of the site at all. Here, George was able to take advantage of the building's footprint and change it to suit the open, streamlined design he had in mind. "I totally stripped it back – roof tiles, walls, everything – and gave it a contemporary look," he explains. "I even pulled the rooms apart and reorganised them."

He then divided it into two completely self-contained units with the family accommodation upstairs consisting of a living area and kitchen, three bedrooms, two bathrooms and an ensuite. Downstairs there are three more bedrooms, a kitchen, lounge and dining room, that can either be totally separate or linked to the main apartment upstairs if required. "It's what I call the guest suite,"

PREVIOUS PAGE: The open-plan living area has windows that fold back to bring the stunning view inside.

ABOVE: All the kitchens and bathrooms are coordinated – this one is downstairs.

RIGHT: The expansive dining table is topped in CaesarStone on a stainless-steel frame with chairs from Sylecorat imported from Spain.





BOVE: The feature wall in the master bedroom is painted in Nile Clay by Dulux and the striking bedhead is custom-made in leather in a colour called 'dark chocolate'.

he declares. "If people come to stay, they've got their own quarters downstairs, but if we want to use it as an overflow area from ours, we can. It's always nice to have visitors when you go away on holidays," he smiles, "but then again, it's great to be able to give them their own space."

HAPPY FAMILIES

And, of course, the view is breathtaking. George says – laughing – that it can actually be a disadvantage because

it gets boring! "Sometimes it's nice to hide it because it's too much 'in your face'! But it's always changing," he adds. "From sunrise on, there are the waves and the clouds blown by the wind – and often there are dolphins out the front."

What they wanted was a durable house in the time-honoured beach-house tradition of no carpet to absorb sand and salt water, so it was tiled and made easy to clean just by mopping it down. The whole place has a single theme to make it uniform and free-flowing – "one colour, one Italian



BOVE: The master bedroom's luxurious ensuite blends beautifully with its overall colour scheme.

BELDW: The sumptuous guest accommodation is unexpected in a 'beach house'.



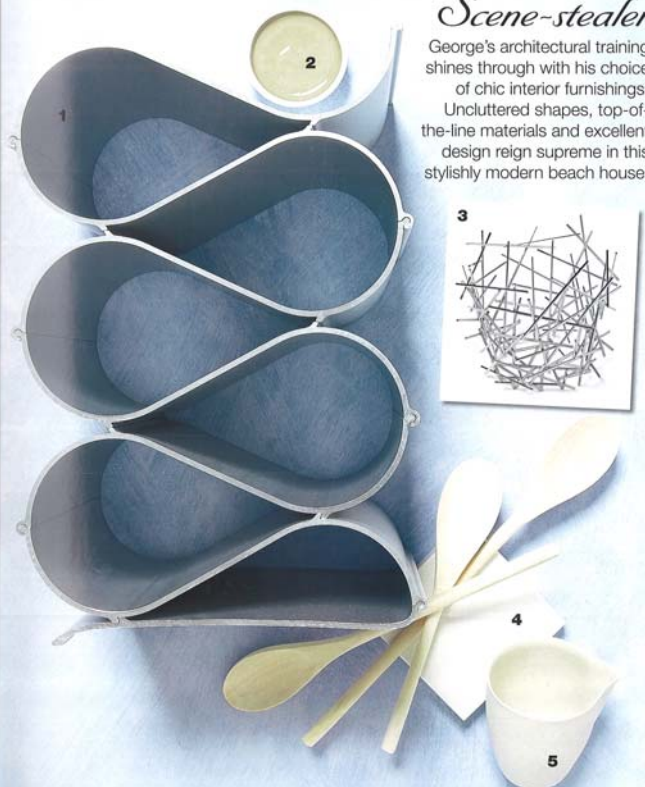
porcelain floor tile throughout!" George exclaims, "although we did put coloured feature walls in the children's rooms to make them more their own and individual – and they chose the colours themselves." He and Cosette purposely got Valerie and Patrick involved in the interior design. "Otherwise, they wouldn't have enjoyed it," he says simply. "We figured at some point, they'd probably say 'I don't want to go because my friends aren't there', but because we took them to RDesign, the interior designers, and got them interested in choosing colours and things, the whole family had an important input. And now they love going down there – and all their friends do too!"

"Everybody likes things to be to their own liking and in their own style," says George in conclusion, "and when you get that, you don't want to let go of it. And then, why would you go anywhere else? You can travel the world but you usually end up at a beach somewhere, so why not be close to home? Why not indeed?"

Scene-stealer

George's architectural training shines through with his choice of chic interior furnishings.

Uncluttered shapes, top-of-the-line materials and excellent design reign supreme in this stylishly modern beach house.



1. Echelon wine rack \$132 from Top 3 by Design **2.** Dulux Nile Clay **3.** Alessi Blow Up citrus bowl \$289 from Space Furniture **4.** CaesarStone in Snow **5.** Small jug in white \$19.95 from Mud Australia.