

Salute to the sun

With Eco-Fest just a week away, **Jude Ritchie** examines Steve and Holly Schoenberg's sustainable lifestyle dream home in Upper Moutere.

Part of the motivation for Steve and Holly Schoenberg's move from California to New Zealand was to live more sustainably, and after three years' living in Auckland they moved to their perfect piece of paradise.

In 2006, they bought 74 hectares near Upper Moutere: undulating land with hilltops offering panoramic views from Mt Arthur around to Motueka and the coastline. The mixture of pasture, 20 hectares of regenerated bush, a lifetime supply of firewood and plenty of space for their two dogs, Streak and Rudi, met their needs for a new lifestyle and the perfect house site.

Already aware of Christopher Alexander's book *A Pattern Language*, Steve says this influenced design choices, relationships between spaces and the flow of their home.

They were also taken by Nelson architect Helen Richards' home and business practice, Powered Living, with its curved frontage, maximising sun and views. After two years of site visits, scrapbooking ideas, making models and much discussion, with Helen on board as architect, they were ready to begin building their 204-square-metre home.

They first had a long, winding road engineered and built by Cameron Gibson and Wells of Nelson, who also advised them on reputable tradesmen and contractors. Because of the distance from the road and hence power supply, they decided to go off the grid. Bruce Geddes from Freedom Energy supplied the solar system which consists of 16 panels installed on the roof of the 96sqm workshop next to the house. A sensor operates a backup generator which Steve estimates they use for about 300 hours a year.

Steve worked closely with Tony Rioridon Builders who constructed the house, co-ordinating the many sub-contractors, and helping with the smaller jobs. He also made some of the feature joinery, with his dad on board. Steve came from the States, like the entrance foyer cupboards. These are a striking aesthetic when entering the house, the dark veneer mahogany complemented by a beech surround.

Another feature in this area, and repeated along the hallway, is the use of solid beams of macrocarpa made by Timberworks, known for their post and beam construction techniques. Also within this space is a tasmanian oak spiral staircase made by Artistic Stairs in Christchurch, which leads up to the second-storey office space. This airy room with views to die for, has a cosy nook in the



Gentle arc: The west view of Steve and Holly Schoenberg's home with dogs Streak and Rudi, foreground, at Blackbird Valley, Moutere.



Crow's nest: The upstairs office and library is reached via the timber spiral staircase.



Home work: Steve Schoenberg stands by the dining table he made from ash with walnut slabs legs.



Timber tones: Steve descends the tasmanian oak spiral staircase to the hallway, which features mahogany cupboards framed in beech.

corner, somewhere to retreat with a book and cup of tea.

Once through the entry, the hall opens into the massive east-west-spanning living, kitchen and dining space, all with a softly curving front, the floor to ceiling windows maximising the views and sun.

Although very open, this space is also inviting, with a step-down area for relaxing, reading or television watching, while the upper area incorporates the kitchen and dining space, plus an innovative timber bar, complete with massive coffee machine.

The long chunky ash dining table with walnut leg supports was hand-made by a modest Steve.

A big wood-fired Rayburn cooker in the kitchen heats the wetback for hot water. The kitchen joinery in american oak was made by Motueka Joinery, and features a Caesarstone benchtop. One handy feature discovered

by the Schoenbergs is writing messages with whiteboard marker on the splashback glass used on the kitchen cupboards. The downstairs floor is made from polished tinted concrete, functioning as a passive solar heat sink.

Each end of the house has a bedroom with wonderful views from the large windows. All windows are double glazed and argon-filled with thermally broken frames to retain heat.

The house is framed using 140mm timber, allowing super-thick wool batt insulation, as well as in the ceiling cavity. Outside, the curved front, upstairs and south entry clad shiplap style using lawson's cypress and finished with Silkens timber stain, gives the house a warm glow.

Steve and Holly are opening their home this Sunday as part of the Eco-Home Tour. Tickets on sale at Tasman and Nelson council offices.



Well clad: The Schoenberg home from the south entry, showing the lawson cypress shiplap cladding.



Flowing lines: Looking through the kitchen-dining area into the master bedroom, all taking advantage of the sweeping window frontage.