



# la dolce vita

Backing onto the bush and only five minutes' walk to the beach, this Queensland home combines the best of both worlds

STORY & STYLING KYLIE JACKES  
PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN DOWNS

For Claudio and Karen, their front deck has proven to be an ideal spot for year-round alfresco entertaining. Long lunches with their kids are often spent here at a table from Aero Designs, which exudes the same sun-bleached patina as the hardwood decking. In the dining room (opposite), a rustic style table, discovered on a holiday to Dubai, is paired with bentwood chairs Karen had limewashed and waxed. Hanging above is a Hermon & Hermon 'Birds Nest' pendant from Watermelon Red. A vast wall expanse provides the ideal gallery space for the striking artwork, *Bush Medicine Leaves* by Gloria Petyarre from Jive Art. >



**KITCHEN** "I wanted to design a unique kitchen which incorporated beautiful timber finishes rather than standard laminate," explains Karen, who approached a local woodworker to build the bespoke cabinetry. "Initially he turned me down, but I gradually convinced him to see the kitchen like a large piece of furniture and we worked on the design together." The result is a wonderfully functional space that features Queensland maple shelving and drawers that complement the merged Tasmanian oak and Caesarstone island bench. To keep within budget, handles, splashbacks and a pantry were done away with in favour of open shelves, compact storage and slick drawers with finger pulls. Decorative ceramics from Dimity Kidston (opposite, bottom right) and cute orange stools from Hearts And Minds Art are colourful additions.



**FLOORBOARDS**  
Tasmanian oak 85mm x  
17mm floorboards, from  
\$6.25/m, The Bunker.

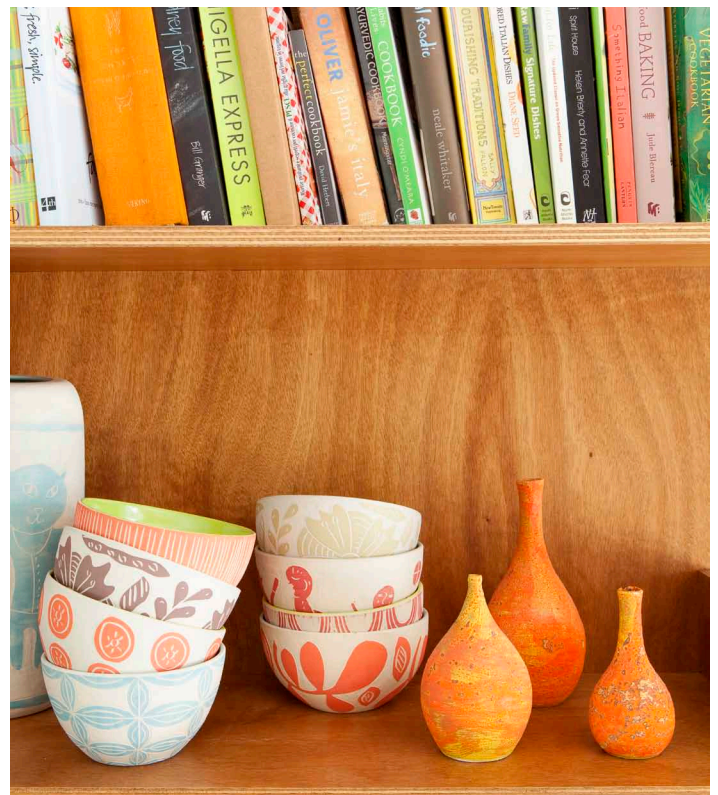


"The **forest** behind us cools the house, which is ideal for **summer**" - Karen

**HAVING MET AND** fallen in love with her Italian-born husband Claudio while backpacking in Croatia and then spending a year in Italy, Karen says she was happy to live anywhere. "We decided to make a home for ourselves in Australia and since Claudio was the one making the big move and emigrating, I wanted him to choose where we'd live," she recalls. It was a combination of coast and country that lured the couple to Queensland's Sunshine Coast more than a decade ago. The decision was a quick one – after just a week at Karen's parents' holiday home, Claudio was smitten with the area and the search began for a property along a coastal stretch within walking distance to the beach.

The couple eventually found an idyllic block of land that backed onto a forest reserve, and took their time to carefully design a beach house that embraced the green outlook and nestled unobtrusively amongst the trees. Four years on, they can't believe how lucky they are to come home to their bungalow with its breezy, holiday-like feel. Designed to suit the Queensland climate with multiple decks, big openings and plenty of louvres, there's also several European influences, a nod to Claudio's Italian heritage: a Vespa is parked in the driveway, potted olive trees flank the entrance and there's an impressive commercial Faema coffee machine in the kitchen for the couple's morning espresso.

With a love of interiors and design, Karen relished the opportunity to create a family home that encompassed the beauty of the outdoors, with a rich mix of timbers both inside and out. "A lot of the ideas for the house came from architecture books about wooden homes and Scandinavian design, and I also incorporated several key elements of feng shui within the layout so spaces flowed from one another," explains Karen. >



**LIVING ROOM (top left & right)** "All of the joinery in the house evolved from the success of the timber elements in the kitchen," says Karen. The same Queensland maple used in the kitchen was used here for shelving and concealing electronics. Accent colours in shades of pink and orange were drawn from the David Band artwork above the fireplace and are carried through to the soft furnishings like the upholstered daybed and cushions from Aqua Door Designs, Watermelon Red and Whitebeach Home And Living, which all enliven the taupe Norman + Quaine couch.

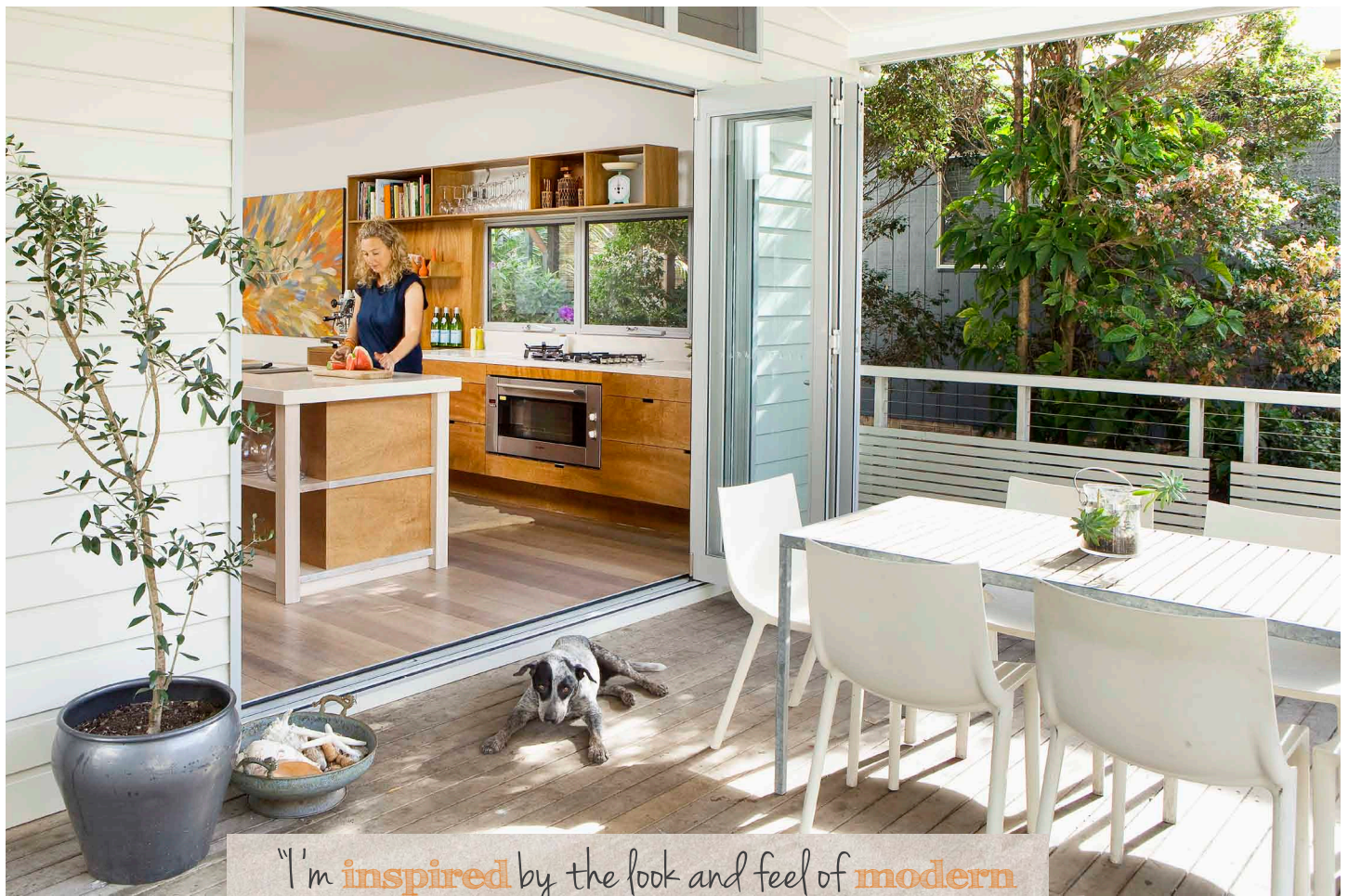
## we love

### Indoor-outdoor living

Carefully considered window placement, designed to take advantage of green vistas, coupled with an abundance of glass louvres and stacking

bi-fold doors draw in plenty of natural light, soft breezes - and local inhabitants. "It can get pretty wild at times with bush turkeys running on the roof, bats in the trees, noisy frogs and geckos coming in and out!" says Karen with a laugh.

"But we love it."



"I'm inspired by the look and feel of modern

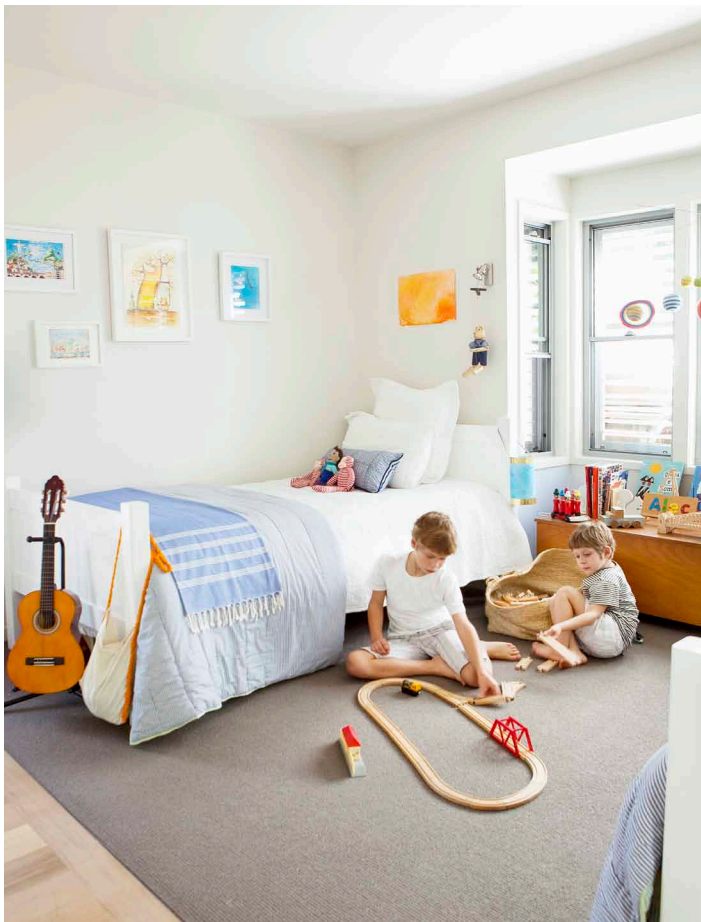
Scandinavian country homes in remote places" - Karen

< A sizeable plasma TV – “Claudio’s only request!” remarks Karen – is cleverly concealed behind cupboard doors when not in use, but it’s the home’s central green courtyard, bordered with fragrant jasmine, gardenia and frangipani, that provides the real entertainment. The couple’s two boys, Rio, eight, and Alec, five, and dog Rocco, zip inside and out all day long. “As the house is very open, with the kitchen, decks, lounge and dining areas all linked to the courtyard, it really encourages interaction, and for the most part we just live between the kitchen and the deck,” says Karen. Off-white timber walls set the tone for the interior, where beautiful limewashed Tasmanian oak floors, bespoke timber joinery and bright punches of colour add warmth and personality throughout. Artwork collected on travels covers the walls and couches are peppered with vibrant cushions, while vintage pottery and beach finds fill shelves.

The couple has selectively incorporated pieces that can withstand the rigours of the coastal climate, where salt air and high humidity can quickly age furniture and finishes, creating a less-than-precious feel. It’s a look that perfectly suits the family’s laidback lifestyle, which revolves around cooking, entertaining and making the most of their coastal surrounds. “Our kitchen is a very social space. We love to roll out pasta on the bench for a big family lunch, then head to the beach along the forest path out the back for an afternoon by the sea,” says Karen. “When Claudio said this is where he wanted to live all those years ago, I didn’t have any complaints – and I still don’t!”



**ENTRANCE** (above right) Rather than traipse sand and wet towels through the house, the family can drop off beach paraphernalia on this outdoor hat rack. The long decked walkway is an unofficial skate path for Alec’s scooter rides and a luxury handmade hammock from The Toucan Shop is ideal for afternoon siestas. **DECK** (opposite) Flanked by towering banana trees, the low-maintenance deck was left to silver naturally, while durable timber benches topped with cushions from Watermelon Red and Signature on Hastings create a comfy place to relax. >



"We love living so close to the **beach** and being able to hear the ocean" - Karen



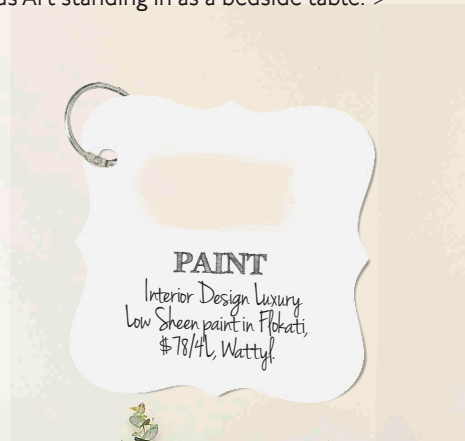
**BOYS' BEDROOM** (above left & bottom left) Rio and Alec share a large bedroom where a mix of timber and wool carpet flooring are equally appealing underfoot. The beds are dressed in a mix of crisp white and blue, with accent cushions from Signature On Hastings and light Turkish throws from Watermelon Red. The children's artwork fills the walls and a special drawing of a volcano, inspired by a holiday to the Italian island of Stromboli, takes pride of place above Rio's bed. "I thought they may prefer to have their own rooms and tried separating them, but Alec moved back in because he missed Rio too much," says Karen with a smile. "They're like two peas in a pod."

**MASTER BEDROOM** (above right) Karen and Claudio's bedroom is a restful space to unwind. Soft, serene and layered with texture, the room has a holiday feel, thanks to a four-poster bed from Island Luxe and luxurious Indian embroidered bedlinen topped with cushions from Whitebeach Home And Living. Wicker hampers (also from Island Luxe) create casual bedside tables to display treasured family photos, giving the space a personal touch, while the bed frames an artwork on the back wall titled *Awely (Body Paint)* by Joy Kingwarreye Jones, from Jive Art.

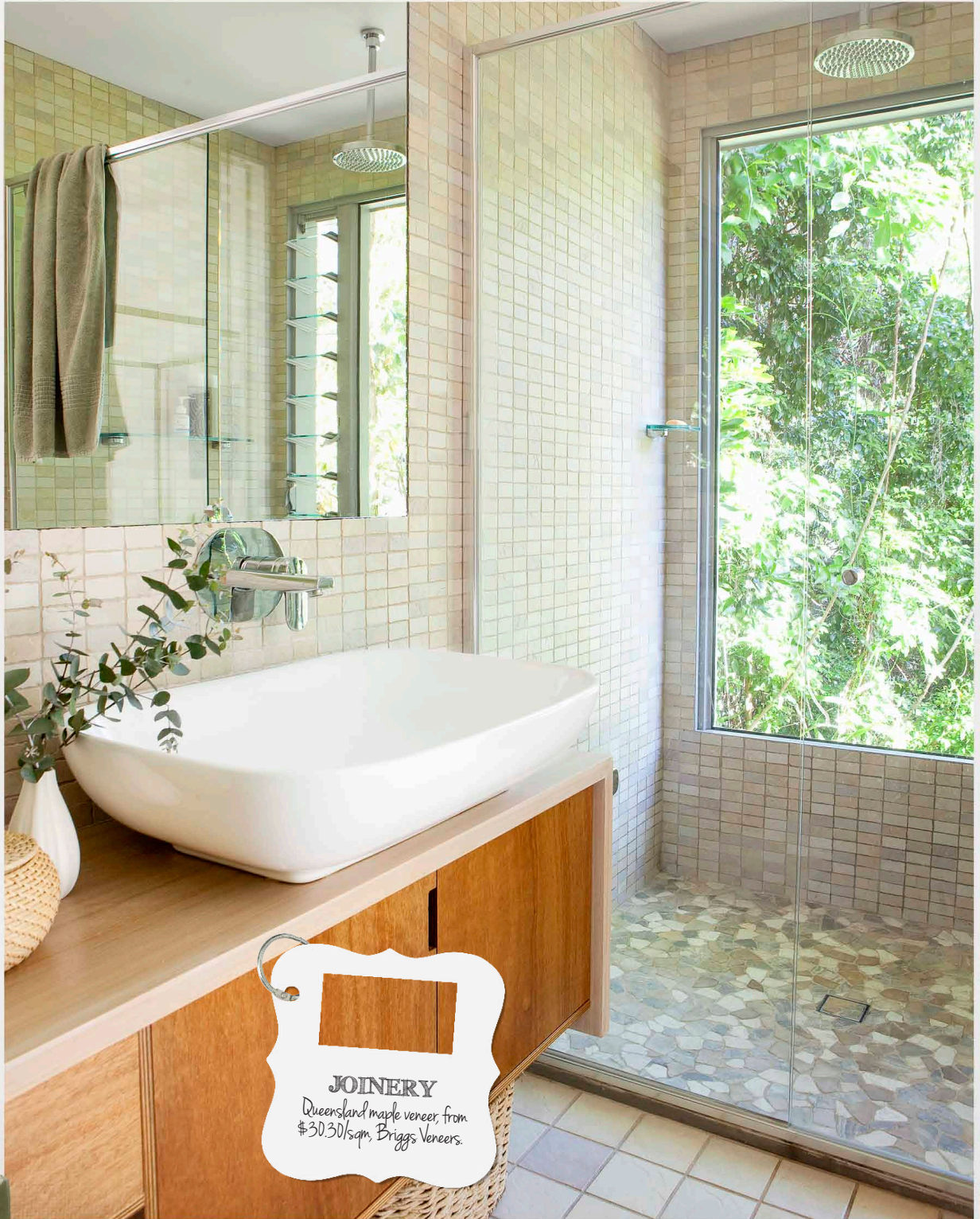


**GUEST BEDROOM** The painting by David Golightly hanging above the guest bed was a house-warming present from Karen's brother who, like a host of family and friends, loves to visit and enjoy an extended stay at the beach. In keeping with the home's relaxed feel, the light-filled room is often updated to suit the season.

"In summer I like to keep the bed fresh and simple with white linen and a throw, while in winter I'll add extra warmth with more layers," explains Karen. For now, the bed is dressed with cushions discovered at the nearby Eumundi Markets, with a stool from Hearts And Minds Art standing in as a bedside table. >



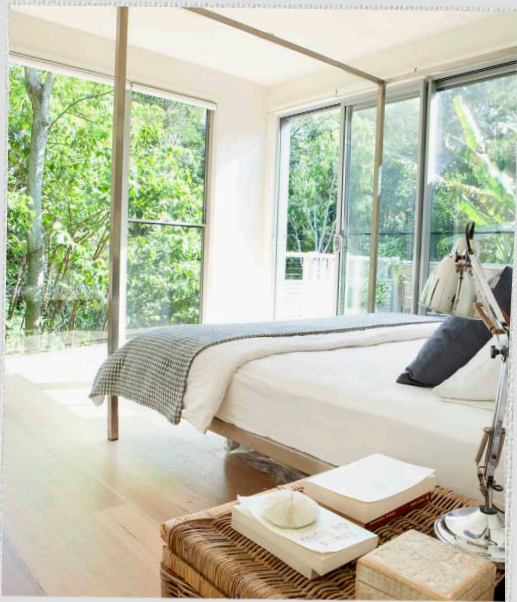




**JOINERY**  
Queensland maple veneer, from  
\$30.30/sqm, Briggs Veneers.

**ENSUITE** To evoke a natural look and feel, randomly mixed marble tiles from Ceramica Senio line the shower recess floor. The sealed Queensland maple timber vanity is topped with a generous above-counter basin – for similar, try the Axa basin from Reece. One of the couple’s favourite features is the floor-to-ceiling window in the shower, which frames the forest backdrop. “It’s completely private and an amazing way to start the day!” says Karen.





"I love lying in our bedroom looking out to the forest," says Karen.

## INSIDE STORY

### Who lives here?

Karen, an interior decorator; her husband Claudio, a physiotherapist; their children Rio, eight; Alec, five; and Rocco the cattle dog.

### Where is your favourite spot in the house?

Karen: "Food is an important part of our family's life and I love to cook, so we're always hanging out in the kitchen together, sampling food and sharing our stories."

### How would you describe your style?

"I love simple lines, luxurious natural textures and design that merges form and function."

### What did you enjoy most about designing the house?

"I have a design background so I loved the creative process from start to finish. The best bit was simply bringing together all the aspects we've liked from different homes we've lived in and applying them here. Also, I've never had such a good excuse to spend hours gazing at books about interiors!"

### What did you learn during the process?

"You have to listen to your gut and do what feels right for you. You have to live with the end product so it's important to take the time to get it right, even if it means a lot of research and a bit more effort for your tradespeople."

## CONTACTS

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## PLANS

