

A BACH, NOT A HOUSE

A HAWKES BAY BACH BY GERALD
PARSONSON STARTS OUT SIMPLE, AND
MIRACULOUSLY STAYS THAT WAY.
TEXT BY JEREMY HANSEN
PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL MCCREDIE



The bach, on a former sheep station on southern Hawkes Bay's Shoal Beach, was designed to resemble the farm buildings in the area. Its northerly deck is sheltered by moveable screens of cedar slats.



ABOVE Richard Gregory, ???, Heather, ???, ??? and ???? on the bach's northerly deck of the living pavilion. The woolshed of the sheep station that originally occupied the property can be glimpsed in the background. The rear pavilion contains the bedrooms and the garage. **RIGHT** The slatted screens sheltering the northerly deck with its ocean views.

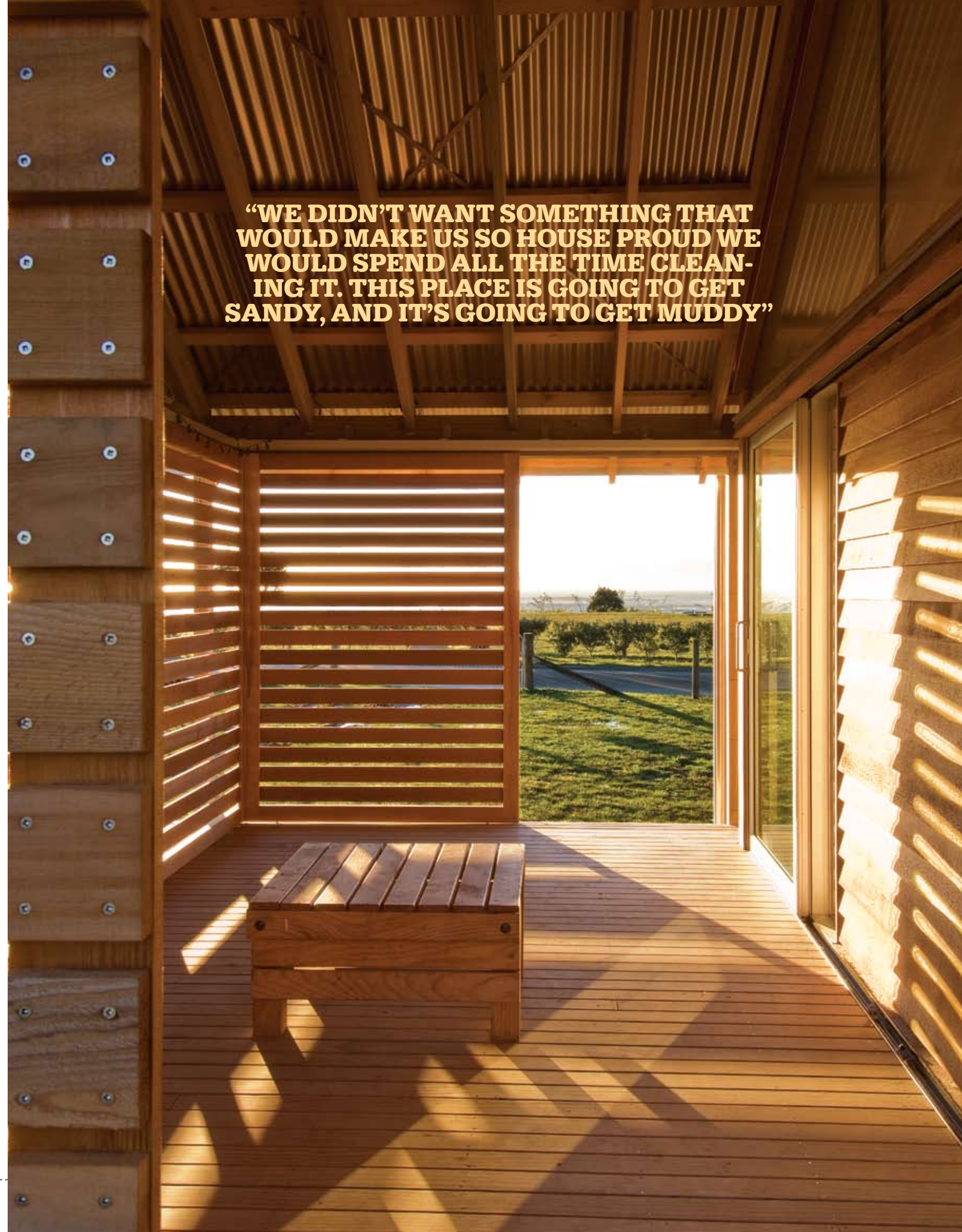
K eep things simple: the desire expressed by so many owners of contemporary baches before the temptation to add suburban trappings creeps stealthily up on them. Here, though, on the shores of Shoal Beach in southern Hawkes Bay, is a dwelling where the owners and their architect have stayed true to their word, with two connected shed-like buildings that can be locked up and left with a minimum of fuss. The owners, Richard and Heather Gregory and their children Sophie, 22, Harriet, 20, Arabella, 18, Patrick, 13, and Rupert, 11, didn't want a home away from home, but something that offered a genuine alternative. "I wanted a bach, not a house," Richard says. "We didn't want something that would make us so house-proud we would spend all the time cleaning it. This place is going to get sandy, and it's going to get muddy in wet weather."

The couple became friends with architect Gerald Parsonson when he designed renovations for

their house in Hastings after he graduated from architecture school 16 years ago. Since then they have kept in close touch and spent time at Parsonson's own bach on the Kapiti Coast, which won our Home of the Year award in 2001. When they bought their own section near the beach, they immediately approached Parsonson to design the bach for it. "We've got the history," Heather says. "Ged's a very good listener and just guides you in his direction. We've experienced his home in Wellington and his holiday home and we know his work is very functional – they're not show homes, they're family homes."

For some years, the Gregory family had been holidaying in Taupo, but Richard, who had spent the summers of his youth on Hawkes Bay's Waimarama Beach, a little to the north of Shoal Bay, decided he needed to experience the ocean again. These days, when Richard wants things to happen, they usually happen pretty fast: Eight years ago he was diagnosed with carcinoid syndrome, a slow-growing liver

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cancer that, with non-surgical medical attention and what Richard calls “a few hippie treatments”, appears to have stabilised. “Every year I just get better,” he says. Even so, he remains keenly aware of the importance of each and every day. It is not too much of a stretch to say that some of his positivity stems from the family’s regular trips to Shoal Bay. “The sea builds your soul,” Richard says. “I always feel better within myself at the sea.”

One of the secrets of the bach’s success is that its simplicity allows it to feel so well-connected to the environment around it. The Shoal Bay subdivision was once part of a large sheep station; the Gregorys drive by the now-disused (for farming purposes) woolshed every time they take their boat down to the water. It was this structure from which Parsonson took some of his design cues, setting out to create a rural-looking building that is appropriate for its setting, just as the Gregorys wanted it to be.

Two simple gabled forms in a paddock: how

hard could that be to design, anyway? But calling the building simple belies the range of architectural tricks Parsonson has deployed to make it so. The rear of the building, which contains the garage, bedrooms and bathroom, was built with standard truss roofs, but because Parsonson wanted the living pavilion to “have a feel of generosity to the space” and for its ceiling to be uninterrupted with trusses, he designed a series of supporting outer posts, in doing so eliminating the need for interior trusses and adding a lovely layered, light and diffuse feeling to the structure as a whole. The added benefit of this part of the bach being raised slightly off the ground makes a handy space for stacking kayaks and other beach accessories. “The structure gives it a temporary sort of appearance, another thing that makes it appropriate for where it is,” Parsonson says.

There are other notes of discreet ingenuity – a window seat that, on the other side of a set of louvres, continues onto the eastern deck; a glass sliding door

LEFT Heather and ??? in the living pavilion, where the kitchen door slides back behind the bench to create an indoor-outdoor cooking space. The light shades are by David Trubridge. The TV in the background is for watching DVDs on rainy days. **ABOVE** Heather and Richard on the bach’s southern deck, which catches the morning sun and is a shady spot on summer evenings.



ABOVE LEFT The connecting space between the living and sleeping pavilions can be closed off behind a large sliding door. **ABOVE RIGHT** The bunkroom. The bedrooms were kept deliberately pared-back, with hooks instead of wardrobes. **RIGHT** The space between the two pavilions feels open by is actually closed off with glass panels.

that disappears behind the kitchen bench, turning the area into an indoor-outdoor cooking zone; cedar screens on the bach's northern face that are remarkably effective in breaking up the strong northwesterly breezes; a weatherboard-clad garage door that closes almost seamlessly to look like just another side of the building.

The Gregorys also wanted the bach to be simple in an environmental sense. Heather converted the family's commercial orchard to organics 12 years ago, and brought a similarly rigorous sensibility to the bach, requesting sustainably harvested timber, solar water heating, wool insulation for the walls and ceilings, and a low-emission log fire for heating.

After three years camping on the site before the bach was designed and completed, even these basic touches feel like luxuries to the family. Which, when you think about it, is exactly what the idea of a bach is all about. •

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Gerald Parsonson

PARSONSON ARCHITECTS

Wellington-based Gerald Parsonson won our Home of the Year award in 2001 for the design of his own family's bach on the Kapiti Coast. He first worked with the Gregorlys, who own the bach on these pages, 16 years ago when he designed a renovation for their home in Hastings. The ambition for this project was to keep things simple, which Parsonson achieved using a subtle lineup of architectural tricks, ensuring the bach feels entirely different to the Gregorlys' family home.

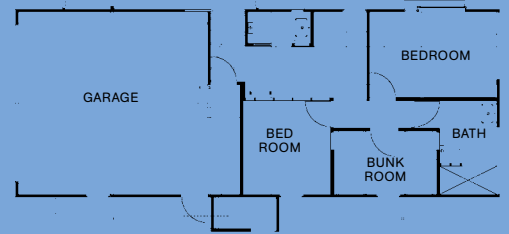
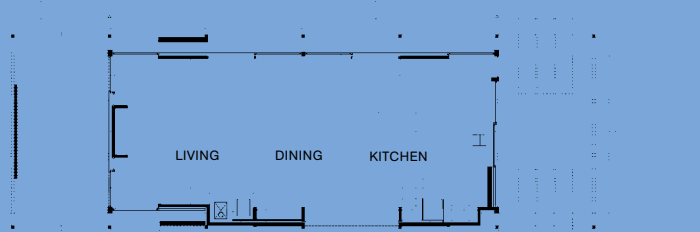
✔ The terrain

RIGHT The bach is part of a new subdivision on a former sheep station at Shoal Bay on the coast of southern Hawkes Bay, near the Te Angiangi marine reserve and backed by a range of steep hills. **BELOW** Just beyond the bach on the road to the beach, the farm's old woolshed nestles beneath a steep bluff.



MEET THE ARCHITECT

Gerald Parsonson discusses his approach to creating uniquely New Zealand homes on **Thursday August 20, 6.30pm at Jeff Gray BMW, 138 Hutt Road, Kaiwharawhara, Wellington.** Free entry. Email architectstalk@acpmagazines.co.nz to register



✔ Washing up

The bach has only one bathroom, in which Parsonson kept things deliberately simple, with built-in storage units and a walk-in shower. The louvres open to reveal southerly views of the bluff at the end of the bay (Richard and Heather's bedroom has windows allowing them similar views). The plywood cladding in this room gives way to metal wall coverings in the wet areas.

✔ Overflow

With five children, the Gregorlys knew that holidays with the entire family were going to be a squeeze, so Parsonson designed a storage space above the garage that also serves as a sleeping loft when bedroom space is short.



⤴ The gap

An architect's impression of the way the bach's two pavilions meet. Parsonson specified outdoor materials for the flooring between the two shed forms, but closed in the space with windows at each end to prevent heat loss in winter.