



A SHARED PLOT IN PERTH
HOUSES A BRIGHT AND
CLEVERLY DESIGNED
SMALL HOME BUILT FOR
AN EXPANDING FAMILY

urban chalet

WORDS CERI DAVID STYLING LISA QUINN-SCHOFIELD PHOTOGRAPHY JODY D'ARCY





KITCHEN Homeowner James Crombie sourced the bricks used throughout the family home. "We think they originally came from the beautiful old Perry Lakes Stadium, built for the Commonwealth Games in 1962." **EXTERIOR (opposite)** The house is clad in Frenchman rough-sawn Cypress. "People call it the Gingerbread House or the Ski Cabin," says James.

cheat sheet

Who lives here James Crombie, a film and TV set dresser; his wife Bekk, an architecture graduate; their children Beatrice, 9, Björn, 7, and Elsie, 9 months; and Chalkie the cat.

Style of home A 78-square-metre eco-friendly house in Perth on a plot shared with their best friends.

 Bekk spent 11 months on planning and approvals, followed by an eight-month build.

 The house cost approximately \$170k to build.

PUREBOND ROCK MAPLE PLYWOOD CONCRETE STUDIO KITCHEN BENCHTOPS



It was 2008, while planning their wedding, that James and Bekk Crombie fell in love with yellow. “We were looking for an interesting colour for the bridesmaids’ dresses and bonbonniere,” says Bekk. “We went for a really warm, deep yellow that, strangely, we’d liked from [horror film] *Rosemary’s Baby*. It looks so rich teamed with white.”

Though the yolky shade didn’t get a mention in their vows, it’s followed them through the birth of their first two children, Beatrice and Bjørn, a couple of years living in Norway and back again to the house they built in Perth. Here, visitors are welcomed by it at the front door and when they ring the doorbell. It’s the colour of the family’s bikes and the ladder that leads to James and Bekk’s loft bedroom. “Friends have started calling it ‘Crombie yellow,’” says James, “because it pops up in everything we do.”

When it comes to personal touches, that yellow is just the tip of the iceberg. Everything in this house has been adapted, customised and reinvented – right down to the land it sits on, which they share with their best friends Nathan and Helen.

The plan was hatched while the Crombies were living in Norway, where Bekk’s family is originally from. “I suggested it half-jokingly to our friends... but within a couple of weeks all four of us were actively looking at properties and finance options,” says James. “They would renovate a house and we would build another one – and we would all live together on the same block.”

It was an idea that ticked many boxes for both families. “[It] gave us a chance to live ‘small,’” James says. “For similar money we could’ve had a triple garage mansion an hour up the freeway... but instead we have a five-minute walk to school, the train, supermarket and parks, and enough of a garden to grow vegies.”

Many would baulk at living in such close proximity of their friends, but these guys were confident they could make it work.



PATIO “We’re so lucky with the climate that we can open up the doors and double the size of the house,” says Bekk of the Meranti timber-framed sliding glass doors.

KITCHEN (left) The cupboards were painted in White Knight ‘Chalkboard Green’ so Beatrice, Bjørn and eventually Elsie can get creative and use the space.

bright idea

Not everything needs to be new. Salvaged items like these 1970s industrial lamps from General Electric were found at the tip shop and add a cost-effective focal point to the patio.

DINING AREA The painting above the window is a collaborative piece the Crombies made by all painting the same vase. The pendants are vintage finds and the table is from IKEA. **THE NOOK (opposite)** A custom sofa from At Home Furniture & Homewares is a colourful base for Mobilia cushions and the blue blanket from Bambury. Vintage finds like the wooden stool, map of Europe and pendant light add character.

There are vintage industrial pendant lamps in blues and greens, and mid-century teak furniture inherited from James's dad.

DULUX FLAT BLACK PAINT.

“Nathan and I have been friends since we were eight, and Nat, Bekk and I all played in a band called The Bank Holidays,” says James. “We had a bit of success a few years ago, before kids. So we knew we could work together.”

They started making offers and struck lucky on their fifth go: a 600-square-metre corner block in Shenton Park with a small 1950s house, which Nathan and Helen would renovate and move into with their two kids, plus space for James and Bekk to build. That said, the block couldn’t be subdivided, so their ‘house’ would need to fit the specifications for an ancillary dwelling – aka a granny flat. Ultimately, they got approval for 78 square metres and just one storey – but the couple were up for the challenge.

Bekk, an architecture graduate, describes designing her own house as a dream. “We’ve always lived in a compact way.” James agrees. “At one stage in Norway we were living in a 55-square-metre boathouse and it really suited us.”

The Crombies moved back to Western Australia in 2015 and planned the project with three set key criteria in mind – build an environmentally friendly home to a tight budget that maximised their small space.

According to Bekk, “the most central concept of the home is reverse-brick veneer” – a method where bricks are used for the interior as they naturally regulate temperature far better than other materials. The house is positioned to make the most of winds for ventilation and the sun for warmth, and is divided into two long halves. To one side is the open-plan living space (with TV nook, kitchen and dining area), which has extra space thanks to the high vaulted ceiling and large glass doors that open onto the garden. On the other side are two children’s rooms, bathroom, laundry and wardrobe, crowned by a mezzanine bedroom for Bekk and James, which is cleverly accessed by the yellow ladder.

“In terms of materials, the brief was always, ‘This, or something similar,’ so there was room for creativity and flexibility,” says Bekk. “Luckily, James has such a keen eye.”

James, a set decorator, sourced many of the elements used in the house. Clearly, repurposing old materials is a win for sustainability, and the character it adds to a new build is a huge benefit. “We didn’t want our home to look like it had just landed from outer space,” says Bekk. “It has a very established feel, and that suits our tastes. It means it’s easy wearing, as well.”

There’s colour and texture everywhere, from the various timbers whose shades will evolve as they age, to kitchen cupboards given a lick of green chalkboard paint so the kids use less paper. There are vintage industrial pendant lamps in blues and greens, and mid-century teak furniture inherited from James’s dad. “I don’t do it often enough, but when you have a moment to relax, it’s a feast for your eyes,” Bekk exclaims.

A lack of time to sit still is understandable given that just after moving in, the Crombies discovered they were expecting again. Would Bekk have designed something bigger had she known they would become a family of five? She takes a moment to mull it over. “I mean, if we’d known we’d have to accommodate another baby we might have,” she says, before reconsidering. “No, it just works. Elsie has slotted in perfectly. It’s such an easy space to negotiate everyday life. I’m pretty content.”



COLOUR PALETTE

technicolour dream

A bold splash of colour used sparingly in small spaces will invigorate a room.

Interior Expressions low-sheen acrylic paint in Hunter Green and Texas Yellow, \$74.90 for 4L, Haymes.



KIDS' BEDROOM A Pink Sahara rug from Oh Happy Home and Bambury 'Rainbow' quilt cover prove kids' spaces don't need to be childish. The wooden toy boat mounted on the wall is a sweet reminder of Norway. **BATHROOM (opposite)** The IKEA taps were powder coated in the same 'Crombie yellow' used throughout the house (Dulux 'Safety Yellow'). Mosaic pool tiles create synergy between the shower area and the rest of the bathroom.

GREAT FINDS

mid-century musts

Mix sleek wooden pieces with muted colours to create a cosy cabin vibe.



FROM LEFT Loop stool, from \$950, Mark Tuckey. Julia coffee table, \$209.95, Zanui. Olva/Unikko mug, \$35, Marimekko. Tana sofa in Canary Yellow, \$879, Castlery. Peach velvet penny round cushion cover, \$49, Castle.

ADDITIONAL PRODUCT SOURCING: NATALIE JOHNSON



COSMIC STUDIOS STOOL, IKEA VANITY, CONCRETE STUDIO VANITY TOP.

MASTER BEDROOM Chalkie looks out from James and Bekk's loft bedroom. The artwork is by James, who is a visual artist, as well as a TV and film set dresser.

OPPOSITE Emmie Ruta bedlinen from IKEA and a Bedtonic blanket echo the Scandi feel of the loft. James's grandfather painted the alpine scene sitting on the built-in drawers of the plywood headboard and the pink vase is from Mobilia in WA.

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BEKK CROMBIE, HOMEOWNER

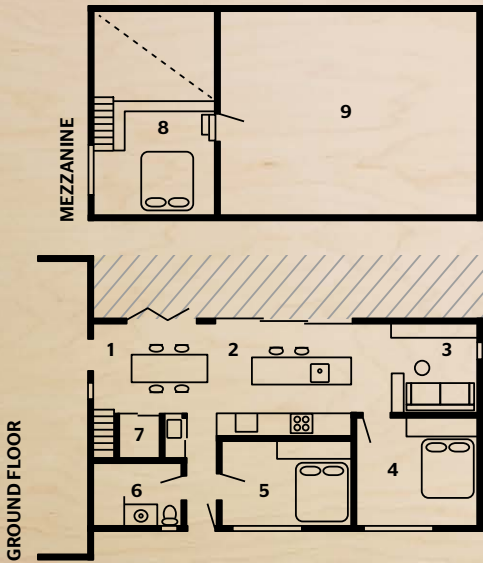


lessons learnt

“MY BIGGEST REGRET WAS NOT PUSHING HARD DURING THE BUILD TO FINISH SOME OF THE SMALL THINGS”

BEKK CROMBIE, HOMEOWNER

“[They] now feel very hard to get done. Solar panels, vents, whirlybirds – they weren't particularly exciting or imperative to moving in, and now I'm not really sure how long it will be before they're completed.”



- 1. Entry
- 2. Kitchen
- 3. Nook
- 4. Kids' Bedroom
- 5. Kids' Bedroom
- 6. Bathroom
- 7. Walk-in Robe
- 8. Master bedroom
- 9. Loft

