

WINDOW ON THE WORLD



THE SEA ALMOST
SEEMS PART OF THIS
AUSTRALIAN CLIFFTOP
HOME, WHERE MODERN
ARCHITECTURE SITS
PERFECTLY ALONGSIDE
NATURAL ELEMENTS

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Pictures PRUE RUSCOE/TAVERNE
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Living area Seamless glass walls provide an uninterrupted panorama of the sea. Architect Jorge Hrdina maximised the breathtaking views by elevating parts of the house above neighbouring rooftops ►



Swimming pool Providing cool relief during the hot Australian summers, the alluring infinity pool is a strong visual component of the house and an impressive feat of engineering. It's supported with massive beams integrated into the walls of the guest bedroom below and sits on thick rubber pads to minimise any vibrations

Living area Timeless Italian furniture and ethnic touches create a polished finish, with 'Happy Chairs' by Antonio Citterio for Flexform sitting alongside a wooden stool from Africa and a zebra skin, which adds texture and pattern (try The French Bedroom Company for similar) ▶

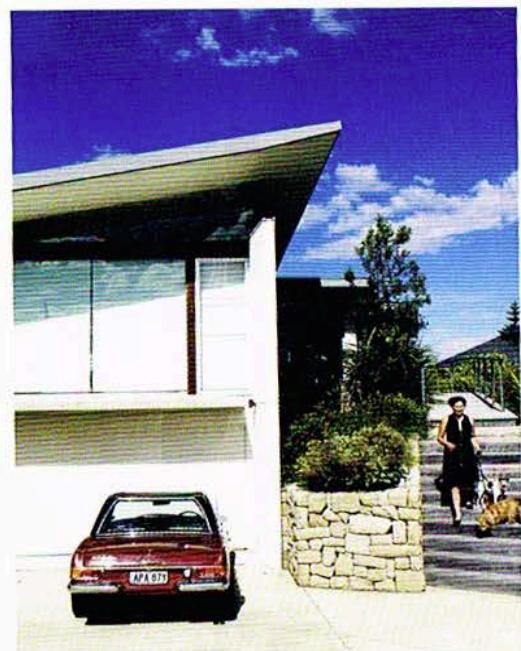
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Terrace The Australian hardwood deck area is perfect for a spot of sun-worshipping. 'We have our coffee out here in the mornings, but I deliberately didn't put a table here to avoid getting too much sun,' says homeowner Valerie. Instead we throw the windows open inside and sit at the table there.' The furnishings have a global feel: the bench is Pakistani, the large copper planters are Turkish, and the teak pots are from Bali

Garage The red vintage car is Valerie's Mercedes 280SL.



A sk the average Brit to describe their dream house and sea views will probably enter the equation somewhere. And oceanic panoramas don't come better than those at Valerie Hunter's light-filled home in New South Wales, Australia. Enormous picture windows, unfettered by beams or cornerposts, show off a dazzling expanse of blue. The effect is so vivid that the waves almost feel like a decorative element inside the house rather than an external force. 'I can't imagine not having a sea view,' admits former fashion retailer Valerie. 'It's uplifting and keeps you in touch with the elements. We're on a cliff looking out over a point break where you can see surfers, fishing boats and beautiful birdlife.'

Valerie and husband Richard Haskell, a pathologist, moved to this spectacular spot in Terrigal three years ago. Originally seeking a place to renovate, instead they found a tired weatherboard house in a fantasy location, and decided to rebuild from scratch. Downsizing from a large family home, their six children having grown up, the brief was for a pared-back and uncluttered sanctuary. 'We simply walked out of our last place because we were so excited by what lay ahead,' Valerie recalls.

The result is a super-stylish affair. Outside, a dramatic angular roof juts into the sky, while the shimmering pool is a feat of high-tech engineering, cantilevering out towards the ocean. The building is cleverly angled in segments to take advantage of the sunny northerly aspect – the Down Under equivalent of our south-facing ideal. 'I wanted an elegant house,' says Valerie. 'Its success is down to things like the heights of the ceilings and the room proportions. The light is also very important.'

But while refreshingly modern, this is no austere temple to minimalism. 'We're by the sea, not in the city. I didn't want the house to be too slick. It's all very soft and natural,' Valerie explains. What's striking is how interior and exterior flow seamlessly together, united by a simple palette. 'Too many people over-decorate. They move into a new place and try too hard,' she says. 'One of the secrets of bringing the outside in is not using too many materials.' Shades of white, cream and caramel accentuate the modern-organic vibe. 'We have strong light and big views. Too much colour and it would look artificial,' says Valerie. 'If I put up a roll of wallpaper, it would ruin things.' Instead, colour comes from the lush Norfolk pine tree outside and local landmark, the Skillion, a rocky outcrop that glows orange in the sunset.

Glass doors open straight onto the deck, bringing in the sound of waves, while white curtains billow in the breeze. Organic sculptures sit on walls above baths or behind beds, and the raw concrete floor is an unpolished taupe. While Valerie has stuck to her favourite classic Italian furnishings, global finds add a quirky edge. 'I like ethnic touches. They give a bit of soul and an earthy quality that I love.'

Valerie and Richard start their days with coffee on the terrace, and the pool is ideal for a dip on scorching afternoons. The enviable outdoor kitchen, complete with gas-powered barbecue, is the hub for family gatherings. 'It's so easy to eat out here. We cook seafood caught just five minutes away and my sons like to throw on steaks. Of course, we love barbies,' she laughs. 'We're Australian! ▶'

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Kitchen/dining area The teak fittings add to the outdoors-in theme. 'I love the colour of teak,' says Valerie. 'We're beside the sea and they use teak on boats, so it's a perfect match.' Much of the house has unpolished concrete floors in a soft sandy hue, while under-floor heating keeps things cosy in winter. The table is made from reconstituted concrete, which is lighter than ordinary concrete. The chairs are similar to Hans J Wegner's 'Wishbone' design for Carl Hansen & Son (available at Skandium) ►

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Main bedroom 'It feels like being in a hotel,' Valerie says of her charmingly simple bedroom. Throw in a warm toffee colour co-ordinate with the built-in teak cabinets and wardrobes, which were all designed by architect Jorge Hrdina and mean there is no need for the clutter of free-standing furniture

Bathroom Beautiful views and neutral colours make for a calming vibe. The twig sculpture made from grapevines is by floral artist Tracey Deep and adds warmth and texture. The sleek bath is by Kaldewei and the taps are by Boffi (try Alternative Plans) **DECO**

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'I LIKE ETHNIC TOUCHES, A MIXTURE OF OLD AND NEW. THEY GIVE A HOUSE SOUL AND AN EARTHY QUALITY'

