

collectors' edition

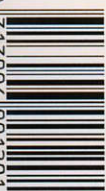
Belle

NO 150 DECEMBER-JANUARY 1999 NZ \$9.95 (INC. GST) \$6.50

oasis

havens of calm from the
city, country and coast

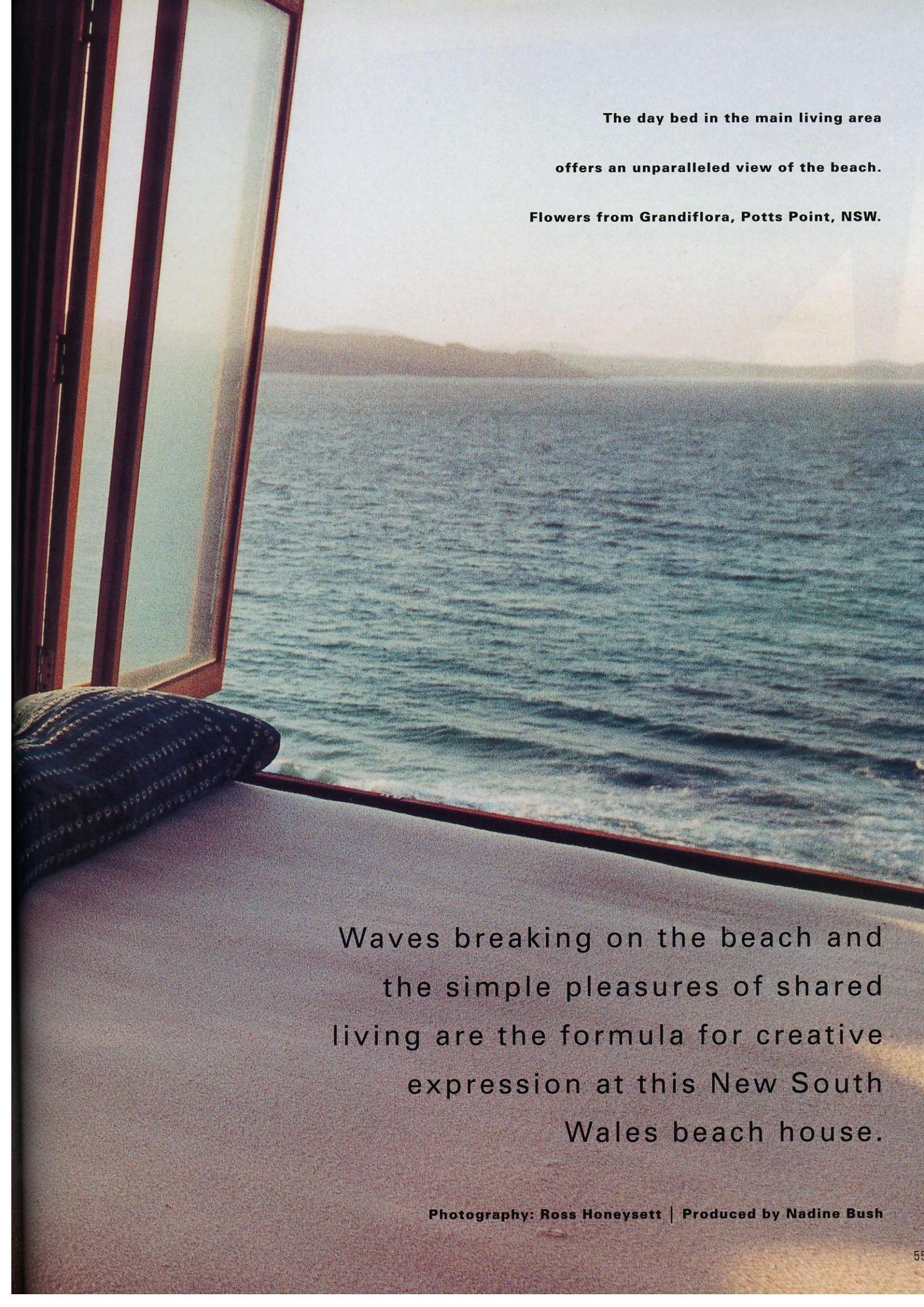
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n e w w a v e



A photograph showing a view from a window looking out over a beach and the ocean. The window frame is visible on the left, and a patterned cushion is partially seen in the foreground. The ocean is a deep blue with white-capped waves breaking. In the distance, a low, hazy coastline is visible under a pale sky.

**The day bed in the main living area
offers an unparalleled view of the beach.
Flowers from Grandiflora, Potts Point, NSW.**

Waves breaking on the beach and
the simple pleasures of shared
living are the formula for creative
expression at this New South
Wales beach house.

Photography: Ross Honeysett | Produced by Nadine Bush



Timbers from a former dwelling were used in the new construction. Materials were selected to weather with minimal maintenance. External walls are clad in BHP Zincalume.





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A couple of hours north of Newcastle is Seal Rocks, a small village of old fishermen's shacks perched on hills overlooking the sea. Backed by a national park and with only a dirt road for access, it is a peaceful, lazy and unsophisticated place with a single shop, fishing boats on the beach, dolphins in the bay, and a spectacular coastline.

Stephen Grant bought one of the shacks here a few years ago. A property developer and art collector, Grant was then working on a project with Newcastle-based architects Shane Blue and Rachael Bourne, and he asked them to design this retreat. At a relatively young age, Grant is something of a philanthropist with a passion for the creative expression of contemporary culture, and his brief to the architects was for a house that would work as a collective—a communal place of retreat for family, friends and acquaintances, artists, writers and filmmakers.

Bourne and Blue are a husband-and-wife architectural team who have had their own practice in Newcastle for two years. Grant became aware of the pair when he learned that a building they had designed and built in Canberra had won an architectural award. This is their second project with Grant, and a third is underway.

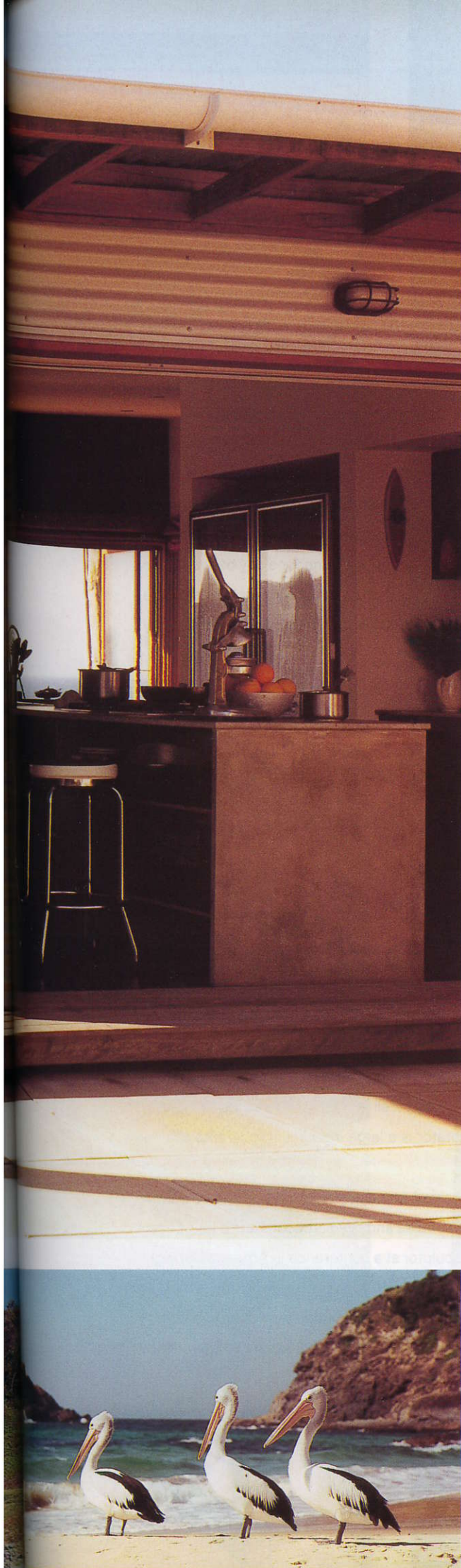
"Stephen is very encouraging," says Blue. "A supportive and enlightened client. He believes that, as an architect, you have a vision, and he is prepared to nurture it." Bourne and Blue consider the Grant house to be their most uncompromised project to date. Entered in the 1998 Royal Australian Institute of Architects NSW Chapter Awards, the house was awarded a Blacket Commendation.

The house is simple and robust, in the tradition of the shacks in the area, and is designed to weather the elements, multitudes of guests, and periods of emptiness.

"The idea was to provide a carefree and simple way of living on holiday at the beach. It's a step above camping," observes Bourne. Indeed, the structures that make up the house have the sense of being permanent tents around a camp site. The sleeping pavilions are at the back of the site, while at the front, overlooking the beach, is the building housing the living area. In between, beside the entry, is the bathing area. All open onto the courtyard, which has a centrally placed barbecue.

The owner had experienced this kind of pavilion living in Bali. "It's sensible in that climate to maximise ventilation," notes Blue. "Here we have an adaptation of that. The breezes here can be very strong. We needed a protected area where you could be outside, sheltered from the wind, but still able to see the view."

Building in separate structures also allows for complex interplays between inside and outside spaces. "The house works well for large or small groups by virtue of the different parts of the building," explains Blue. "There could be any number of people in the house, but it's still possible to escape and be by yourself."



**Opposite: the ocean can
be seen from practically
anywhere within this
building, which is
arranged in pavilions
around a courtyard.**

**The bedrooms
capture the feel of
permanent camping.**

The bedrooms at the back of the site open to the courtyard and the bush behind. "The idea is that you can open up the walls and sleep under a mosquito net," says Blue. Beds are placed centrally in the rooms and their boxed bases provide the only storage. There are no cupboards or places to hang clothes, just simple corner ledges where T-shirts and shorts can be tossed. "It's not as though we dress for dinner," laughs Grant.

From the very back of the site it is possible to look across the courtyard through the living pavilion to the view beyond. Bourne and Blue felt that putting a full bank of windows across the front of the house would have "killed the view". Instead, they installed a fireplace centrally in a section of solid wall with two picture windows either side. "People love them because they're like little paintings on the wall," says Grant. Corner windows are also placed symmetrically, framing views and defining two bays in the larger living room, one for a day bed, and one for a dining table – a place to lie and a place to sit. This building opens to the courtyard with transparent roller doors that are raised on arrival and generally stay in that position until departure.

In keeping with the utilitarian aesthetic of the place, the bathing pavilion has the feel of a beachside change room. Concrete outer walls run up to shoulder height with clear corrugated sheet awnings above. Two lavatories and two showers, catering for numbers of guests, are partitioned with fibre cement sheet over a timber deck through which the water drains. An original laundry tub is placed conveniently behind a wall of the courtyard. "You can clean fish in it, or wash out your wetsuit," says Grant.

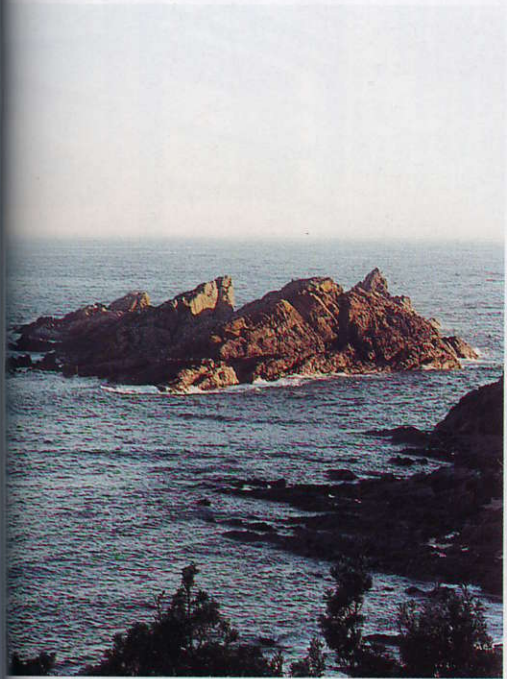
The house was built with environmental considerations in mind. Solar panels on the roof provide hot water. Septic tanks from Earth Safe recycle waste for the garden. All rainwater is collected into two large tanks which, when full, can last an entire summer. Gas lights provide a soft yellow glow as an alternative to standard electric lamps, as well as being a backup for an unreliable electricity supply that can fail after a thunderstorm.

Last summer there were 15 people to stay, and Grant is preparing for open house again this year. The pantry is always well stocked with staples like pasta, noodles and tinned food. The refrigerator is a large industrial model that allows two weeks' supplies to be stored.

Cooking is generally an uncomplicated and communal affair. There's a wok burner for stir-fries, a ring burner for noodles and the barbecue gets a lot of use. There is no oven – yet. Grant met a sculptor at a conference in America last year and is bringing him over to stay at the beach house. In return, the artist will construct a woodfired oven in the courtyard from discarded terracotta tiles found close by. "Homemade bread and pizzas," says Grant with a satisfied smile. ●

DAVID CLARK

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**The light, breezy bathing structure, which connects
the sleeping and living areas, is made from
tallowwood decking, concrete walls
and fibre-cement partitions.**