



Project type
New-build

Designer
Rata Fraser of
Rata Architecture
& Design

Builder
Ben Gommers,
Gommers
Construction
Limited

Floor size
204m²

Cost
\$500K-\$1 million

Timeframe
12 months

Construction
Pre-cast concrete,
steel beams, timber
framing.

Cladding
Cedar weather-
boards; pre-cast
concrete

Flooring
Solid 18mm beech

Lining
Ply and
plasterboard

Location
Glen Innes,
Tāmaki Makaurau
Auckland

Case

GOMMERS HOUSE

Story by Simon Farrell-Green
Photographs by Barry Tobin

"You don't expect it to be here," says builder Ben Gommers of his home in the gentrifying suburb of Glen Innes, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. "I love that – it's a big surprise as you come up the driveway."

Gommers and his wife Jasmine were renting the original state house on the front of the property from his mother, when she suggested he build a house on the back lawn. At the time, he was working for another builder. Building the house was the impetus to go out on his own, so he turned to architect Rata Fraser of Rata Architecture & Design to devise a plan for him.

Fraser's design was simple, with a long north-facing elevation running out to a flat garden. On the ground level, two U-shaped concrete frames define each end of the house, while the upper floor is timber framed, clad in cedar weatherboards. The concrete frames are a strong presence in the house, containing a living area at one end, and a kitchen at the other. In between, there's an airy dining room and a generous void above the stairs that lead to the upper level.

Building it was reasonably straightforward; managing the whole project was another story. "Financially it was hard, seeing how the budget can move around quickly and trying to deal with it. I definitely learned a lot about budgets, which I've carried through into my other jobs," Gommers says.

While the concrete boxes might look like they were poured in situ, the budget didn't stretch that far: they were actually precast, made with 45-degree mitre joints at the end. "I'd never done precast concrete before, but



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Study

I really like it. It was a day to stand them up and suddenly you've got walls." There was just enough room on the site to bring the truck up the driveway, and millimetres to spare for the crane, which only just floated over the top of the fence so the panels could be lowered into place.

Structurally, they're held up by a concrete footing, which extends a metre inside the wall. A RibRaft concrete floor sits on top of that, its steel tied into ReidBars in the base of the footing. The top floor of the house and a couple of exposed I-beams hold the whole house together. Initially, Gommers planned to paint all the steelwork dark grey to match the window and door joinery, but when it arrived painted shop-primer red, he liked how it sat with the concrete and timber.

Gommers started work on the place two weeks after his younger daughter was born: nine months later, they moved in, with one functional bathroom, no internal doors and a plywood staircase. He spent several months finishing the place off, including tiling the bathrooms himself – an impressive feat, considering the bathrooms feature whole tiles only.

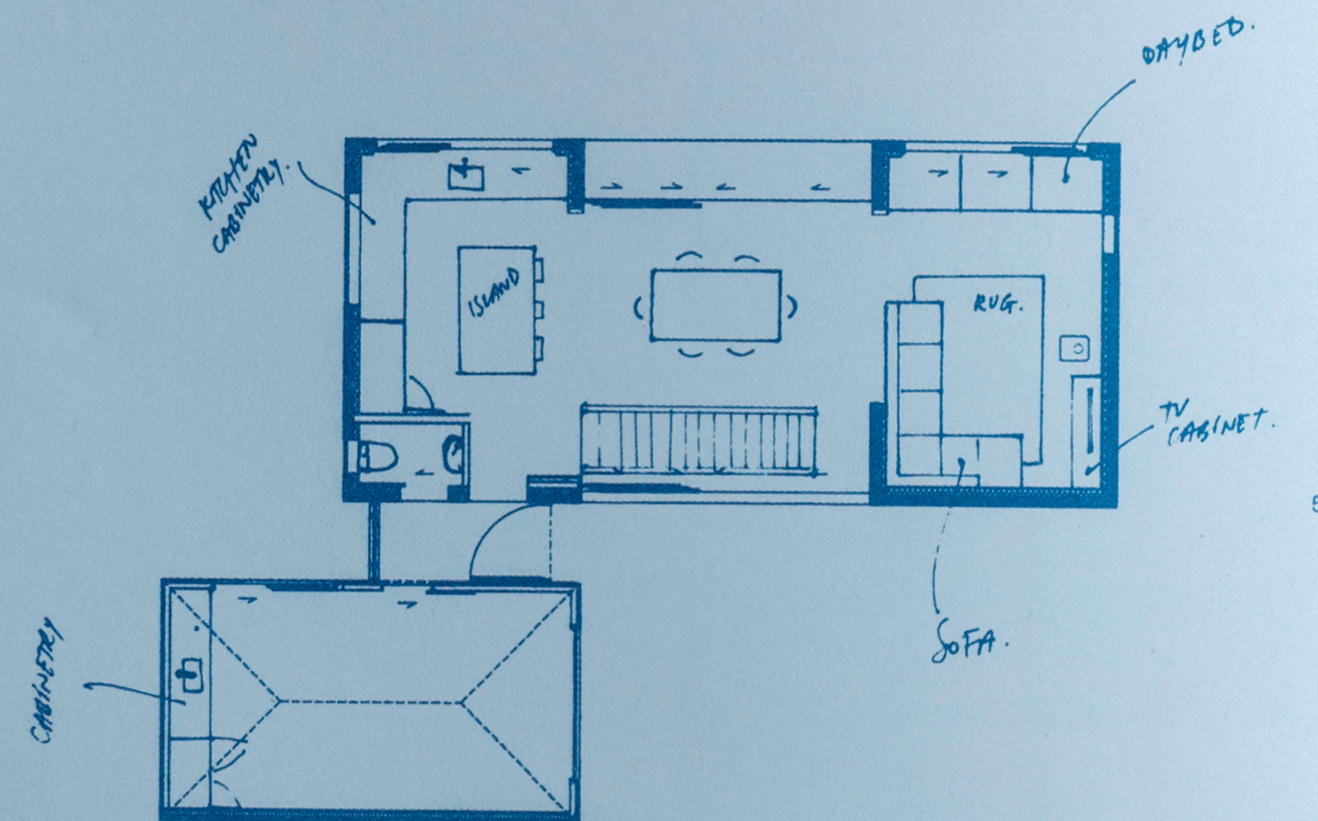
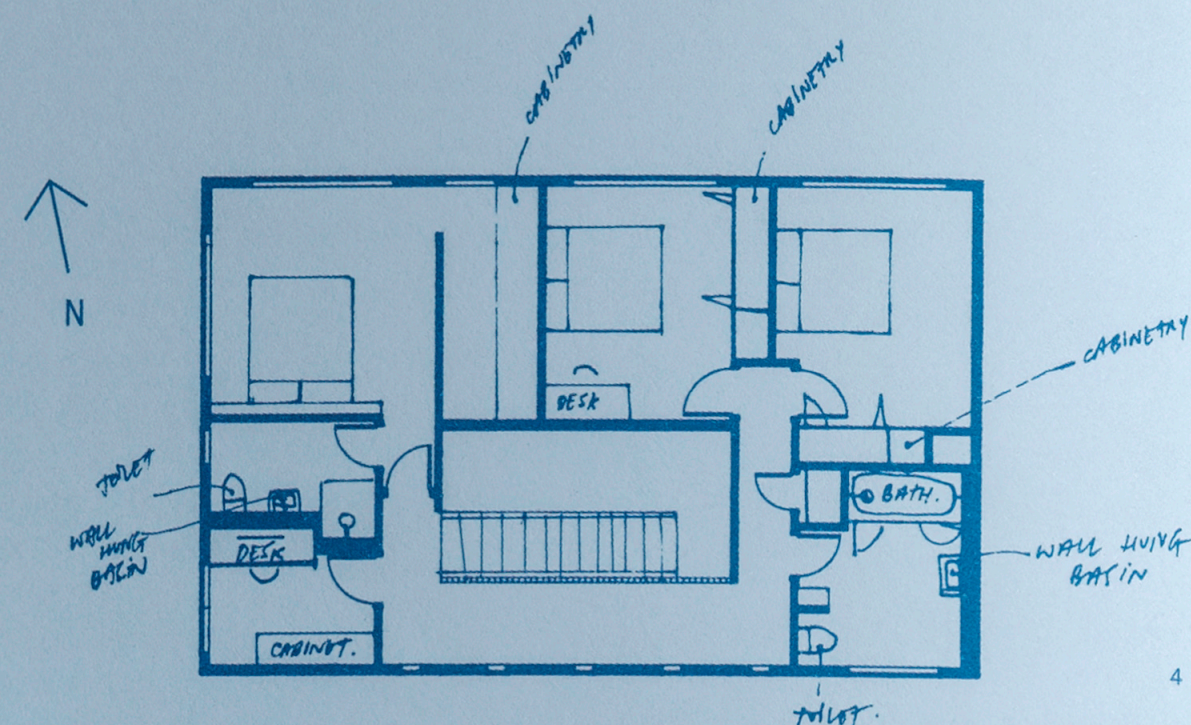
The morning the new staircase arrived, the family was upstairs, waiting while Gommers and his team hand-winchd the feature into place in time for everyone to head out for the day. Left with a few thousand at the

end for the kitchen, Gommers designed the cabinetry around Kevin McCloud's principles (prep, cook, mess, dishwasher, return), getting panels made by cutting sheet to size, and assembling it himself.

The house is full of small, carefully thought-out details like this. The floors upstairs are solid 18mm timber from Foreverbeech. They come with a microbevel, which means you lay them and oil them without needing to sand. They wear beautifully and don't feel too precious.

On the inside of the concrete panels, plywood-clad walls match the proportions of the concrete slabs and sit perfectly flush. The ply lining downstairs is cut in such a way that whole panels meet corners; Gommers chose to run sheets full-height from the floor, and top each with a 200mm panel. "There's so many ways you can do it," he says, "so you kind of have to make a decision and be confident and stick with it. You might get mixed reviews, but having the confidence to do it is important."

Building his own place – and having to work through details himself on site – gave him the confidence to go out on his own, focussing on architectural builds and renovations. "I'll get the drawings and I see the intent – how it needs to look when it's done. But the way you get there is open to change, so it's easier to build or it's more accurate. I really enjoy that."



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Images:

1. A double-height void.
2. View through the living space.
3. The staircase meets polished concrete.
4. Upper-level floorplan.
5. Lower-level floorplan.
6. Warming timber offsets the concrete.
7. Detail of stairs.
8. The home is hidden behind an existing house.
9. Kitchen designed by Gommers.

This case study was produced in association with: Gommers Construction Limited
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