



**LEFT** Visual arts, compact size and sustainable design combine in this unique, visually arresting building

It's not every day you find someone who has a vision. It's even rarer to find someone who pursues their dream and uses it to educate the public.

For Kylie Mitchell of Kylie Mitchell Designs, building a home that encapsulated her thirst for clever home design was something she had to do. "I wanted to combine visual arts, compact design and sustainable design all in one building," she explains. "As an artist, building designer and interior designer, it was the ultimate project."

Her inspiration was art. In fact, Kylie wanted to create a "life-sized artwork that could be lived in" to be precise, while also building a compact and sustainable building.

### *The site and structure*

The house is located in Armidale and the block that the house was built on is 527m<sup>2</sup> with a narrow frontage and a slight fall to the south. Kylie chose the location because it was close to town, allowed the building the orientation they were after and was cheap while still being in a good area. "It also has beautiful parklands only one house away," she smiles. "It was one of those rare sites that show up from time to time."

The house has two bedrooms. Upstairs, the main bedroom has a walk-in-wardrobe and the second doubles as a library and meditation space. Kylie shares the home with her husband and their son stays during school holidays; the doubling up of rooms was a practical step in the design process. The bathroom is also located upstairs. The open-plan living, dining and kitchen area is located on the ground level, with the dining room opening out onto the northern entertainment area.

# SMART BUILDING

*Combining compact, sustainable design with visual art all in one building*

■ WORDS / Tatyana Leonov

■ PHOTOGRAPHY / Simon Scott Photography

■ EXTERNAL PHOTOGRAPHY / Kylie Mitchell Designs





The recurring colour theme of black, white and red unifies the interiors while retaining a degree of uniqueness in every room

### Compact design

“Compact design is about eliminating waste, reducing both building and running costs, and clarifying how we live by reducing the amount of stuff we fill our lives with,” Kylie explains. “To make a successful compact design, you need to get back to the basics of what is necessary to live happily and comfortably.”

The house needed to be a home for the family and work as a functional yet idyllic space to live in. Kylie took this on board and studied her family’s lifestyle, habits, hobbies and living patterns — then designed the house around those.

“For example, my partner is very tall and could have easily felt cramped in a compact building, so the bathroom, bedroom and walk-in-wardrobe are all designed to cater for his movement,” she notes. “We also both love showers and rarely use baths, so I eliminated the bath and designed a roomy double shower space instead.

“Another example is that due to food intolerances and working from home, I tend to spend a lot of time working in the kitchen, so I allowed for a full-sized and highly functional kitchen space.”

### Sustainable design

For Kylie, sustainable design “just makes good sense” and she uses her home today to

showcase the benefits and rewards that an environmentally conscious house can bring. Sustainable design is smart design working with, instead of against, the environment.

Basic factors to think about when building a sustainable home include correct orientation, passive solar design, natural heating and cooling, thermal mass, double glazing, low-energy fittings, low or no off-gassing paints and products, double layers of insulation for colder areas and water tanks for reusing and collecting water.

In the instance of her own “art house”, Kylie employed a number of initiatives during the design and building process including:

- Armidale is cold for at least half the year, so the house is oriented slightly east of north, designed to pick up the morning sun.
- Thermally, the polished concrete floor has a dark grey oxide in it to increase its capacity to absorb heat. This acts as the thermal mass with the northern glazing heating the flooring throughout winter.
- Shading has been implemented to prevent heat absorption in summer.
- The building is designed with doors and windows strategically placed to capture the summer breezes.
- The staircase is designed to act as a chimney to heat the upper floor in winter and to vent the excess warmth in summer.
- The building captures plenty of natural light



ABOVE The staircase acts not only as a gallery for family photos and artwork, but also as a chimney to heat the upper floor in winter and vent excess heat in the summer



The compact kitchen provides all the necessary requirements for a functional space in which to enjoy preparing meals for the family

due to purposefully positioned windows and mainly white internal walls. Even the black feature wall doesn’t darken the space.

- Many of the materials chosen are low maintenance, as both Kylie and her husband lead busy lives. The timber windows were, however, chosen over their lower-maintenance aluminium rivals as they offer far better thermal properties, are much more attractive and were one of the only products Kylie was able source locally.
- The Freestyle kitchen benches, among other products, can be resurfaced, which makes it a very durable product.
- The house is not sealed completely, allowing natural air exchange to happen through winter. On clear winter days the northern doors can be opened as the thermal mass of the dark paving in the entertainment area combined with the internal thermal mass keep the house warm.
- The entire roof of the house is dedicated to water tanks and this water is used in the laundry, for the toilet in the detached offices, and for the garden.

### What next?

Kylie and her family have created their ideal home and today use it to showcase smart and beautiful living. Apart from being a compact and sustainable design, the house is a perfect example of an “art house”.

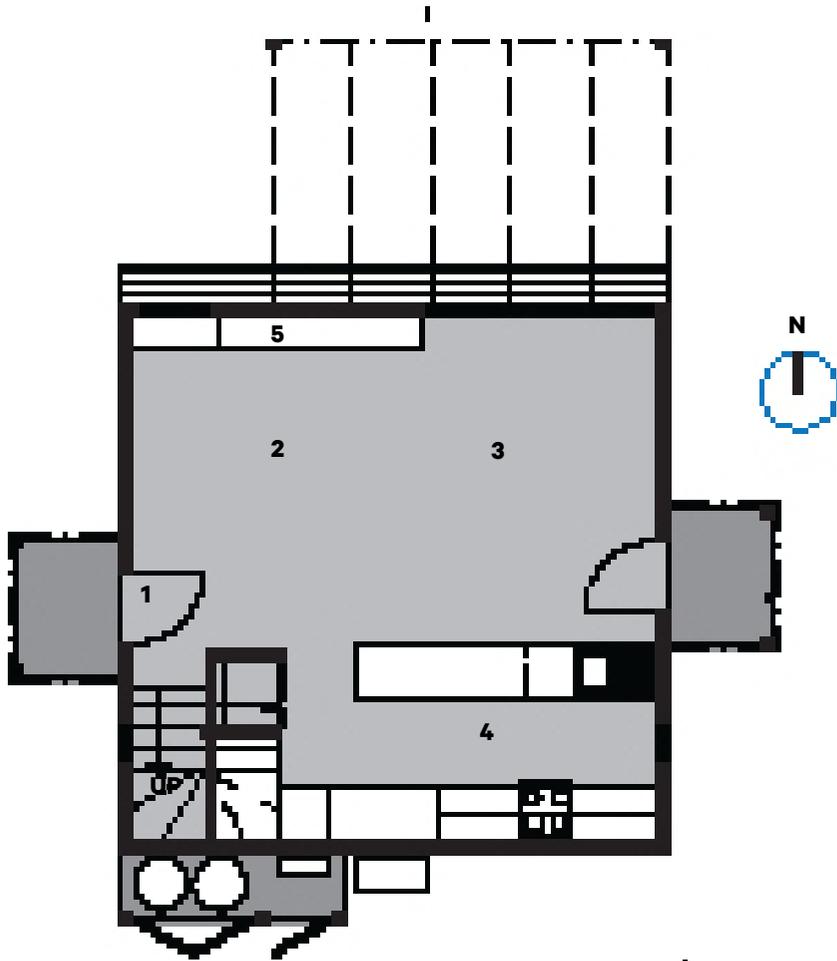
“The visual arts theme required a high level



Inside the house captures plenty of light despite the use of a black feature wall in the living room

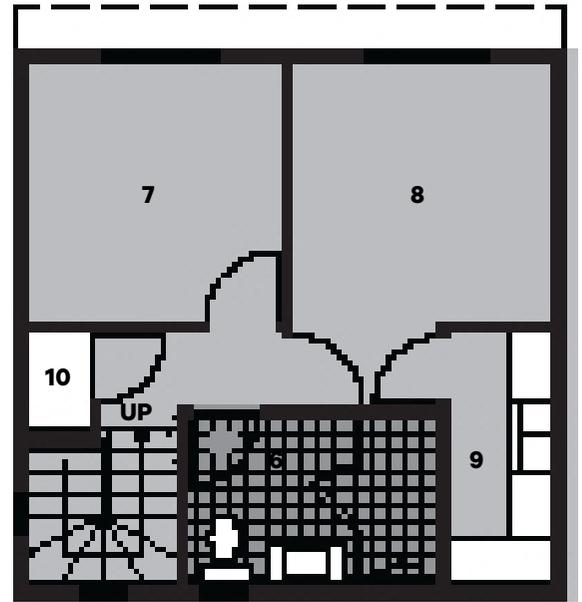
of consideration,” says Kylie. “To have the one theme carry through the entire building, inside and out, could have made the project overwhelming. It was a balancing act to create a space that would be comfortable to live in every day, while maintaining the theme as a constant presence.

“This building offers the unique experience of living inside a work of art. That’s not something that happens every day!”  
As for today? Kylie is working on nine similar designs, ranging from two- to four-bedroom dwellings, each with a unique floorplan and, yes, a unique art theme. ♡



**GROUND FLOOR PLAN**

- 1 Entry
- 2 Lounge
- 3 Dining
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Entertainment Unit



**FIRST FLOOR PLAN**

- 6 Bathroom
- 7 Bedroom
- 8 Bedroom
- 9 W.I.R.
- 10 Linen Cupboard

**PROJECT TEAM**

■ **BUILDING DESIGNER**

Kylie Mitchell Designs  
(kyliemitchell.com.au)

■ **ENGINEER** Tierney

Consulting Engineers  
(02 6771 1678)

■ **STRUCTURAL TEAM** Builder Owen & Fiveash & Partners Pty Ltd (0412 668 025)

■ **FIXTURES AND FITTINGS** Building Products Retravision, Armidale (armidaleretravision.com.au), Lysaght (lysaght.com), Swan Plumbing (02 6772 9677), KingSpan-AirCell (kingspan-insulation.com.au), Blum (blum.com), Laminex (laminex.com.au), CSR Cemintel (cemintel.com.au), Resene-Meredith Paints (02 6772 1690)

■ **FURNITURE AND ACCESSORIES** Audio-Visual Urban Intelligence (urbanintel.com.au)

**Children's Painting** Workshop Meart (meart.com.au) **Custom-Made Furniture** Dewhurst Furniture (dewhurstfurniture.com.au) **Custom-Made Rugs and Carpets** Rugs, Carpet & Design (rc-d.com.au)

■ **SERVICES** Electrical & C-Bus BRD Electrical (brdelectrical.com.au) **Landscaping** Gills Nursery (gillsnursery.com.au) **Painting** Kim Farrell Painting Services (0419 380 397)