

DIVINE RESURRECTION

They bought a block of land and a 130-year-old disassembled church then built a stunning and unique home using the numbered jigsaw puzzle as a template

■ WORDS / Tatyana Leonov
■ PHOTOGRAPHY / Rhiannon Slatter

Peter and Mary's stunning hybrid house sits confidently on an idyllic hillside.



HOUSE

Fish Creek Church House

LOCATION

Fish Creek, Victoria

COST \$800,000**DATE COMPLETED**

November 2010

EPISODE 1 SERIES 1

Imagine a jigsaw puzzle. You have the numbers and the right pieces, but you're not quite sure where they are meant to go. You have a fairly good idea and a plan (albeit a flexible one) but the rest, you hope, will come together.

For Peter and Mary Riedel, designing and building their home was a fast process. Peter, a coastal engineer, and his wife Mary, an interiors importer, had never built a place from scratch, having mainly dabbled in renovations for their past properties. This project was a whole different story. They wanted to build a place they could call home for the rest of their lives; somewhere their six adult children and 12 grandchildren would enjoy spending time in.

So they purchased a church — a 130-year-old timber church in flat pieces that were numbered. Their goal was to bring the disassembled church to Fishcreek, located at the most southern part of Victoria, and rebuild and expand on the original structure.

The land the Reidels purchased was 6.6 hectares, 4.6 of which were bare of all but one old gum tree. The other two acres were abundant in willows and wild blackberries. "We chose to build on a slope," Mary explains, "with the house elevated to take advantage of the 270-degree views including hills, valleys, Wilsons Promontory and glimpses of Bass Strait and Corner Inlet."

They wanted to turn the flat-pack puzzle, which they bought at a country clearance sale, into a home that would stand as a testament to its origins. "This church provided the bones for the house conversion layout," Mary explains.

The main church hall, measuring six by 17 metres, would be the open-plan living and kitchen area, standing tall at its full church height of eight metres at the apex. The three stone windows and dry-stone interior wall further accentuated the history of the building. The upstairs mezzanine level would house the master bedroom with an ensuite opening out onto the deck with commanding northerly and southerly views.

The Riedels wanted to incorporate the feel of the church while injecting their own personalities into the design.

The internal features needed to match the scale of the surroundings, so Mary chose to design the items herself and employed a local blacksmith to create some of the pieces.



Design elements employed to accentuate the ecclesiastic feel include a hand-built stone wall and hand-crafted gothic windows.

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The dwelling would also house four additional bedrooms, all constructed to the side of the building as an effective and non-obtrusive structural addition to the church. A large bathroom, featuring a separate bath and shower plus a powder room, was implemented into the design. Peter and Mary took a really organic approach to their project, seeking ways to capture the essence of the church, while modernising the space to suit their lifestyles.

The timber from the church and the original vaulted trusses for the roof would be two key elements keeping the church features and preserving the integrity of the building. However, due to the timber's age, only a minimal amount was able to be retained and Peter and Mary had to use new timber in addition. The timber that was preserved was refined to a weathered brown/grey tone, with the grain still visible to suit the colour scheme and ambience of the dwelling.

It was pivotal to get the look right from inception. The Riedels wanted to encapsulate the church feel while injecting their own personalities into the structure. Additional church doors were sourced from Lithuania to accentuate the ecclesiastic aesthetic of the home. Other elements used to attain the ambience included an interior stone feature wall.

The unique factor in this project's build was the ability to achieve the right look and feel. Design elements of the church needed to be rescaled to a residential level for functionality and comfort. Through the innovative use of different materials and processes, Peter and Mary were able to create a luxurious home that embodied a mish mash of old and new.

The building process was not one without challenges. To begin the process, a 550-metre-long road was built for access to the site. This held up the project before the building even began.

The building site itself was sloped and the location susceptible to very strong winds. This required Peter and Mary to look at beefing up the building structure with the implementation of heavy-duty bolting. Because of the strong winds and cool climate of Fishcreek, they also needed to look at heating solutions that would keep them warm and cosy during the cold Victorian winters. Peter and Mary applied in-slab water heating and double-glazing across all the glass areas in the home for this purpose. "We use recycled oil for the in-slab heating," Mary explains. "We buy it in a 10,000-litre truckload and require a storage tank for it."

Today, the home is a grand and majestic ode to their lives and passions. Peter and Mary had the thrill of finding the unexpected and



The stunning gothic windows are featured prominently around the house.

adapting it to their vision, which was half the fun, and they applied this to all the interior and exterior elements of the home.

The recycled Aga stove, originally built in 1941, is one of Mary's favourite features, and sits confidently within the kitchen space. The couple drove 800 kilometres to northern New South Wales to purchase it, which was a surprise for Mary — it's evident the trip was worth it.

Mary took an interesting approach when fitting out the interior of the dwelling. The internal space features needed to match the scale of the surroundings, so Mary choose to design the items herself and employed a local blacksmith to create the pieces. Though Mary works in the interior importing industry, the Riedels chose to use local tradesmen where possible to support the local economy.

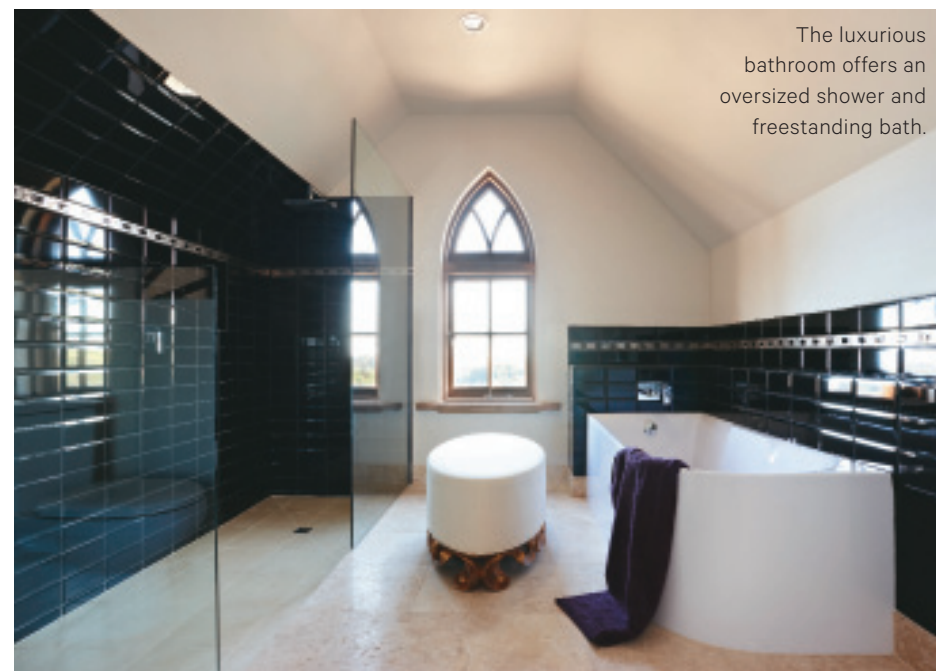
Peter and Mary now call home a building that is a regeneration of another place and time, firmly embedded in a slope on a scenic hill among orchards and fields. The detailing and correlation to the ecclesiastic aesthetic of the abode are manifested through the design and implementation of specific elements; the trusses are the most significant, as one of the few original features from the church puzzle. The cedar ceiling is another original item, stripped and painted before installation.

Other elements are new but add to the character of the building. The hand-built stone wall behind the fireplace was made using only local stones (a somewhat challenging task) while the hand-crafted gothic windows featured prominently all around the house provide an abundance of natural light and take advantage of the stunning views. The best feature of the dwelling is its sheer volume — it provides cohesion and encapsulates the spirit of its history and age.

Peter and Mary have completed an exceptional job, and today enjoy reaping the rewards of living in the residence. They've thought ahead and built a house that requires minimal maintenance and is eco-friendly. "All external surfaces are oil-stained rather than painted, so the only maintenance required is applying oil," Mary explains. "Just a wash-down-and-apply job with no scraping or surface preparation. The floors, except for the master bedroom, are all unfilled (aged-looking) travertine that vacuum and mop clean and will last as long as we do."

Peter and Mary have also created a non-obtrusive garden with the aim of growing fruit and vegetables for self-sustainability, and all water comes from the building's roof. "We have 115,000 litres of storage," Mary explains. "And with relatively high rainfall, the tanks filled within six months of completion of the system."

Life for Peter and Mary is unerringly what they envisioned when they took on this project. Not only did they build a wonderful home perfectly located on an idyllic hillside, they have also created a stunningly unique hybrid building that juxtaposes the mix of old and new seamlessly while maintaining its magnificent character. 🏡

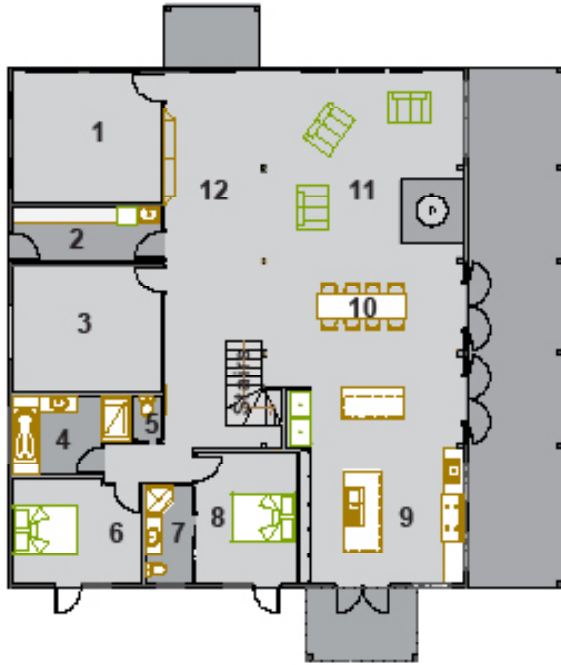


The luxurious bathroom offers an oversized shower and freestanding bath.



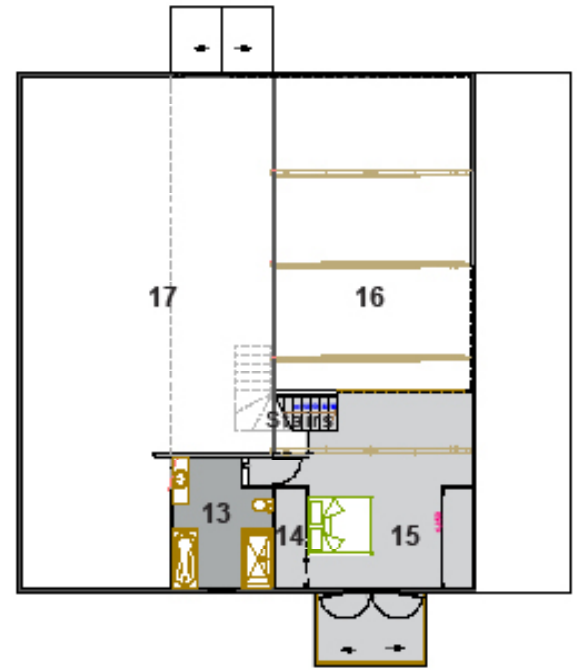
The large master bedroom is seamlessly linked with the rest of the majestic abode and does not feature a door, enhancing a feel of openness and space.

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GROUND FLOOR PLAN

- 1 Study
- 2 Laundry
- 3 Media room
- 4 Bathroom
- 5 WC
- 6 Bedroom 2
- 7 Ensuite
- 8 Bedroom 1
- 9 Kitchen
- 10 Dining room
- 11 Lounge room
- 12 Library



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

- 13 Ensuite
- 14 Store room
- 15 Bedroom 3
- 16 Void
- 17 Roof / ceiling space



PROJECT TEAM

- **BUILDING SURVEYOR**
Coast to Coast Building Service
(03 5674 3733)
- **DRAFTING** C&D Drafting
(03 9727 0667)
- **ENGINEERING** John Gardner and Associates (03 9739 8066)
- **SURVEYOR** Surveytech Pty Ltd
(03 5655 2615)

- **STRUCTURE** Carpenter/foreman Capital Carpentry (capitalcarpentry.com.au) **Concrete** Nick Haines Off Shore Concreting (0448 805 166) **Courtyard paving** Granite Works (graniteworks.com.au) **Cranes** Toora Cranes (03 5686 2423) **Road design** Jamison & Craig Consultants (03 5995 4388) **Road works/ gravel supply** Tony Williams Gravel & Earthworks (tonywilliams.com.au) **Sheds** Safety Steel Structures (safetysteel.com.au) **Steel work** (Custom) Hattam Engineering (0427 343 498) **Structural steel supply** A & D Cuman Engineering (03 5672 4761) **Timber/ hardware** AW Smith & Sons Home Hardware (03 5662 2311) **Timber supplier** Tait Timber (taittimber.com.au) **Wood turning** Peter Bassett (0429 832 432)
- **FIXTURES AND FITTINGS** **Fireplace stone supplier** South Gippsland Quarries (03 5662 2641) **Floor tiles** Project Stone (www.projectstone.com.au) **Hardware/ paint** Fish Creek Home Timber & Hardware (03 5683 2378) **In-floor heating system** Tubulous Australia (tubulousaustralia.com.au) **Joinery** Nev Smith Cabinets and Joinery (0428 595 620) **Kitchen** IKEA (ikea.com/au) Kitchen (benchtops) Pazzi Marble and Granite (pazzimarblegranite.com) **Paint finishes** (specialist) Faux Paint Effects (fauxpaintedeffects.com)

Plaster Caprice Plastering (03 5942 7765) **Stairs** Gibson and Jones (03 9836 4079) **Windows/doors** Lawmont Design (03 9836 9743)

- **FURNITURE AND ACCESSORIES** **Artworks** Framery (03 9817 1957) **Bathroom tiles** Beaumont Tiles, Leongatha (beaumont-tiles.com.au) **Door handles** Handles Plus (handlesplus.com.au) **Furniture & decoration** Riedel Imports (riedelimports.com) **Kitchen (slotted shelving)** Shop for Shops (shopforshops.com)
- **SERVICES** **Aga fuel** Australian Char (auschar.com.au) **Aga installation** Aga Man 1 (0428 539 934) **Electrician** McDonald & Roberts (03 5662 3814) **Equipment hire** SG Hire & Sales Leongatha (03 5662 3783) **Excavation/ road works/site prep** Col Smith Earthmoving (03 5683 2390) **Native Vegetation — Supply & Planting** Master Tree Growers (mastertreegrower.org.au) **Plumber** Nick Shaw Plumbing and Gasfitting (0427 561 394) **Polaris** (All Terrain Vehicle) Marriotts Leongatha (marriottsmpe.com.au) **Scaffolding** Waco — Warrigal (wacokwikform.com.au) **Site office & amenities** Auzbilt (auzbilt.com.au) **Tools & equipment** Grays Online (graysonline.com)