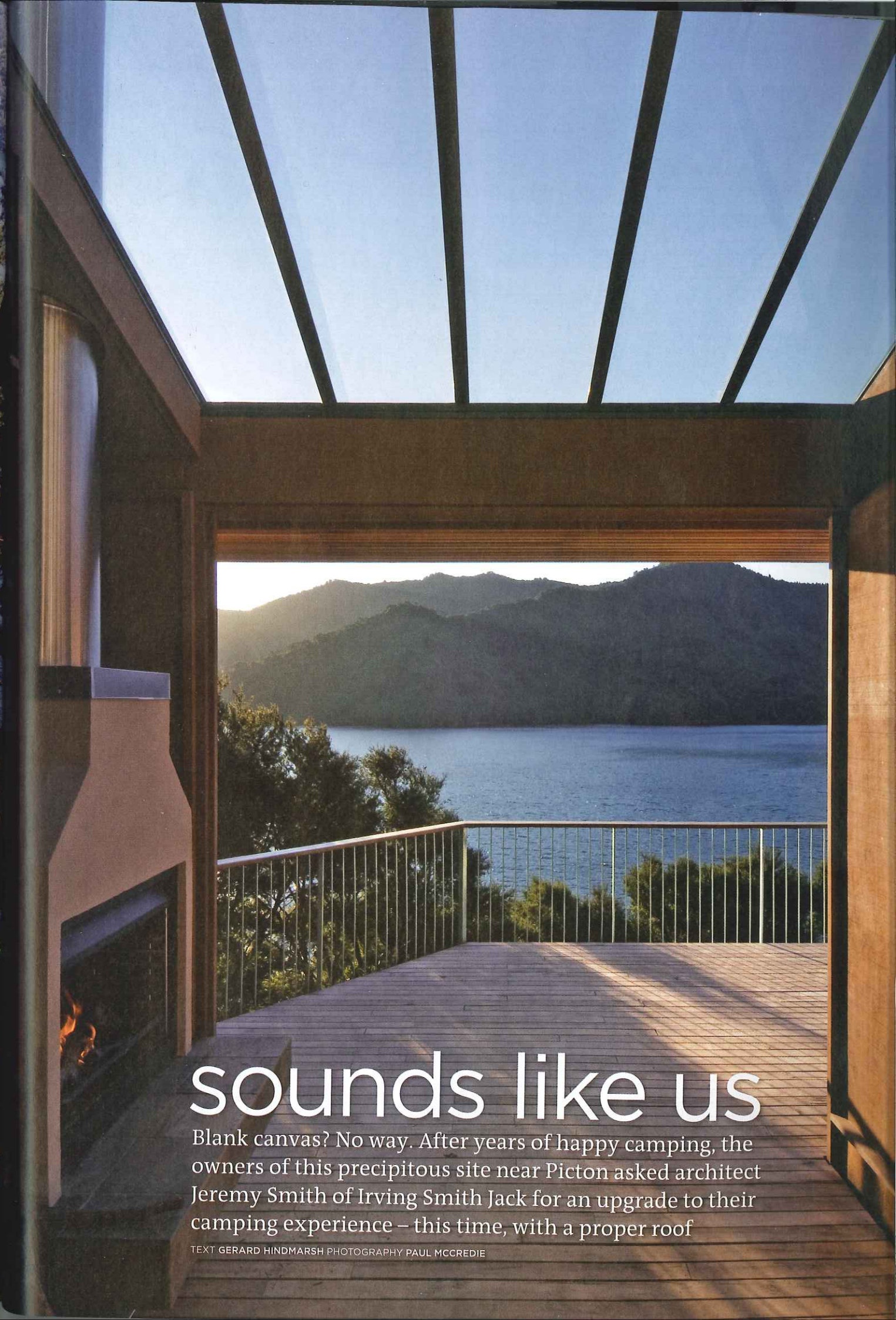




The bach is nestled deep into the kahuka forest on the steeply-sloping spot the family had once happily camped on. OPPOSITE The large deck spays out from this sheltered area with its giant Warmington outdoor fire and views to the water.



sounds like us

Blank canvas? No way. After years of happy camping, the owners of this precipitous site near Picton asked architect Jeremy Smith of Irving Smith Jack for an upgrade to their camping experience – this time, with a proper roof

TEXT GERARD HINDMARSH PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL MCCREDIE

The bach's key design feature is the inverted truss roof. The ceiling tips up at the rear and ducks down over the living room, giving a sense of compression and leading the occupant out onto the deck. Natuzzi sofas from McKenzie & Willis. The dining table was constructed on-site. The light over the kitchen bench is by Prolux.





The view from the bach's jetty. The tricky, but beautiful, site in Kumutoto Bay in the Marlborough Sounds had no road access, so everything had to be transported by boat, barge or helicopter.

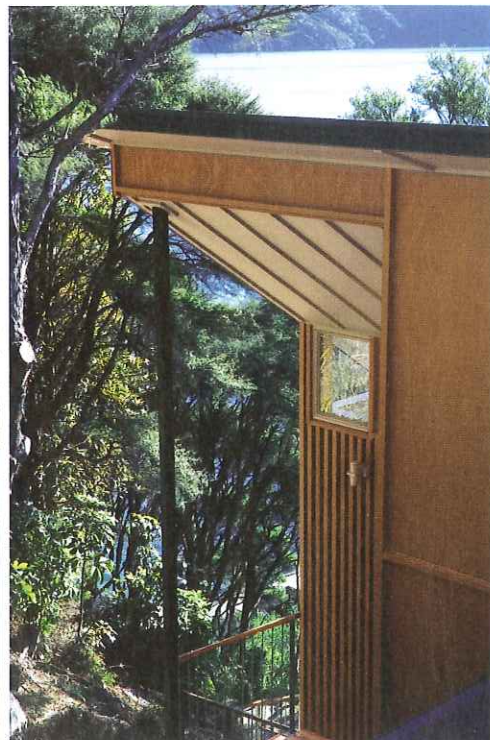
THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE

camping out to fine-tune one's aspirations for permanent accommodation. When Tony and Sue Hewitt purchased four hectares of land in Kumutoto Bay in the Marlborough Sounds back in 1999, they were unable to decide what, where, or how they would build on the site. They would drive up from Christchurch with kids, dogs and assorted friends to catch a boat to their elevated campsite (which has no road access), a resting place they dug by hand from the steep hillside near a small spring.

By the time they engaged Jeremy Smith of Nelson's Irving Smith Jack Architects to design them a bach, the Hewitts knew exactly what they wanted – a structure that would provide greatly improved habitation without losing the joy of being within the regenerating kanuka forest that they had grown so fond of. As such, the view looking back into that forest inspired their brief just as much as the outlook over the bay and beyond.

It all sounds straightforward in theory; the logistics were anything but. Without an access road all the materials, including load after load of pre-mix concrete, had to come in by helicopter, barge or boat. Then there was geotechnical complexity surrounding drilling the foundations and excavating the clay-and-schist hillside. For local builder Mark Shields, who employed only one permanent carpenter to help him, the 200-square-metre home took a whole year to build and involved a daily commute by water taxi from Waikawa, six kilometres away (the bach is a 10-minute boat ride north of Picton).

Coming up the path from the jetty – also newly built – all this hard work is almost invisible. The bach nestles nicely into the bush, but it's not until you enter that it becomes clear how successfully it invites the outside in. Smith's big idea in the home's design was the development of an inverted truss roof (lined inside with MDF panels and battens), an innovation that achieves a couple of important things. The first is that it allows the ceiling to tip upwards at the



Builder Mark Shields and the owners designed the dining table and benches from the same laminated pine used in the exposed beams throughout the house. The pendant lights are Prolux. OPPOSITE FROM LEFT The kitchen features an enamelled Rayburn (355M) wood burner which, along with the log fire, is capable of keeping the whole house warm; a view of the low-key ply and batten-clad exterior, painted in Resene 'Driftwood'; in the bathroom is a bath from Burmark Industries in New Plymouth.

Because they make the bach feel so connected to the precipitous landscape around it, Smith's design gestures increase the feeling of simplicity, the lovely sheltered discretion of being tucked into the hills surrounding the bay

rear, giving space for windows with intimate forest views. The second thing the ceiling does is duck down over the main living area, creating a sense of compression that invites the visitor out onto the deck to enjoy its beautiful outlook to the west across the bay. At each end of the home, long slim windows provide vertical glimpses of the surrounding tree trunks.

The plan, Smith says, was to present a great variety of views, rather than focusing solely on the stretch of water outside. "It was really important that the building relate not just to the water, but to the surrounding bush, and that the interior spaces had a variety of different moods," he says. "The way the windows are arranged offers a variety of different experiences as the owners pass through the house."

This is not to say that the big water view is at all denied – let's say instead that it isn't just served up on a plate. Smith integrated the large deck with the house by creating a sheltered alcove with a combined fire and outdoor barbecue built into one wall and a window opening through to the dining area.

He also lowered the deck a little from the home's main living area to provide casual outdoor seating, and to ensure it was still possible to see downwards through the trees to the shoreline.

These are all clever touches, but the good thing is that they never feel as if the architect is trying to show off. In fact, because they make the bach feel so connected to the precipitous landscape around it, these gestures increase the feeling of simplicity, the lovely sheltered discretion of being tucked into the hills surrounding the bay.

Given the Hewitts' history of camping on the site, it wouldn't be accurate to call Smith's approach back-to-basics. And yet, the absence of fussiness makes the dwelling feel robust and easy-going, an antidote to city life instead of an attempt to transplant it. Rather than plasterboard the interior into submission, for example, the bach's construction is expressed internally with exposed posts and beams of laminated pine. Builder Mark Shields designed a dining table and benches from the same material. The living areas, two bedrooms and bathroom are all laid out in simple linear

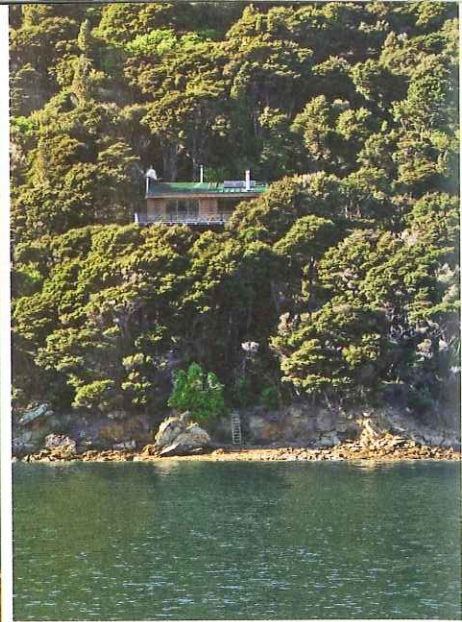
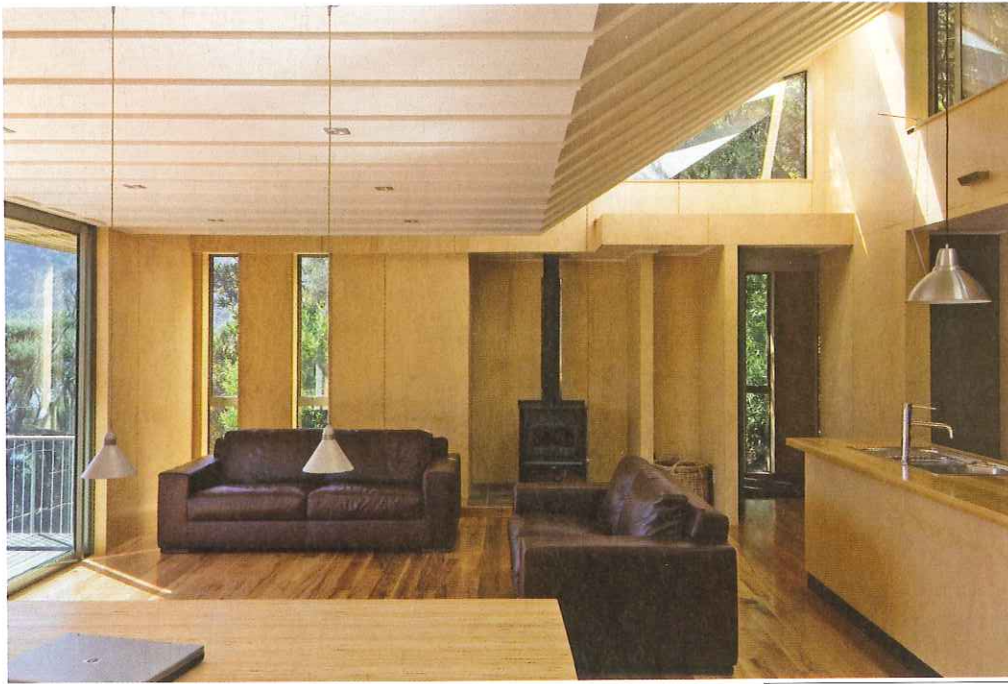
fashion on the upper level, with a basic bunkroom for increasing numbers of guests tucked quietly downstairs (the rest of the downstairs area is reserved for boat storage).

For the Hewitts, who spend a significant part of their year working abroad, the ease of no longer having to stay on the site in a tent has only increased their desire to live there permanently. In the meantime, they take every opportunity they can to visit. Their three children, now in their 20s, have all left home but are understandably enthusiastic about the transformation of their former camp site in the bush.

So far, the architectural profession seems to agree: earlier this year, after taking the boat trip out to the bach, a jury from the New Zealand Institute of Architects gave the dwelling a local award, praising the way it "playfully sculpts the changing quality of light and shadows, mimicking the effect of the surrounding landscape".

Which is a much more eloquent way of saying that, just as its owners requested, the bach fits into its enviable surroundings very, very well. H





ABOVE The bach nestles into the small site where the owners used to camp. LEFT In the main living area, Smith designed vertical slot windows to improve the sense of connection with the native bush outside.

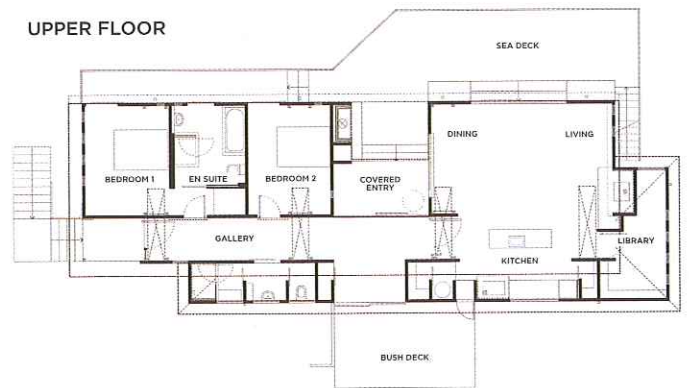
notebook

JEREMY SMITH
IRVING SMITH JACK ARCHITECTS

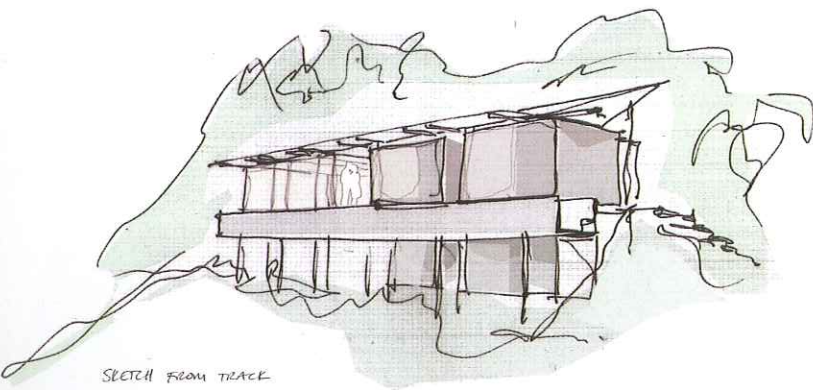
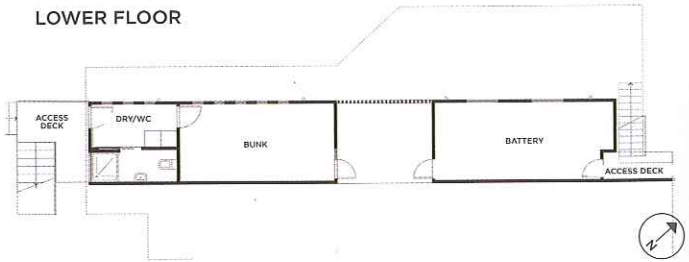


This bach in Kumutoto Bay near Picton in the Marlborough Sounds was designed by Jeremy Smith of Nelson's Irving Smith Jack Architects. Construction was complicated by the fact that the site is accessible only by boat. All materials arrived via boat, barge or helicopter.

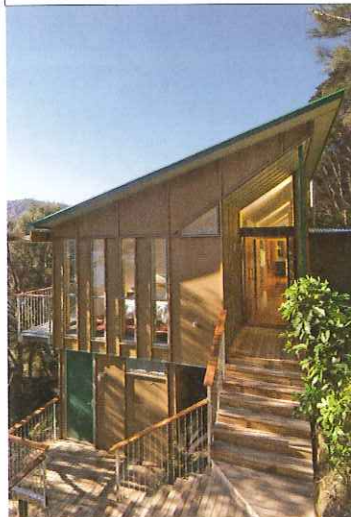
UPPER FLOOR



LOWER FLOOR



ABOVE An early sketch of the building shows how the bach sits on its site, as well as the inverted truss roof Smith developed for it. The living area is on the top level, with bunkroom and boat storage downstairs.



ABOVE LEFT The home's southwesterly elevation reveals vertical slot windows in the master bedroom. ABOVE RIGHT The kitchen features a Rayburn wood burner and an island topped with North American oak. The light is Prolux.