

SPECIAL FEATURE

Wet areas

Bathrooms, toilets, laundries, mud rooms

The Owner Builder is all about sharing the experience. One way to do this is through special features like this, where we concentrate on specific topics.

In this issue we showcase some of the fabulous and creative work done by owner builders who responded generously to our call for examples of solutions to the design and construction of wet areas.

We hope you find it inspirational as you contemplate, begin or continue with your owner building journey.

Perhaps you will be tempted to share something you have done with us!

See p.59 for more details of upcoming features.

The accidental bathroom

BY HELEN SMITH

The design of Jenny and Ken Svendsen's beautiful bath and splashback came about because they decided to move the position of the basin. This meant the bath would be against a curved wall in their owner built mud brick house and, as Ken says, they couldn't buy a curved bath.

Ken decided to build his own using ferro-concrete. Earlier, bushfires had raged through their property (Ken was frantically hosing down their stash of cedar roof beams after the fire had passed!) so there was a free supply of burnt out rabbit-proof fencing wire.

The design wasn't going to be as free form as the photos show, but Jenny and Ken's 16-year-old daughter, Leigh, watching the process, told her father that the bath needed more curves and directed where the structure should go. The result is a stunning sunken bath that is sculptured into the wall with clever shelves for soap and shampoo.

The marbled effect was also an accident. Ken used a trowel to fill in any holes and was quickly told by everyone that he mustn't paint over it. ♦

Our sunny bathroom

A bathroom built between boulders is still open to the sun.

BY ALLAN JAMES & KATE O'DWYER

To describe our bathroom, you first need to know a bit about our house construction. My partner Kate and I re-erected a large steel framed building on a very serious rocky ridge here in southern Queensland. After the roof was up, we used cob for the walls. Some of the rocks jut out through the floor inside the house and have become room dividers.

Editor's note: See TOB 89, TOB 103, TOB 104, TOB 108, TOB 135, TOB 160, TOB 162, TOB 163 for previous articles on Allan & Kate's home.

Rocky stairs

Quite often, when we are showing visitors our owner built house, we all end up in the bathroom, which, by the way, is accessed via an interesting stairway that we built after finding a gap between two large subterranean boulders. We just dug the soil out of the approximately 600mm gap between these massive rocks then made the stair treads out of rock-look concrete and added a pipe hand rail. That cavity, unknown to us at the beginning of the house construction, was very fortuitous indeed.

Cave bathroom

The bathroom itself is very cave-like as we also built it in a large gap between two big rocks and, like the rest of the house, when we needed to do any concrete work, we made sure that the concrete work looked like granite too! It blends in well with the real rock. The roof of the bathroom is a 125mm thick suspended concrete slab that is also the bedroom floor; the single bedroom being directly above.

It is a simple bathroom consisting of an open shower with visible chrome piping and no shower screen, a second-hand claw foot bath, a rock-look vanity unit with hand basin and a toilet pedestal. However, it is a lovely light filled and spacious place. It never gets too cold as it gets a huge amount of sunshine for most of the year, which is rare for a bathroom, and of course the thermal mass compensates for the large amount of glass if the day is cold. No heated towel rails needed here.

Sunny showers

Most bathrooms have small windows and are on the cold side of the house. With ours, if you shower in the afternoons you nearly need suntan lotion on as you will be showering in the sunshine that comes through the specially angled north-west facing windows. As we

are on a bit of land and high up on the ridge, privacy is not a concern. We sometimes see kangaroos in the bush below.

I think more people are starting to realize that sunshine in a bathroom is a good idea. In *TOB 167 Oct/Nov 2011*, two different house plans show bathrooms on the north-east corner. We live in the coldest part of Queensland and really love that low angle, clear crisp winter sunshine that penetrates well into the house, bathroom included.

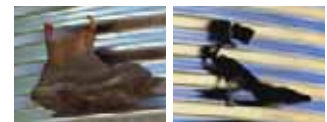
The bathroom is serviced by a heat-pump hot water service located in the laundry, which is midway between the kitchen and bathroom. A solar hot water service up on the roof would have been too far away, though a solar split system would have worked for us if they had have been available at the time. The loo is a normal septic but with a reed bed instead of a trench. The loo roll holder is simply a large bolt inserted in a drill hole in the closest rock (most visitors think this is great.) Apart from a bit of slate on our home-made vanity unit, no tiles were needed as the natural rock looks good and looks even better wet. The big boulders outside the windows are home to a family of Cunningham Skinks and they can often be seen lying in the sun just outside the windows; obviously these lizards love a sunny spot too! ♦



Clockwise from left: bathroom entrance; surrounded by rock; no shower screen necessary; proposed bathroom space between boulders below suspended floor; angled windows on NW corner catch plenty of sun.



Clockwise from left: Door handles hand crafted from tree branches; recycled corrugated roof sheeting has been used as internal lining; doors are of recycled boards; volunteer humour – a Holden headlamp 'shines' from the concrete slab; on-site timber was used for external cladding – vertically and horizontally.



Clockwise from below: 'flaky' flooring, curved Zincalume; showgirl vanity; quirky his and hers signage...



The Quinlans showers – masterpiece of innovation

An update on the bush showers being built at Quinlans koala sanctuary in Queensland (see TOB 165 June/July 2011).

Quinlans' motto is 'It has to be somewhere' and sure enough, every item used to construct the showers at the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF) Sunshine Coast property has been provided by the property itself.

When the AKF took on Quinlans, the result of a generous bequest by committed conservationists Peter and Julianne Quinlan, the project seemed ambitious for a charity with limited resources. However Deborah Tabart OAM, CEO of the AKF, took on the challenge with relish, having faced many a similar problem on her own Brisbane property.

Lean-to

We inherited a lean-to shed with a mud floor. Its only advantage was its proximity to the water tank, which collected water from the Bunkhouse.

The workforce consisted of unemployed young folk working with Conservation Volunteers Australia and local enthusiasts with amazing trade skills; all inspired by the prospect of making something from nothing. They came through with flying colours.

Slab with extras

As mentioned in the original article, the concrete slab went down with character. One of the volunteers found an old Holden headlamp and sunk it into the floor. The rest

BY JILL RICHARDSON

added their hand prints for posterity. Then the hunt was on for walls, doors and fittings.

Amazingly, everything could be found on site. Peter Quinlan threw nothing away, God bless him. Needing taps? Up went the cry 'they have to be somewhere' and sure enough they were. Sinks, pipes and even the shower fittings were found in sheds, under the house, in the bush. A smorgasbord of goodies can be found in Peter's vast collection of 'stuff.'

Water

The issue of hot water was a big one. Too many trees for solar, so an efficient instant gas water heater had to be purchased. The water pump was donated as were the services of Steve the plumber and Col, 'the best sparky in town,' who took on the daunting task of making Quinlans electrically safe. A vital job.

Joe Kirkpatrick took on carpentry with Ian Harling, local 'Ride on Mary' Kayaking Tour operator and dedicated master in the art of re-using found objects. The legendary Jono, team leader with Volunteers Australia, kept the troops marshalled, fed and watered.

Drainage was next and an absorption pit 20 metres long by five metres wide filled with aggregate provided efficient drainage.

Tree branch handles

The beautiful doors are made from fallen timber and the handles are crafted from tree branches; these showers are a work of art. They were made with love from the property's own trees and found objects. Oh... and they work really well, too!

We are getting closer to our dream of a shining example of how to live sustainably on the land in a part of the world that throws up many challenges. The Quinlans' wish list is getting shorter but we still need a bigger water tank and a gas stove for the house.

Jill Richardson works for the Australian Koala Foundation. If you would like to help out with the building project, check for future working bees on the Australian Koala Foundation website, under Our Work, Quinlans.



Links & resources

◆ Australian Koala Foundation

A non-profit, non-government organisation dedicated to the conservation and effective management of the wild koala and its habitat. If you have any assistance to offer, please give us a call.

07 3229 7233, www.savethekoala.com

Water tank toilets

The outside toilets for a restaurant in WA are unusual in shape and floor covering.

When owner builder Darren Walker of Perth, Western Australia was faced with the task of constructing an outdoor toilet for his tapas bar and restaurant (The Tap) in Perth's beautiful Swan Valley, he set out to build something that people had not seen before. With many of Darren's quirky and unusual design ideas already featuring in the restaurant and bar, it was natural that the new building would also be different. He wanted a showpiece but, like other decor in and around his restaurant and bar, the new toilets ended up becoming more like an art piece.

BY SHARON PONSFORD

Design

The restaurant itself is renowned for its country ambience and quirky, early settler style architecture and decor. The existing buildings and outdoor areas are constructed from a mix of timber, natural stone, corrugated iron and barbed wire. There is even a garden feature made from an old wheelbarrow collection so it was essential that

the design of the new building was in keeping with the country theme.

Darren wanted something completely different to the existing buildings... something that would definitely have the 'wow' factor. He decided that to capture people's attention the building would need to be a totally different shape to the existing rectangular and square buildings and should therefore be a round building of some kind. So his next thought was, what is the most commonly seen round structure in country Australia? A water tank!

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Wet areas feature *cont'd*

Of course, it was simple; the new toilet building would look like a water tank.

Then, in true restaurant style, the first concept sketches were drawn on a paper napkin, and the outdoor toilet building soon transformed from imagination to reality.

Internal fit out

Next was the design for the internal spaces. The water tank was divided into two halves with a partition wall, separating the male and female toilet areas. Each area would have two toilet cubicles end to end on the internal wall and a curved vanity along the outside edge. The ceiling would be covered with draping fabric throughout so the rafters would not be visible, which would serve not only to add to the ambience but also to help avoid a build up of cobwebs.

Ceiling-mounted light fittings would be handmade from rolled barbed wire, to match those inside the restaurant. The vanity units would be custom-made and clad with stone tiles. The women's side, of course, would be fitted out a little more glamorous in style than the men's area, with fabric bows along the ceiling cornice area and rows of vertical lights along each side of the large vanity mirror.

Flooring

With the fixtures and fittings being decided fairly easily, the one last thing to consider was the flooring. Of all the design elements, the flooring was the one thing which had the most requirements and constraints to work with when deciding what product to use. The following was the short list Darren had to work with: The look of the floor would need to be something classy, but also be able to take a back seat and allow the rest of the building to be the star. The floor would need to be highly serviceable due to the high amount of traffic. The floor would also need to be very easy to maintain. A surface that would not suffer from wear and tear such as scratching or chips. A surface which would not harbour bacteria. Non-slip surface for public safety. Must look great when installed inside a round building. Allow for DIY installation.

So many requirements quickly ruled out any traditional floor treatments such as tiles, stone or slate. All require grout which, in such a busy zone and with constant cleaning, would quickly become ugly and harbour all kinds of

bacteria. Also, their shape would look quite out of place if installed inside a round building.

Finding the 'wow'

Darren thought of an idea to give the concrete slab a surface treatment. Polished concrete is definitely beautiful and classy but he wanted something a little different as well as the challenge of installing the flooring himself. So Darren researched all types of painted finishes but each of them looked way too plain and dull; missing the 'wow' factor.

It wasn't until Darren began researching industrial floor coatings that he came across a product that was perfect – a non-slip textured floor coating created primarily for industrial work areas which consists of a water-based epoxy system called *Mastershield*. It looked fantastic, satisfied all of Darren's critical requirements and, of course, had the 'wow' factor. Not only that, the product was available in a large range of colours too. It would cost about \$80 per square metre.

Darren investigated further and found that the flooring system could be installed by any confident DIY person following the step-by-step instructions.

Construction

Plans for the new toilet building were prepared and submitted to council, while building materials were sourced. Once plans were approved construction began in earnest. The carefully planned total construction time was only two weeks. Site preparation, electrical and plumbing in completed, the concrete slab was poured without delay. New *ZINCALUME* corrugated sheets were custom curved and laid horizontally for the exterior walls, giving the true water tank effect. The roof has timber rafters sloping down from a central ridge, allowing for a slight roof overhang all around, and is then topped with more corrugated sheeting.

Coating the floor

Once the walls and the fittings and fixtures were in place, the flooring surface treatment was done. Darren says it was relatively easy, and it was also very easy to cove (make a curved edge) all around the floor for easy cleaning.

The instructions he followed for the *Mastershield* textured floor surface coating were:

1. Prepare the concrete slab by finely grinding off any surface imperfections. Wash the floor

clean to remove all traces of dust and allow to dry. The concrete floor must be perfectly clean and dry before commencing step 2.

2. Using a roller apply the water-based epoxy primer and allow this to completely dry.
3. Using a roller again apply the water-based epoxy base coat to the area and immediately, while the base coat is still wet, walk on the floor with spiked shoes carrying a 5kg bag of the texture flakes and sprinkle them all over the surface of the base coat. You have about 30 minutes to complete this process so the more people you have to help the better. You will need at least two people but three would be even better.
4. Immediately dry roll the flakes into the base coat to ensure they are well bedded in.
5. The next day scrape off any loose flakes and carefully vacuum off the remaining excess flakes.
6. Using a roller again, apply two coats of one part clear polyurethane top coat.

Darren liked the surface treatment so much he used it on all the floors behind the bars as well.

When I asked Darren if there was anything he would do differently next time, he said there was only one thing; he would not pour on quite so many flakes. But I still think it looks amazing just as it is... ♦

Sharon Ponsford is a freelance building designer with a love of vernacular architecture and handmade natural buildings. She also teaches a range of creative design workshops for owner builders.

0414 583 510, www.studiowest.com.au



Links & resources

♦ The Tap

Chapel Farm Restaurant and Getaways.
Middle Swan, WA.

08 9250 4755, www.chapelfarm.com.au

♦ Mastershield

An epoxy water-based product available in a wide variety of colours and finishes.

1800 801 108, www.parchem.com.au

♦ Zincalume

Can be bent, folded, stamped, punched or crimped for easy fastening.

03 9666 4000, www.zincalume.com.au

Inspiration from public amenities

Just because they are 'public,' there's no excuse for toilets to be boring!

BY LYNDA WILSON



1. 'moyo blouberg,' South Africa

Mosaics are always spectacular; black and white stones on the wall and broken tiles in the basins create a striking feature. However, the maintenance on all the grout in well used areas could be a problem. www.moyo.co.za

2. AREC, Mudgee NSW

These recently completed public toilets are practical, with vertical Zinalume lining making for easy cleaning. Basin pipework is left exposed, while timber doors enhance the 'rural' atmosphere. www.arec.com.au



3. Fire & Ice!, South Africa

Offering you a place to 'chillax,' this hotel carries it's funky theme through to the toilets, where themed unisex rooms allow for a different experience each time you visit! The 'Outhouse' includes corrugated sheeting and newspaper clad walls, as well as a steel drum basin stand. www.proteahotels.com

4. Surfhouse Merewether, Newcastle NSW

A Newcastle icon has been replaced with a brand new building. Sleek lines combined with external timber cladding make for an impressive building, carried through inside. Ply doors and stone panels are complemented by neatly crafted solid timber door surrounds and simple exposed stainless steel fixings. www.surfhouse.com.au ♦



Clothes drying rack



Who needs a power guzzling clothes drier!

BY ROB HADDEN

Heat rises, so making a rack to hang above our open fireplace to dry clothes made perfect sense as well as keeping things out of the way.

Based on a design I saw in England on one of my trips, I made a simple rustic version for our cottage from second-hand timber and fallen branches from our bush. A little sanding to remove splinters and a coat of milk paint finished the timber surfaces. Then a couple of old cast iron hooks, some good strong cord and two pulleys securely attached to the rafters and we were in business.

Raising and lowering the rack is a breeze, although a full load of wet washing on a rainy day is about the limit. ♦