

# barn storming

Entrepreneur and serial renovator Belinda Alexander reached for the sky with her latest project, a brave new build in Melbourne

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INSIDE | HOME

**EXTERIOR** Charred shiplap timber cladding from Eco Timber Group gives this family home its unique Nordic-NZ character. **TERRACE** (opposite) Adjacent to a pool and level lawn at the back of the property, this space is frequently used. The seat is concrete and the Porto table and benches are through Eco Outdoor.

## cheat sheet

**Who lives there** Belinda Alexander, owner of Base Supply lifestyle brand; her husband Steve, an advertising sales executive; their daughter Mia, 16; son Jem, 14; and pet Cavoodle Gilbert.

**Style of home** A free-standing contemporary home shaped like a barn, which was inspired by Scandinavian and New Zealand design.

**🕒** Construction began in February 2018 and the family moved into the home 15 months later, in May 2019.

**💰** All up, the bill for the construction and fitout was close to \$2 million.

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**A**t an age when the typical Australian is either bunking in a share house or renting a studio apartment, Belinda Alexander was already living out her fantasy as an interior designer of houses. “I did my first one at 24,” she says, “and it proved successful, so I just kept doing them.”

Belinda credits her father for the path she’s taken, both in her career – she founded lifestyle brand and e-commerce business Base Supply – and in her ‘sideline’ occupation as a residential designer. “I grew up with my father building all of our houses,” she explains. “He always had a can-do attitude.”

In 2017, Belinda and her husband Steve decided it was time for a fresh challenge. They purchased a perfectly positioned property in the Melbourne suburb of Camberwell and set about designing a brand-new freestanding house to sit on the block. “As I’ve gone along, my projects have naturally become bigger and more involved,” says Belinda. “This was the most complex to date.”

The key criterion was to build a home that would comfortably accommodate Belinda, Steve and their two children, who were about to enter high school. “The whole house was planned with teenagers in mind,” says Belinda. “It’s a house that kids can actually grow up in and bring their friends to, all year round.”

**KITCHEN/DINING AREA**  
The soaring nine-metre ceiling creates an incredible feeling of space. Cladded walls, solid American oak. Cabinetry, Ventech Ebon timber veneer. Benchtop, Dekton Sirius. Mattiazzi ‘Osso’ stools, Normann Copenhagen ‘Knot’ chairs and ‘Bell’ lamp, all District. Dining table, Simon James Design. Sideboard, clients’ own. Artwork by Rachel Castle.





## bright idea

Belinda was determined to achieve a 6-star rating in the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS), but didn't want to sacrifice the huge panes of glass at the back of the house. Instead, she opted for cutting-edge PerformaTech glass, a type of double glazing made by Viridian that contains an insulating gas in between two panes of glass. "It wasn't cheap," Belinda admits, "but over time the energy savings will add up."

As someone who knows a lot about design, Belinda wasn't going to settle for a conventional home. "I definitely wanted something that would stand out in suburban Melbourne," she explains, adding that her inspiration was Scandinavian architecture and contemporary New Zealand design in particular.

Working with Heartly, a Melbourne company that offers both architectural and interior-design services, Belinda sketched a house that, as she puts it, "resembled an enormous barn", with an asymmetrical pitched roof. "I really wanted that pitched ceiling because I was keen for each room to have a different shape or feel. Every room is unique because of the pitched roof."

The home's centrepiece is a double-height living/dining/kitchen area that occupies the entire back half of the building. At its highest point, the ceiling in this room is a staggering nine metres. The back wall of the vast space is made up almost entirely of glass, offering widescreen views of the garden and pool.

At the top of the main staircase is a study that overlooks the living room, much like a New York loft space. "The idea was that the children could be upstairs, studying for their exams or whatever, and still be connected to us downstairs, instead of being tucked away in their rooms," says Belinda. "The various parts of the house are all designed to feel connected: you can see upstairs windows from the downstairs living room, for example. But you can close off zones as well. My home office is like that: there are two sliding doors that connect together and act as walls, so I can either close off the space or open it right up."

Throughout the home, Belinda and Heartly took special care choosing high-quality materials, such as marbled concrete floors with underfloor heating for the ground floor and, upstairs, solid American oak floorboards. Early on, they decided the house should be clad in wood, not only to reference the agricultural architecture of yesteryear but also to soften the building's facade. The timber Belinda chose appears to be stained black but has, in fact, been charred. "The exterior is a burnt timber, so there's no maintenance. That was a huge drawcard for us, even though the charred stuff was a bit more expensive," she says.

Belinda credits Heartly's director, Mikayla Rose, for helping to animate her somewhat unconventional ideas. As Heartly acted both as the architect and interior designer, Belinda says she felt more in control of the project than she might have done had she hired multiple teams. "Without Heartly, my vision would not have come to fruition," she says. "I had a few crazy ideas, but there wasn't a single occasion when Mikayla said, 'No, that won't work.' She just said, 'Let's make it work.'"

When asked about the result, Belinda speaks with the strict professionalism of someone who has been doing this sort of work for a long time. But when she describes her family's experience in their new home, the business woman softens. "I know it sounds cheesy," she says, "but we've been here for more than a year and every little nook and cranny still amazes me." **10**

Discover more at [heartly.com.au](http://heartly.com.au) or @heartlydesignstudio

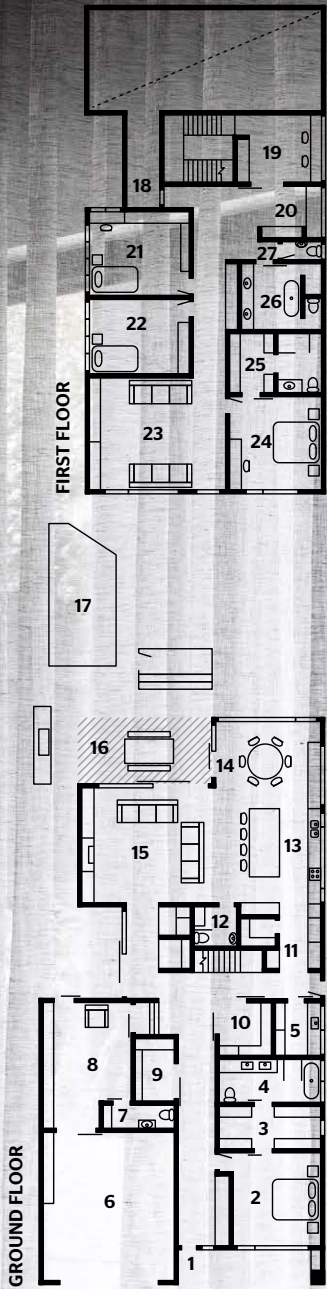


**WORK SPACE** Concrete flooring on the ground floor is practical and aesthetically neutral. Chair, Stylecraft. **LIVING ROOM** (top) Andy sofas from Jardan create a conversation corner. The entertainment unit features lift-up panels in Veneer Ebon. Fireplace, Heatmaster. **HALL** (opposite) Laminex Classic Oak detailing on this storage zone near the games room matches the kitchen drawers and island bench.



**MAIN BEDROOM** An upholstered Andy bed by Jordan adds a hint of colour to the space. Linen and cushions, Abode Living. Nyta 'Tilt' wall light, Koda Lighting. Feltex Stonefields wool carpet in Dark Marble. Linen curtains, AP Shutters & Blinds.

**ENSUITE** (opposite) Large-format Berlin Night tiles from Signorino set the mood here. Clearwater Formoso freestanding bath, Reece. Gunmetal tapware, Phoenix.



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|----------------|------------------|
| 1 Entry        | 15 Living        |
| 2 Main bedroom | 16 Alfresco area |
| 3 Walk-in robe | 17 Swimming pool |
| 4 Ensuite      | 18 Void          |
| 5 Laundry      | 19 Study         |
| 6 Garage       | 20 Built-in seat |
| 7 Powder room  | 21 Bedroom       |
| 8 Games room   | 22 Bedroom       |
| 9 Mud room     | 23 Rumpus        |
| 10 Study       | 24 Bedroom       |
| 11 Storage hub | 25 Walk-in robe  |
| 12 Powder room | 26 Bathroom      |
| 13 Kitchen     | 27 Powder room   |
| 14 Dining area |                  |







GREAT FINDS



ADDITIONAL PRODUCT SOURCING: LISA BURDEN

**CLOCKWISE FROM CANVAS** *Scribble 3 artwork*, \$2000, Castle. Muuto 'Grain' **pendant** in Dark Green, \$245, Finnish Design Shop. Belgium Stone porcelain **tile** in Carbone, \$20 per sq m, National Tiles. Rosebery concrete-look **tile** in Matt Silver, \$55 per sq m, TileCloud. Inax Japanese ceramic mosaic **tile** in ADM283, POA, Artedomus. Round polished edge **mirror**, from \$179, Architectural Designer Products. Stand **basin** by Norm Architects, \$2799, Candana. Bethell **bath towel**, \$75, Koskela. ILVE 'Grigio Lusso' 600SPYTVGV 60cm pyrolytic **oven**, \$3299, Pampas hand-knotted wool **rug** in Gull (200cm x 300cm), \$1760, Armadillo & Co. Chambray fringe **quilt cover** in Limestone, \$229, Aura Home. Vintage linen **cushion** in Iris, \$59.95, Aura Home.

**UPSTAIRS BATHROOM** (this page and opposite left) Tucked in under the eaves, this wet area has similar elements to the ensuite plus an unglazed green Japanese feature tile. Omvivo Venice basin, Reece. **POWDER ROOM** (opposite right) Belinda had a custom bronze mirror made for the wall above the compact Stand Basin by Norm Architects.





## LESSONS LEARNT

**“Don’t bulldoze your old house until you’re ready to start building the new one”**

BELINDA ALEXANDER, OWNER

“When we bought this block of land, we got excited and bulldozed the old house straight away. Then we discovered that our builder couldn’t start constructing the new house for 12 months. We should have kept the old one standing for longer so we could have earned some rental income from it.”

**BACK GARDEN/POOL** (this page and opposite) The family wanted easy-care faux grass so opted for a premium-grade product with a brown fleck that gives it a more natural look. Pavers supplied by the builder (Build2) have almost no grout lines, while the clean white mosaic tiles in the pool have a pearl finish. The outdoor shower screen is stained Porter’s Paints Palm Beach Black. Monsoon stainless-steel outdoor shower from Sussex Taps.