



touch wood

Why not swap traffic jams for peace and quiet in this relaxed country cottage? Can you believe we're still in Melbourne?

STORY MEREDITH MCKENDRY PRODUCED BY MIA ASKER PHOTOGRAPHY LISA COHEN



LEFT Comfort zone: the big, comfy sofa has followed Marie around the globe, from France to the US and now Australia. **RIGHT** In terms of Chinese astrology, the house is designed for Earth and Fire temperaments, suiting the family perfectly. **BELOW** The front entrance is a reminder of the tiny, fairytale house of yore. **OPPOSITE** The house was designed around a central living-dining-kitchen area, which is surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows.



Stressed out? In need of some fresh air? Just take a peek inside the Wallin's family home. One look at the cosy Swiss chalet-style interiors, comfy sofas and lashings of winter sun, and the pressures of the big smoke soon fade away.

Despite its location just 25 minutes' drive from the centre of Melbourne, you could be in the middle of nowhere. After renting in the city for years, it was just what the doctor ordered for Marie Wallin, husband Chris and daughters Camille, 11, and Charlotte, eight.

"It was a lifestyle decision to move here," says Marie. "We chose the area because there are so many trees, it's really peaceful and it's close to the girls' school. And still not that far from the city."

Having chosen the area to live in, Marie and Chris just had to find the perfect place. But when she first laid eyes on the house that would become their own, Marie could think of only one thing – *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs!*

"There was something very pretty and girly about it," she says enthusiastically. "It was totally unsuitable for us and really poky and dark inside. But it was just so cute!"

Nestled among a mix of deciduous and evergreen trees, the tiny white weatherboard cottage had just a couple of box-like rooms, suitable for two people at a pinch. >





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TRUE CONFESSIONS

WHO LIVES HERE?

Architecture graduate consultant Marie Wallin, 40, husband Chris, a management consultant, daughters Camille, 11, and Charlotte, 8, and one-year-old labradoodle Winnie.

DID YOU AGREE ON THE BIG DESIGN DECISIONS? Chris is very accommodating, it's like, 'Whatever you want, darling'. It's really important to me where I live. To him, it doesn't matter so much so he is happy for me to explore new ideas.

WOULD YOU DO ANYTHING DIFFERENTLY? We're all very happy here but I'm ready for the next house now! Next time we want to build from scratch and I'd like to try something a bit more contemporary.

ANY DECORATING DISASTERS? I can't find a colour for the feature wall in the bedroom. I've changed it from blue to green to dark pink... currently it's a brick colour but I'm still not happy with it!

FAVE PIECE OF FURNITURE? Furniture doesn't matter to me, as long as it's functional. My emphasis is on space – it should be interesting and uplifting even when it's empty.

WHAT DO YOU DO TO RELAX? After lunch I love to sit in an armchair in the living room, put my feet up on the coffee table, sip herbal tea and enjoy the peace.

ANY RENOVATING LESSONS TO SHARE? One thing that is really important to me is to let inspiration happen. Don't rush into things.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES WATSON; STYLING: JAMES WATSON; INTERIORS: JAMES WATSON; FURNITURE: JAMES WATSON; PILLOW: JAMES WATSON; BLANKET: JAMES WATSON; WINDOW: JAMES WATSON; PLANT: JAMES WATSON



< Hardly appropriate for a family of four and a boisterous dog. But with her own thriving architecture business, House of Light, Marie knew she would soon have it up to scratch.

Now resembling a spacious Swiss chalet more than a fairytale cottage, timber is the dominating look. It's everywhere – floorboards, dining table, staircase cathedral ceilings, and benchtops – but together with floods of natural light and soaring sky-high ceilings, the space is open, bright and airy.

So what was the inspiration behind all the timber? “I just followed what I liked,” shrugs Marie. “This is the first house we’ve owned, and I kind of surprised myself realising how much I adore timber. I can’t say that it’s usually my thing. But it’s a real delight to live with. It feels a bit like a forest in here!”

The forest analogy is appropriate considering that two Monterey cypress trunks hold up sections of the roof, one of which Marie had to pick up from the mill herself, an hour’s drive away, when it was needed urgently by the builders.

“The huge trunk was in the car with me, with at least a metre-and-a-half of it sticking out of the back – I thought the car would tip back,” laughs Marie. “I was a bit of a hazard!”

In Marie’s design, the home revolves around a large open-plan living, dining and kitchen area, with four bedrooms, a home office and playroom for the kids. Builders knocked out several existing internal walls, extended the ground floor with a new conservatory-style living room and added a second storey. With Marie’s know-how, the project was completed without a hitch.

The most striking feature is the big breezy living room flanked by floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the leafy garden.

“With all the windows it feels like being outside. I love it,” says Marie. “The light in there is brilliant. It’s also the room I associate with doing absolutely nothing!”

The living area leads to a cosy dining nook with a built-in table and bench softened by bright cushions, and a cute country kitchen where the family loves to congregate.

Upstairs, Camille and Charlotte can escape to their own playroom, which leads to their bedrooms. It features a beautiful window seat, a quiet place to curl up with books and toys.

Unlike the original cottage, which was decorated in dull shades of grey, Marie >

TOP LEFT Trees of life: These Monterey cypress trunks are over a century old, and before becoming the lynchpin of the Wallins’ house, were windbreaks on Victorian farms. **BOTTOM LEFT**

Sunlight streams into the kitchen where the family likes to gather.

OPPOSITE A favourite niche for the girls, this charming, sunny window seat also stores their books and toys.

THIS PAGE The dining nook has a built-in bench and table, which flows into the kitchen, with its Monterey cypress features on the kitchen island and buffet.

OPPOSITE The wood theme extends to the main bedroom's wardrobe doors, which have bamboo insets.

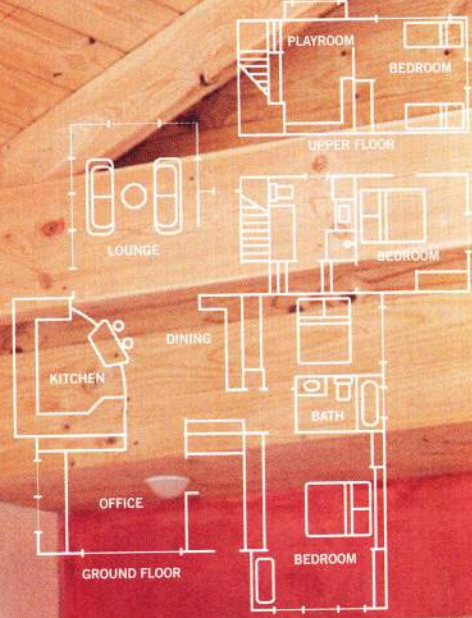
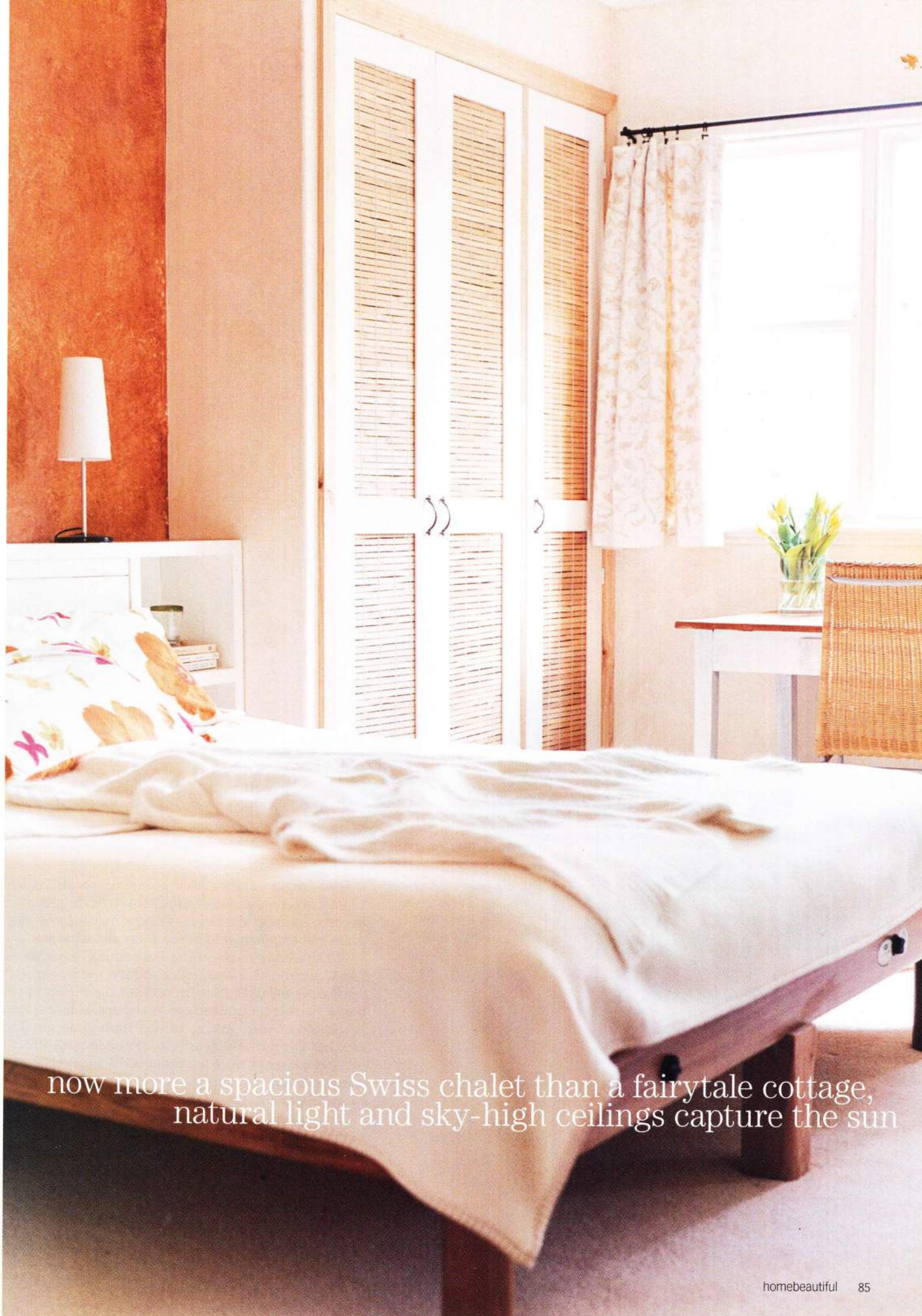


ILLUSTRATION: KENWILL DESIGN





now more a spacious Swiss chalet than a fairytale cottage,
natural light and sky-high ceilings capture the sun

hbhome

THIS PAGE A place in the sun: The north-facing living room is awash with pure sunlight. **OPPOSITE** The Oregon floorboards, salvaged from an old Sydney telephone exchange, have a woollen underlay and are finished with linseed oil.

