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Single mother Emma Hohnen builds \$100,000 family home in 12 weeks

Jul 26, 2015 [Trisha Croaker](#)



Amazing designs: Tiny house, terrific outcome



Having already renovated three homes and built two others, creating a sustainable home was no problem for this young single mother, writes Trisha Croaker.

Want to know if it's possible to design and build a new home for around \$110,000 in 12 weeks? One that's inviting and nurturing, and accommodates three people in 60 square metres?

That allows a family to live in a sustainable fashion – environmentally, economically, socially and emotionally? And, in the process, offers an inspiring example of how to think innovatively to combat housing affordability, address increased high-density housing and encourage dual occupancy?

If so, you might be interested in Emma Hohnen – young, single mother of two, yoga teacher, former marketer, and passionate home renovator and home builder. She recently aimed for, and achieved, all that and more. This is her extraordinarily inspiring story, and mission.



Emma Hohnen ... single mother and passionate home renovator.

Brief

Newly separated, Hohnen needed a place for her young family. Owning an old three-bedroom cottage with front and rear lane access on land at Urunga, on the mid-north coast, she decided to create a new home as a dual occupancy. The old cottage would be rented out, helping offset building costs, with the family occupying the new house.

It is a divine space to be in ... I've never been happier. Emma Hohnen

The east-west running block was 758 square metres, with the new building addressing the lane. It must have maximum sunlight penetration, good ventilation and insulation, with no fixed heating or cooling and a

significant use of recycled materials. It should have a small footprint and encourage social interaction. All on a “small budget”.

The main challenge: a public sewer main along the southern boundary, preventing use of the most obvious position to maximize northern light.

Cost efficient design

Autodidact rather than architect, Hohnen’s passion and commitment, and first-hand, hands-on experience compensated for formal training. During the past 10 years, she’d renovated three homes and built two others, being involved in every detail.

With informal advice from uncles-cum-architects, and co-opting her mother as draughts person, Hohnen ran the house east-west along the northern boundary to overcome the sewer issue. Internal spaces were pushed to the south-east, with a north-west deck used to gain maximum winter sunlight.

“The aim was to keep the house long and narrow in proportion to the shape of the block, maximize north sun and minimize building cost by using a simple rectangular shape,” she says.

“The dimensions are 4.8 metres x 12.5 metres (60 square metres) with a 6-metre x 6-metre deck. The ceilings are 2.4 metres with a skillion roof to the northern wall which has a height of 3.6 metres.

To contain costs and build sustainably, she bought secondhand hardwood bearers and joists, wooden floors and mahogany lining boards from a local house being demolished.

“I bought the whole thing and stacked all the wood on the block. It all had to be de-nailed, which took a week’s labour by a young carpenter, assisted by myself, friends and neighbors. The paint also had to be stripped off the mahogany lining boards.”

She achieved cost savings of more than \$15,000, and a stronger frame.

Again to save money, an IKEA kitchen was bought and assembled with friends over a week, saving an estimated \$5000. No rangehood was used, just louvres above the kitchen for ventilation and light; with the bathroom doubling as laundry.

And the end result? “It is a divine space to be in. I wanted to put it out there that we don’t have to live in this ‘luxury home’ story we’ve been sold. I’ve never been happier.”