

"Visually the house is intended to be seen as a piece of constructed jewelry amid a natural landscape," architect Pip Cheshire says of the seaside Auckland residence he built for Sue and Peter Cooper. He collaborated closely on the project with interior designer Terry Hunziker.



Upstairs, Downstairs in Auckland

A CLIFFSIDE HOUSE EVOKES INTEREST ON MANY LEVELS

Architecture by Pip Cheshire/Interior Design by Terry Hunziker
Text by Michael Webb/Photography by Erhard Pfeiffer

TOP: "An oak stair is the main circulation route through and up and down the house, though there is an elevator." ABOVE: Hunziker designed the living room's sleek nickel-coated fire surround, which complements the zinc-clad wall. Chair, Christian Liaigre for Holly Hunt.



Sue and Peter Cooper are bicoastal in an unconventional way: They regularly commute between their family home in Newport Beach, California (see *Architectural Digest*, August 1997), and the house they recently built for themselves in their native Auckland, New Zealand. The interiors of both were designed by Terry Hunziker, but the similarities end there. In contrast to the traditional courtyarded villa where they raised their five children, the new residence is a sleek exercise in Cubist geometry emerging from a forested slope and facing out over the water to a dormant volcano. Each of its five levels feels like a sophisticated penthouse floating above an idyllic landscape.

A private investor who is currently planning an environmentally sensitive residential community near the farthest tip of the North Island, Peter Cooper has a passion for modern architecture and the unspoiled beauty of his homeland, and he was determined to bring the two together. He had lived on this stretch of the coast for many years and realized what a challenge it would be to fit their house and small residences for their mothers on a steep narrow site. To make it more complicated, the 40-foot cliff is unstable, and all development on this coastline is tightly regulated. "I tried working with several ar-

"The kitchen, dining and main sitting areas all share one level near the top of the building," explains Chesire. "Each of the five floors of the house expresses a different character and mood," adds Hunziker. The floor is polished concrete. Chairs, Christian Liaigre for Holly Hunt.

The subtle, Japanese-inspired finishes and intimate scale are an ideal setting for the New Zealand art the owners love to collect.



ABOVE: "The study is the most private of the public areas, an intimate entertaining space," says Cheshire. "The roof is lifted off the walls to admit light and is kicked up along the north side to allow dappled sunshine in." Edelman suede. Pillow stripe from Pollack.

chitects who didn't understand that we wanted a vertical stack of apartments—a place without grounds that we could lock up and leave," Cooper recalls. "Then we found Pip Cheshire, who shared our vision and understood the site."

Cheshire participated in the competition-winning design for Te Papa Tongarewa, the monumental Museum of New Zealand in Wellington, but he feels more comfortable working on an intimate scale, one on one. "The organizing idea of this house is progression—a walk from the upper plateau, which is part of a highly developed suburban area, to the lyrical loneliness of the water's edge," he explains. A

long flight of steps descends through a sandwich of public and private spaces from the entrance-level living areas to the master suite, a lower floor of bedrooms for guests or the Coopers' grown children and, at the base, an entertainment area opening onto the grounds and a path to the beach. A concealed staircase leads up to Peter Cooper's study and library, and the entire house is oriented northeast, toward California. Retractable awnings supported on projecting metal frames provide shade from the sun, and each level has a different prospect, from treetops to the volcano Rangitoto and a view down to the water.

To accommodate all of the

RIGHT: "The family room is tuned to ensure good sound for the theater and has a perforated-zinc acoustic ceiling. The focus is inward, on people and activities rather than on the view." Sofa fabric from Henry Calvin. Perennials fabric on Sutherland outdoor furniture.





LEFT: "The master bedroom has a special relationship with the cliff and the native trees," says Cheshire. Hokanson carpet. RIGHT: "The garden terrace is a contemplative area," comments Hunziker. In the distance are the Hauraki Gulf and, beyond, the Rangitoto volcano.



BELOW: "Conceptually, the house as a 'path' from the upper site to the lower garden under the pohutukawa tree canopy is revealed as the play of solid against transparent and planar against frame," Cheshire points out. Standing in the foreground is the curved gym.



program, the clients had to buy a portion of land from a neighbor and negotiate for two years with the local council, which was afraid that new construction would be too obtrusive and possibly trigger a landslide. Finally, the Coopers told them: "If you'll let us cut out the hillside and put in our house, we'll take care of the stability problem by building a massive retaining wall." It took a year to excavate and put in a palisade of caissons, which are now entirely hidden behind the lower stories, and the

dense grove of pohutukawas—known as New Zealand Christmas trees for the scarlet blooms they bear in December—was carefully preserved. As the architecture took shape, the Coopers invited Hunziker to make his first visit to New Zealand, to work closely with Cheshire on the choice of materials and finishes as well as to custom-design most of the furniture. "It was summer, and it reminded me of Kauai," he recalls. "We helicoptered up the coast, and Peter left me overnight at his

beach house. I was dazzled by the clarity of the night sky—it was like another world." Hunziker soon had to return to Seattle, from where he and his assistant, David Lucas, communicated with pencils, faxing sketches back and forth. Everyone agreed on the Portuguese limestone façades, oak floors, oxidized-zinc fireplace wall and subdued tones, and the furniture was fabricated and shipped from the Northwest, as it is for Hunziker's domestic jobs. Its solidity

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