

Rammed earth gets contemporary in a new Wanaka home.

# SENSE OF PLACE



If you're asking for a home that feels deeply connected to its location, it's hard to top this: a dwelling with walls made of rammed earth taken from just a few kilometres down the road in Wanaka's Cardrona Valley. For owners Stuart and Melanie Pinfold, the selection of this ancient but still unconventional material for their family home – a finalist in *HOME* magazine's 2015 Home of the Year award – was not a fanciful idealistic experiment, but a considered part of their brief to friends Justin and Louise Wright, the husband-and-wife team behind Assembly Architects. The Pinfolds (who own the Mountain Range accommodation lodge nearby) had been living in a mud-brick home and loved the warm visual qualities of the no-maintenance material, as well as its thermal and acoustic performance. So when it came to devising the wish-list for their new home just outside Wanaka, rammed earth went quickly to the top of the list.

Local know-how helped. In 2010, when the Pinfolds first started thinking about a new home, the Wrights, now based in Arrowtown, were living in Wellington and had no experience with rammed earth. Enter Wanaka-based Jimmy Cotter, a rammed-earth contractor with more than 20 years' experience (he worked with builder Andrew Wavish on the house). Cotter's expertise gave the architects the confidence to give the material a go.

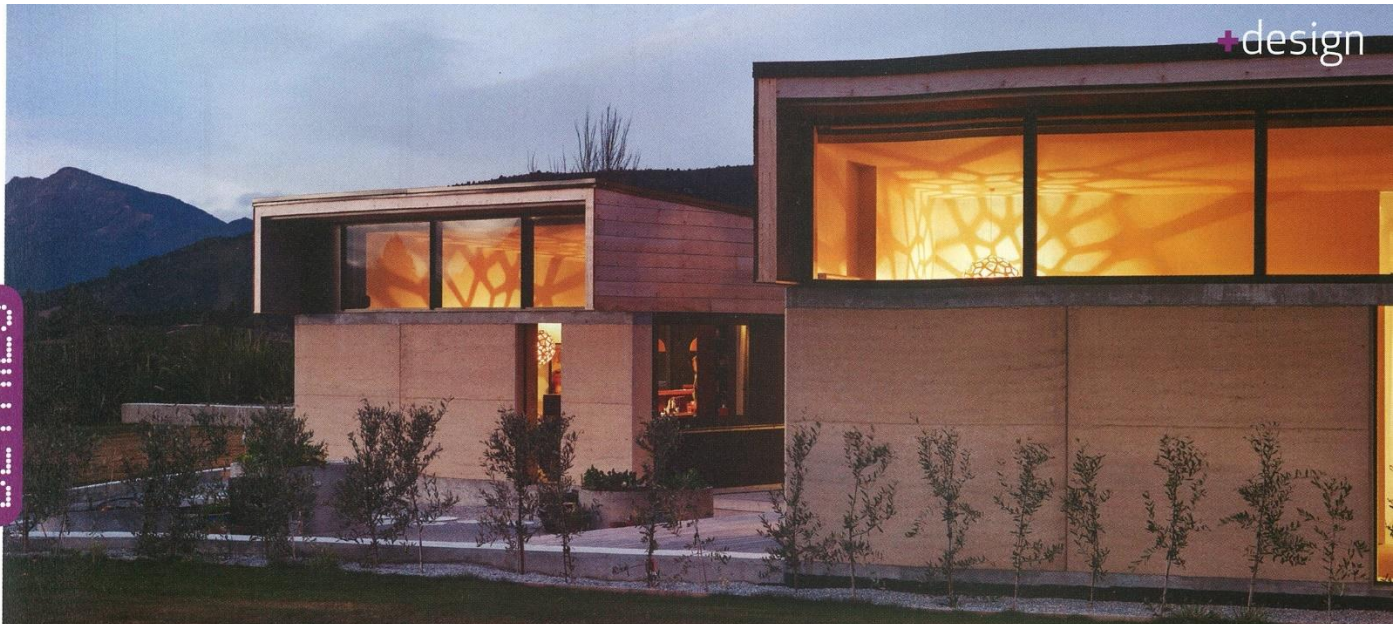
Some preconceptions ought to be cleared up. Rammed earth is not as labour-intensive and therefore as expensive as many people think. The architects say the cost of building in rammed earth was similar to what the Pinfolds would have spent if the home was built



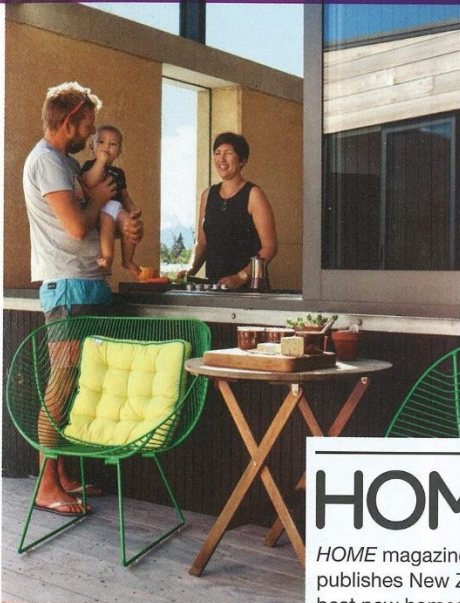
## BIO

**ARCHITECT** Justin and Louise Wright, Assembly Architects.

**BACKGROUND** Arrowtown-based husband-and-wife architecture team Justin and Louise Wright formed Assembly Architects in Wellington before moving to Central Otago in 2012. They design homes as well as commercial and public buildings.

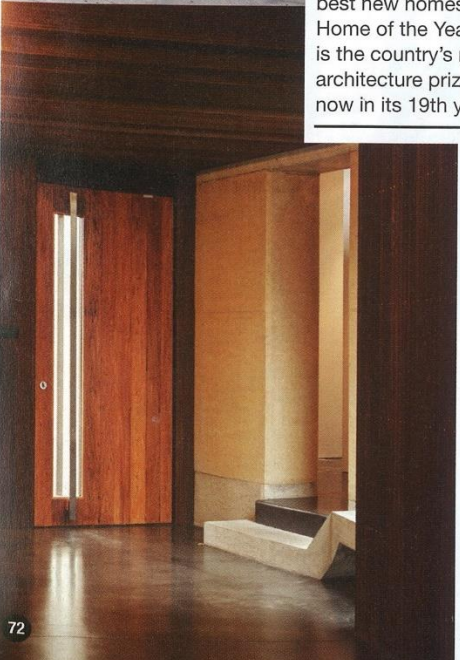


From above: Clerestory windows adorn the pavilions; the living areas occupy just one of three pavilions; cedar lightens the effect of the rammed earth.



## HOME.

HOME magazine publishes New Zealand's best new homes. Its Home of the Year award is the country's richest architecture prize and is now in its 19th year.



from conventional masonry. Yes, rammed earth requires manual labour, but a team of three men took just three weeks to erect the almost half-metre-thick walls of the house. Once the concrete foundations were established, the earth was mixed with a small amount of cement before being shovelled gradually into a pre-built form work. A labourer then compacted the earth with a pneumatic ram. The form work was removed only a few hours after the walls were complete, and no insulation, plasterboard linings or paint were required. The rest of the home was then built over and around these walls. "It sort of felt like Stonehenge for a while," Stuart Pinfold says.

The timeless quality of rammed earth means it is more likely to be associated with homes with a romantic colonial vocabulary than a contemporary one. But nobody in this project had romantic colonial aspirations. In fact, the modern clarity of the design plays beautifully with the rustic qualities of the rammed-earth walls. The architects topped the home's three pavilions with the lightness of cedar weatherboards holding up long, gently pitched roofs. Clerestory windows in all three pavilions divide the arresting peaks of Mount Roy and its neighbours into horizontal slices, while big sliding doors in the bedroom and living pavilions open to the north and views towards the Southern Alps. Neither of these vistas feels overwhelming: this is a home that enjoys its views, but never feels overawed by them.

The Pinfolds liked the idea of a home with three pavilions because it allowed the separation of public and private areas. The living areas occupy

one of these pavilions, while another contains three bedrooms, two bathrooms and the laundry. The third pavilion is a two-storey structure with a self-contained one-bedroom flat, which allows their parents to have their own space when they visit. It also serves as a quiet getaway for the couple from the hubbub of family life. The ground floor of this pavilion contains the garage and a study, from which the pair work from home, and which can house meetings that don't interrupt life in the rest of the home.

The pavilions are connected by a low-ceilinged entry and hallway that accentuate the drama of the loftier rooms beyond. "Circulation through a home is a pathway you're walking constantly, so we made a conscious effort to have some tight, cave-like spaces and some high, lofty spaces," Justin Wright says. In the hallway of the sleeping pavilion, the walls neatly facet towards the doorways of the children's bedrooms. "Little circulation areas like that are often neglected," he says, "but they're often more important spaces than the bedrooms themselves."

Wanaka is the quieter, understated cousin of Queenstown, and both couples see rammed earth as a perfect expression of this. It also has a sense of permanence that few New Zealand dwellings possess. The joy of the design is that the potential heaviness of these beautiful walls is so neatly leavened with the lightness of glass and cedar. "If you look at our body of work there are very few projects which are similar – we're always interested in materials and how they're put together and how to pull out their qualities to create something special," Wright says. Here in Wanaka, they have done just that.

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