

# Small wonder

LOCATION Blackheath, NSW • WORDS Rebecca Gross • PHOTOGRAPHY Kamil Sustiak



## At a glance

- Diminutive hempcrete home for two
- 7.9-Star cosy and energy-efficient design
- Built to a BAL-FZ bushfire rating

## Hemp was a help for meeting the bushfire building requirements on Kamil and Vercha's Blue Mountains block.

They say good things come in small packages. That's certainly true for the fondly named 'Hempy' – a small hempcrete house built on a block with the highest bushfire rating, BAL-FZ, in Blackheath in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney.

Owners Kamil and Vercha wanted a warm and well-insulated house, like the ones they'd lived in in Europe. They also wanted to build with natural materials, so they engaged designer and hempcrete expert Kirstie Wulf, director of Shelter Building Design. The couple had a draft design for the house, which Kirstie finessed to refine the proportions, optimise passive solar performance and meet BAL-FZ standards. "It's great to have clients who know what they want. Vercha and Kamil were passionate and involved in the project," she says.

The L-shaped house is set towards the back of the north-west facing site to bring in as much northern light as

possible and to keep it further away from the most likely bushfire attack path. The internal space is 76 square metres, neatly housing two bedrooms, a bathroom and laundry along the rear of the block with an open kitchen, dining and living room taking advantage of north-east and north-west sun. This living space opens onto a deck with a large eave for shading in summer; the front corner of the eave is cut at an angle to let the winter sun in and accommodate an existing tree. "With the eaves and shading, we aren't baking in summer, and the light in winter still reaches into the house," Kamil explains.

He and Vercha built the hempcrete walls with the help of friends, after a day of training with Kirstie to ensure the mix would have the right consistency and be tamped neither too much nor too little. They built the walls over the course of three months after a local builder had constructed the framing and roof. "They did an excellent job and had great attention to detail, particularly with the curved window surrounds," Kirstie says. Created using formwork, the curves give the home a sense of softness and help show off both the handcrafted nature of the hempcrete and the 300-millimetre